21-DAY EQUITY CHALLENGE

Discussion Guide for Groups

The Group Challenge

Consider using the group approach to this Challenge to create, strengthen, and mobilize your tribe or movement.

We need more people who share this non-negotiable earnestness for equity and are willing to walk before us to boldly guide our steps, beside to steady us, and behind to gently yet deliberately push us forward on the road to equity.

Using the Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations™ as a starting frame, be prepared to:

1. Stay engaged
2. Experience discomfort
3. Speak your truth
4. Expect and accept nonclosure

Remember to use the Challenge as a tool in your toolkit to advance your work toward equity, to activate and support you in taking bold action.

Getting Started

- **Identify a group of people** that are signing up for the Challenge and interested in getting together to talk about their experiences or their learnings during the Challenge.

- **Decide a format for the group.** There is no "right" way to do this. Some groups schedule once-a-week lunch or coffee conversations during the three weeks of the Challenge. Some organize one-on-one conversation buddies. Some people organize an in-office email list or physical "bulletin board" to share reflections, ideas, and resources.

- **Find convenient times and spaces (virtual or in-person)** to meet and reserve those time slots. We suggest something between 60 to 90 minutes. Consider access to that space for people with different abilities. Consider times of the day that will work for your attendees. Can you or someone in the group organize some help with childcare or transportation if needed? Will anyone in your group need or want an interpreter? Does everyone have access to virtual meeting services?

- **Invite people!**

Sample Agenda for an Equity Challenge Conversation

Use this for a 60 to 90 minute meeting/conversation. Modify to suit your needs.

What (Topic)	How (Process) and Who (Facilitator/Presenter)	When (Timing)
Getting Started	• Welcome (Facilitator 1*) • Clarify roles** • Check-In Question: How are you? OR One word to describe how you are feeling today? OR What's something you are bringing to today's discussion? (brief response from each participant) • Review the meeting agenda • Review working agreements to guide discussion	15 min.
Discussion	• Prompt the group with a question or topic for discussion from the 21-Day Challenge (Facilitator 2) • Invite people to reflect silently, perhaps revisit something they have written/drawn in advance • Open up the discussion (facilitator ensures that everyone gets a chance to speak, reminding people that pauses and silence are okay and can be powerful)	30-60 min.
Closing	• Check-Out: What is one thing you are taking from today's discussion? What is something you are committing to further your learning or take action around? (Facilitator 1) • Evaluation ("Pluses": What worked about our discussion today? "Deltas" (Changes): What could we do to make our next discussion even better?) • Next meeting date and time + roles (facilitator(s) and recorder) + prep work for that meeting	15 min.

*You might consider having more than one facilitator to share this role. Or, if you have one facilitator for the entire meeting, consider having someone else facilitate the next meeting.

**Different roles might include facilitator(s), recorder/scribe/visual recorder, photographer (with attendee consent!), timekeeper.

Planning Ahead for Follow-up

Think about ways to keep the conversation and relationship-building moving toward action, to move beyond our "comfort" zones into our "stretch" (sometimes less comfortable) zones. Consider how the group can support one another to push ourselves, our partners, our tribes, further than we have before. How can we create the individual, community, and workplace supports in order to center equity in decision-making and activities, including policies, practices, programs and budgets, and day-to-day happenings?

At the end of your first discussion, take the pulse of the group for next steps. Invite an opportunity for ongoing dialogue, meetings with guest speakers, issue-focused meet-ups to extend the learning, and taking action in the community.

Email lists and monthly or quarterly check-ins also support information sharing and connection. Consider arranging for guest speakers, coordinating field trips to related events or sites, or hosting a film screening. Create opportunities to celebrate successes. Invite articles and blogs from the team into each other's networks. This multiplies and diversifies voices with shared values and messages. Always ask "What's next?" and "What's possible now?" Acknowledge the purpose of the group at the outset.

Preparing Yourself for the Discussion

1. Center yourself. Connect to your values and what gives you strength and support (other people, places, activities). Forgive yourself and others in advance for your own and their imperfections. Also remember that racism is, as Jay Smooth says, "a concept that is designed to trip us up."

2. Keep doing your own personal work on understanding your own identity, your worldview regarding race, racism and other forms of oppression, and your understanding of how your identity impacts your conversations about and work for equity. As humans, we all carry biases that we may not even realize we have.

