

STEPHEN D. BROOKFIELD  
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# THE DISCUSSION BOOK

50  
GREAT WAYS TO  
GET PEOPLE TALKING

**J** JOSSEY-BASS™  
A Wiley Brand

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# **The Discussion Book**

## **50 Great Ways to Get People Talking**

Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill

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## Preface

This is a short book so this will be a short preface.

The two of us have long wanted a brief and accessible book—a manual, really—that collected the best techniques to start discussion, keep it going, and stay focused. This would be the kind of book you could stuff into a pocket or purse as you walked to chair a meeting, teach a class, or run a professional development workshop. On the way you could scan it to get a couple of new techniques to try out that day. To paraphrase *Dragnet's* Joe Friday, we wanted a manual containing “just the facts ma'am” or, rather, just the techniques.

## Audience

Our audience for this book is probably the largest one either of us has ever written for. Essentially we hope that anyone who uses some kind of group discussion process in any setting at all will find it valuable. The convener of a corporate decision-making meeting or the leader of a community town hall or congregation will find this just as beneficial as will a classroom teacher.

We have tried out these techniques in an incredible variety of settings. In addition to the hundreds of schools and colleges we have worked with, these have been used in places as varied as the Occupy movement, corporations (including IBM, 3M, CA Technologies, ARCO Oil), post-Hurricane Sandy community groups, the military, health care organizations, churches, and nonprofit organizations such as the Theater Development Fund in New York. Educational institutions using them have been as diverse as fashion institutes, schools of mining, chiropractic and Asian

medicine colleges, schools for the deaf, seminaries, tribal colleges, and, of course, multiple two- and four-year colleges and universities.

So, if you're looking for some quick and easy techniques to try out in your meetings, workshops, or classrooms that will get people participating, focus the conversation, and keep the energy level high, then this is the book for you!

## **Overview of Contents**

This book doesn't have traditional chapters, just a listing of fifty techniques we find applicable for multiple purposes in multiple settings. We imagine readers approaching a meeting, class, or workshop thinking, "I need to get more discussion going today," "as a group we need to listen better to what each other is saying," or "how am I going to democratize the session today so more people participate?"

We created a brief user guide to the book that identifies ten categories, each of which identifies a particular purpose the techniques are suited to. If this is your first time working with a group, you'd go to the first category on getting discussions going and consider trying something from there. If you feel that a few people are dominating the conversation then you'd consult the category on democratizing participation and select one of the ten techniques listed.

This means you as a reader don't need to look through a list of fifty techniques and pick one that fits. And you don't need to go through this book sequentially. Instead you can start with whichever of the following categories that seem to address your situation the best and see if any of the techniques listed there could work with your group.

- Top Ten Techniques to Get Discussion Going with New Groups
- Top Ten Techniques to Promote Good Questioning
- Top Ten Techniques to Foster Active Listening
- Top Ten Techniques for Holding Discussions without Speech
- Top Ten Techniques to Get People out of their Comfort Zone
- Top Ten Techniques for Text-Based Discussions
- Top Ten Techniques to Democratize Participation
- Top Ten Techniques to Transition from Small to Large Groups
- Top Ten Techniques for Building Group Cohesion
- Top Ten Techniques for Discussions Requiring a Decision

Because many of the techniques we use show up in multiple categories, we end with a list of the Top Ten Techniques That Best Serve Multiple Discussion Purposes.

## **Website**

As an accompaniment to the book we have created a website devoted to it: [www.thediscussionbook.com/](http://www.thediscussionbook.com/). There you can find out how to contact us, reviews and applications of the techniques we've used, and examples of other techniques we couldn't fit into a short manual.

# User Guide

## Top Ten Techniques to Get Discussion Going with New Groups

- Circle of Voices
- Chalk Talk
- Participation Rubric
- Think-Pair-Share
- Today's Meet
- Appreciative Pause
- Single Word Sum-Ups
- Setting Ground Rules
- The Three-Person Rule
- Quick Writes

## Top Ten Techniques to Promote Good Questioning

- Strategic Questioning
- Open-ended Questions
- Nominating Questions
- If You Could Only Ask One Question
- On-the-Spot Questions
- What Do *You* Think?
- Clearness Committee
- Team Modeling

- Question Brainstorm
- Narrative Listening and Questioning

## **Top Ten Techniques to Foster Active Listening**

- Circular Response
- Critical Conversation Protocol
- What Are You Hearing?
- Understanding Check
- Stand Where You Stand
- Clearness Committee
- Team Modeling
- Circle of Voices
- Narrative Listening and Questioning
- Single Word Sum-Ups

## **Top Ten Techniques for Holding Discussions without Speech**

- Newsprint Dialogue
- Drawing Discussion
- Musicalizing Discussion
- Structured Silence
- Writing Discussion
- Appreciative Pause-Sticky Note Plaudit
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)
- Chalk Talk
- Today's Meet

- Quick Writes

## **Top Ten Techniques to Get People out of Their Comfort Zone**

- Methodological Belief
- Justifiable Pressure
- Cocktail Party
- Dramatizing Discussion
- Musicalizing Discussion
- Drawing Discussion
- Stand Where You Stand
- Clearness Committee
- Chalk Talk
- Today's Meet

## **Top Ten Techniques for Text-Based Discussions**

- Hatful of Quotes
- Quotes to Affirm and Challenge
- Jigsaw
- Titling the Text
- Critical Debate
- Deliberative Polling
- Stand Where You Stand
- If You Could Only Ask One Question
- Question Brainstorm
- Quick Writes



## **Top Ten Techniques to Democratize Participation**

- Common Ground
- Deliberative Polling
- Participatory Decision Making
- Circle of Voices
- Chalk Talk
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)
- Newsprint Dialogue
- Circular Response
- Nominating Questions
- Today's Meet

## **Top Ten Techniques to Transition from Small to Large Groups**

- Rotating Stations
- Snowballing
- Canvassing for Common Ground
- Newsprint Dialogue
- Drawing Discussion
- Musicalizing Discussion
- Dramatizing Discussion
- Stand Where You Stand
- Nominating Questions
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)

## **Top Ten Techniques for Building Group Cohesion**

- Mutual Invitation
- Understanding Check
- Circular Response
- Critical Incident Questionnaire
- Narrative Listening and Questioning
- Jigsaw
- Appreciative Pause–Sticky Note Plaudit
- Clearness Committee
- Common Ground
- Participatory Decision Making

## **Top Ten Techniques for Discussions Requiring a Decision**

- Deliberative Polling
- Participatory Decision Making
- Canvassing for Common Ground
- Clearness Committee
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)
- Nominating Questions
- Titling the Text
- Jigsaw
- Critical Conversation Protocol
- What Do *You* Think?