

Conversation Café: Crafting Questions



Powerful questions are at the heart of Conversation Cafés.

What makes a good question? One that is:

1. **Open.** There are no embedded cultural, political, or ideological assumptions.
2. **Inviting.** It involves both head and heart. People can respond with their feelings and their thoughts.
3. **Honest.** It has not already been answered conclusively—yet finding an answer is crucial to moving forward.
4. **Experiential.** If they choose, people can tell a story or recall an experience that relates to the question.
5. **Inclusive.** Anyone at the table could have something valuable to say—whatever their age, race, gender, or level of education may be.
6. **Generative.** Can't be answered with a “yes” or “no”, or a platitude.
7. **Relevant.** Even though broad, the question applies to many of the real issues we each and all face.
8. **Inspiring.** Makes you want to find an answer and do something about it.

A Conversation Café topic could be as simple as an issue (peace on earth) or a theme (love) with three questions after it:

- What do you think about it?
- What do you feel about it?
- What are you inspired to do about it?

Questions for Connecting Ideas and Finding Deeper Insight

- What's taking shape? What are you hearing underneath the variety of opinions being expressed?
- What's in the center of the table?
- What's emerging here for you? What new connections are you making?
- What had real meaning for you from what you've heard? What surprised you? What challenged you?
- What's missing from this picture so far? What is it we're not seeing? What do we need more clarity about?
- What's been your/our major learning, insight, or discovery so far?
- What's the next level of thinking we need to do?
- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been said in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity, what would that be?

Questions That Create Forward Movement

- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized about (your situation)?
- What's possible here and who cares? (rather than "What's wrong here and who's responsible?")
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?
- If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?
- How can we support each other in taking the next steps? What unique contribution can we each make?
- What challenges might come our way and how might we meet them?
- What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future of (your situation)?
- What seed might we plant together today that could make the most difference to the future of (your situation)?

Resources:

Vogt, E., Brown, J., and Issacs, D. (2003). *The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action*.