3. Be willing to meet people where they are; try to understand people who are in different stages of their own journey on these issues. But also be thinking about how we can support each other to get beyond "where we already are."

4. Challenge yourself to listen to others non-judgmentally.

5. Be willing to learn, acknowledging that any one person has only a partial grasp on the truth.

6. Be willing to be challenged, to change your mind, and to deal with uncertainty.

7. Envision yourself handling challenging situations with grace and effectiveness, building trust by being, at times, transparent and vulnerable when you are able.

Preparing for the Group Discussion

1. Acknowledge the purpose of the group at the outset.

2. Acknowledge that power dynamics are always in the room. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Power can be used for good and for ill. And it is important to acknowledge that different power dynamics may be at play and affecting the conversation.

3. Remind people that everyone is unique and that no one speaks for all other people of their race or ethnic group. Invite a spirit of curiosity and for learning from each other as individuals with different experiences.

4. Invite people to share their aspirations for participating in the discussion, including any concerns that they may have.

5. Remind people that the point of these discussions is to help one another grow, to learn, and to commit to taking action to undo racism and inequities. This is difficult to do when we are completely comfortable and things are familiar and easy. It is also difficult to do when we are feeling panicky and worried, whether true or not, about our safety. The work of these discussions is to get us into the "stretch zone," where we experience some discomfort. It is important to make this experience - of stretching into some discomfort in order to learn - okay for people.

6. Agree on a set of working agreements for the discussion time (examples below), either by writing those up on a blank page or working from a list you prepare in advance.

Working Agreements or Guidelines

Working agreements, community agreements, or even rules of engagement are names for conversation/meeting guidelines that help create an environment that values diversity of thought and experience. They help create a space within which you have a higher chance of a respectful and productive experience for the participants.

Talking about your agreements - or even better, creating them together - and getting consent to use them is a helpful way to build trust when you start the conversation. People are much more likely to respect and use an agreement that they have helped create. It will make your job as the host much easier. When problems or conflicts arise, you all will be able to refer back to your set of agreements (e.g. We all agreed at the beginning that it's best if only one person speaks at a time...).

Some Examples:

- Listen deeply
- Make "I" statements rather than generalized "We" statements
- Keep it here
- We don't have to agree
- Notice intent vs. impact (Use "oops" and "ouch" as in "I made a mistake" and "I am hurt")
- Be willing to be uncomfortable
- Expect and accept a lack of closure (i.e. we won't figure this all out today)
- All voices are heard
- 3 Before Me - let three other people talk before you talk again
- Deconstruct language, request clarification when needed
- Take/Share what you've learned (without attribution or with permission)
- Be open to curiosity

Navigating Challenging Conversations

Spend time thinking about how you might respond to these challenges that may arise during your discussion:

- **"What about reverse discrimination?"** ("What about white people who work real hard...now they can't get jobs. That's not fair. Why should whites be punished?")
  Consider: Reverse racism and discrimination are not possible given the history of oppression and power structures that have been core to the making of this country. All people can be unfair and treat others badly, but that is not the same thing as being racist. Racism is by definition a form of oppression based on the socially constructed concept of race used by the dominant racial group (whites) over non-dominant racial groups.

- **"We need to lower our standards so that people of color can get in/advance/make it."**
  Consider: Lowering standards is not what it means to work for equity, and is essentially giving in to myths of racial inferiority. Standards may be culturally/racially biased and changed to be more inclusive, but not "lowered."

- **"Can people of color be racist?"**
  Consider: No. Racism is used to justify the position of the dominant group, white people in this case, and to uphold white supremacy and superiority. Everyone can be biased, and engage in bigoted and belittling behavior that is intolerant of other perspectives. But racism is by definition a form of oppression exercised by the dominant racial group (whites).

- **"I'm tired of talking about white power/privilege/supremacy. What really needs to happen is we need to learn to have constructive relationships, learn to communicate, try to help them...!"**
  Consider: It is true that we have to learn to have more constructive relationships and communication. AND we have to recognize that racism is a system of oppression that is used to uphold the power of the dominant racial group, in this case white people. It is used to preserve unearned privilege and the myth of white superiority. This is the water in which we swim in this country, so failing to see it, talk about it, and work actively to shift it essentially helps to keep racism in place.

