

ONE-TO-ONE RELATIONAL MEETINGS

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The field of community organizing offers us a great tool for building or deepening our collegial relationships in this time of transition into a new Churchwide structure, and beyond. The one-to-one relational meeting is a natural but uncommon conversation with someone you want to know better. It's natural because it flows from your own curiosity and your conversation partner's responses, rather than using a set of pre-determined questions or following anyone's pre-set agenda. It's uncommon because it requires intense listening and courageous inquiry as you focus primarily on going deep into your conversation partner's story and resist turning it too much toward yourself. You will find that you and the person with whom you're visiting have things in common; and you should acknowledge that with brief accounts of your own experience, building trust and connection. But always return your focus to your partner with a question that can lead them deeper into their story.

Your objectives for having this conversation are simple and sincere. These objectives are listed in descending order of importance. In other words, #1 matters above all:

1. You want to establish or deepen a relationship with this person;
2. You want to learn some significant things about them, what makes them "tick", what they value, who they really are, and what has brought them to this point in life;
3. You might find that you and your conversation partner have commonly held interests, goals or values that can lead you into new opportunities for collaboration and community building;
4. Through your inquiry and attentiveness this person might learn some things about him or herself that they didn't realize were true, leading to new clarity and self-appreciation.

Your conversation should last about 45 minutes; it's up to you to honor this time frame. If your conversation partner wants to learn more about you, they can schedule another time when the main focus will be on you. Or, if you both decide in advance to share equally, schedule an hour and a half, with one of you taking the lead for the first half and reversing the roles for the second half; this requires you to be disciplined about time and intent. Focusing on one person at a time allows each to feel deeply heard and valued. It also makes this kind of conversation uncommon and remarkable.

As noted earlier, you shouldn't go into the conversation with a bunch of pre-determined questions. However, it is wise to have one or two ice-breaker type questions in mind to begin with. You might start with something like: "What drew you to the position you have here?" Or, "what constitutes 'family' for you these days?" From there you should follow your curiosity, as well as the other person's response and direction, to get you deeper into their story, their values, vision, life and motivations. This move to go deeper takes courage on your part, a willingness to really listen and to ask what will feel like some risky questions, as well as to reveal some things about yourself. If you don't take risks and make the move to go deeper early on, you'll get into a pattern of asking surface-type questions, and your conversation partner will be reluctant to share with you on a deeper level.

One way to determine what follow up questions to ask is to listen for the "breadcrumbs" or "pearls" people naturally drop that can lead you to a real treasure about who they are. These clues often come in the form of what seem like throw-away comments dropped when answering a question; comments like, "let's see, it was shortly after my divorce," or "my mother had just died and I was living in Atlanta..." Rather than gloss over the reference, dare to ask something about the thing they just mentioned in passing. It indicates to them that you're really listening, that you have courage, and that

you truly care about the experiences, thoughts or feelings that mark significant moments in their life.

Also, be attentive to your gut-level resistance to probing deeper. Rather than hold back, take the risk of asking courageous questions. Instead of being an invasion of privacy, which is what you fear, courageous questioning actually builds trust and gives the person permission to share something deeply significant. To avoid turning this into therapy, offer no advice or analysis. Ask what they make of this aspect of their story, or share something about yourself that relates to their experience.

Sometimes, a ways into the one-to-one, you might need to introduce a new line of questioning, if the conversation gets dry or when you want to move in a different direction. Just don't get bogged down with the idea that you have to cover a lot of territory. Going deep into a few areas of their life, by following a natural course of conversation, is the real key. The following types of questions will encourage your conversation partner to go deeper into their story. (It also helps to insert follow-up questions like "why is that?" or, "can you give me an example?" or, "what was that like for you?")

Introduce one or two of these topics as needed. Never try to cover all this ground in one conversation!

- What brings you the most joy in your work?
- What are the greatest hurdles or challenges?
- What kind of impact do you want to have?
- How's it going — that work of making an impact?
- What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your life?
- How did you handle that challenge?
- How is that challenge still affecting you?
- What role has faith [or community, family, friends, or mentors] played in your life and work?
- What accomplishment or project are you most proud of?
- What assets did you bring to that enterprise?
- What did you learn (especially about yourself) in the process?
- What has created real disappointment for you in terms of wanting to make something happen?
- What were your (especially internal) barriers to success?

Your intent is to get them talking about more than facts, figures, names and events; to explore:

- What their ambitions and dreams are;
- What makes them angry, sad, or joyful;
- Why they are attracted to certain people, organizations, or communities;
- What has grabbed them most along their familial, educational, professional or faith journey;
- Why they spend their professional and personal time the way they do;
- What values and relationships they are willing to take risks and make sacrifices around.

After – and only after - your visit, jot some notes in order to retain the essence of the conversation. (Taking notes during alters the nature of the encounter.) You won't know the answers to all of these, but you'll know some things in a deep way about a few of them:

- What does this person care most about and why?
- What motivates them?
- What do they get excited talking about?
- How do they spend their time and why?
- What assets does this person have and where do they get to exercise them?
- What relationships does this person have and value and why?
- What specific concerns or ideas does this person have?
- Why is this person a member of this organization or community?
- What would make this person feel very honored if they were invited into it?

One-to-one Reflections

date: _____

Use this form to jot down notes following your one-to-one conversation. Refer to it again when considering inviting this person to collaborate with you on some project or before you expect to encounter them again in a work or social setting. Having clarity about their values, vision, life and motivations means you're more likely to relate to them according to who they really are rather than who you need them to be for your own purposes. It's about genuine relationship, trust and respect.

Person visited _____ Role or title _____

Phone or extension _____ e-mail _____

What are this person's main areas of interest? _____

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—

What talents, assets, background or gifts does this person have to offer?

—

—

What memorable stories did this person tell that illustrate something important about them? _____

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—

What clarity about him or herself did the person seem to find in the course of our conversation?

—

—

What was the riskiest question I asked, and where did it lead?

—

—

What might be the basis of a follow up conversation, a deeper relationship, or a collaboration?

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What else do I want to remember about this person or conversation? _____
