

Turning to One Another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future.

Margaret Wheatley

Real change begins with the simple act of people talking about what they care about.

We acknowledge each other as equals.

- What makes us equal is that we're human beings, and we need each other. Whatever we know, it is not sufficient. We can't see enough of the whole. We can't figure it out alone. Somebody sees something that the rest of us might need.

We try to say curious about each other.

- When we begin a conversation with this humility, it helps us be interested in who's there. It is easier to tell our story, to share our dreams and fears, when we feel others are genuinely curious about it. It takes time to create this space, but as we feel it growing, we speak more truthfully and the conversation moves into what's real.

We recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners.

- The greatest barrier to good conversation is that we've lost the capacity to listen. We're too busy, too certain, too stressed. If we make the agreement to listen and to help each other listen, we are acknowledging that it's hard work to learn how to listen, and that we're all struggling with it. We can't learn to be a good listener alone. We need each other if we're going to learn this skill.

We slow down so we have time to think and reflect.

- We work in places where we don't have time to sit together and think. We rush in and out of meetings where we make hurried, not thoughtful decisions. Conversations create the conditions for us to rediscover the joy of thinking together.

We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together.

- Human beings know how to talk to each other—we've been doing this since we developed language. If you're having a conversation, you can rely on history. We humans know how to do this. It does however take time to let go of our modern ways of being in meetings, to get past the behaviors that keep us apart.

We expect it to be messy at times.

- Because conversation is the natural way that humans think together, it is, like all life, messy. What's important at the start is that everyone's voice gets heard, that everyone feels invited into the conversation. Each person's contribution adds a different element or spice to the whole. If we look for superficial commonalities too early, we never discover the collective wisdom found only in the depths. If we suppress the messing at the beginning, it will find us later, and then it will be disruptive. Meaningful conversations depend on our willingness to forget neat thoughts, clear categories, and narrow roles. The deeper order that unifies our experience will show itself, but only if we allow the chaos early on.

We can't be creative if we refuse to be confused. Change always starts with confusion.

We develop courage for those things that speak to our heart. Once our heart is engaged, it is easy to be brave.

You can't hate someone whose story you know.