- **"People of color have to take some responsibility too. I haven't had it easy and I am white. I overcame many obstacles in my life through hard work and a positive attitude."**
  Consider: Many people struggle and suffer, because of poverty, gender, and other forms of oppression. We don't want to deny that. And we don't want to suggest that individual effort and hard work is not important. And we also do not want to diminish the real structural barriers that exist for people of color in this country that often mean they have to work many times harder to "succeed" or survive. Think about how white dominant cultural norms can make it easier for white people to progress, like being on an escalator going up, while presenting a counter-force for people of color, like trying to run up an escalator going down. Individual effort matters, and so does addressing societal structures and norms.

- **"I just see people as people. I don't see Black, or White or green or purple."**
  Consider: Science suggests otherwise. Implicit bias has been proven to play out in everyone's minds to some degree and at a level of consciousness that an be very subtle but still impact our actions in the world. Microaggressions, a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance

of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority are a phenomenon we should discuss and be aware of. And you can take an implicit association test to see about your own biases. It is best that we be humble about this fact and actively work to counter these unconscious biases and stereotypes.

- **"Why use the word "racism"? Couldn't we find a gentler, less negative word?"**
  Consider: Who are we trying to protect by being "gentler" and "less negative"? Often we lean toward the comfort of the privileged (white people), at the ongoing expense of people of color. We have to be bold, courageous, and truthful, and recognize that there is a difference between discomfort and outright panic. Unless we name racism, how will we be able to work to undo or dismantle it?

- **"This doesn't impact me. Racism does not impact me."** (person of color saying this)
  Consider: Racism can be more and less obvious. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Everything we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see." Racism can be interpersonal and institutional (more obvious) and internalized and structural (perhaps less obvious). Research is showing how much of a psychological burden racism is for people of color, even being passed down through genes, and how things as subtle as narrative and primes create barriers for people of color. We do not mean to make this overwhelming, but if we do not name these dynamics, we cannot address them.

Facilitation Tips

There are many important behaviors and skills that facilitators can employ to help guide a group towards a goal or learning point in a respectful and inclusive discussion. Some of these skills are outlined below, along with several examples. These phrases and techniques are not intended to be exact "scripts" and should be adapted to your own voice and situation.

1. Addressing behavior – acknowledging behaviors in the room. Examples: "There seems to be a lot of side conversation. Is that okay with everyone?" "There is low energy in the room. Should we take a stretch break?" "There's a lot of emotion building right now that is interfering with productive discussion. Let's take a few deep breaths and a moment to remember the ground rules."

2. Bridging – making connections, tying one learning point to another. Example: "We started to talk about ally-building earlier, and now we're getting into some more concrete ideas of how to be an effective ally."

3. Checking for understanding – making sure directions and questions are clear. Examples: "Does everyone understand?" "Is that question clear?"

4. Clarifying – interpreting, helping to clear misunderstandings, defining terms. Examples: "There seems to be some miscommunication happening here; maybe we should take a step back." "Who needs more clarification before we move on?"

5. Encouraging – prompting, nonjudgmental responses, open-ended questions, respectful probing. Examples: "We're all learners in this process." "This can be a hard topic to discuss." "Thank you for sharing that story."

6. Evaluating – asking questions that encourage group members to examine an issue from a different perspective. Examples: "What's another way to look at this issue?" "I appreciate Joseph sharing his perspective on the matter; do others have a similar or different perspective?"

7. Gatekeeping – managing time and group participation. Examples: "Let's hear from some of the people who we haven't heard from." "Let's take two more responses, and then we'll move on."

8. Giving – judiciously offering facts or personal experiences to clarify a point. Example: "Thank you for that observation. I had a similar experience at a meeting."

9. Naming feelings – interpreting and acknowledging feelings. Example: "It sounds like you might be frustrated with this conversation. Is that correct?"

10. Re-framing - helping to find opportunities out of challenges. Examples: "That sounds challenging/difficult. What could it look like if it were different in the future, so that it would work better/help us meet the goals better?" "So what needs to happen to turn that around?" "What resources do we need to move that in a different direction?"

11. Orienting – bringing the group back to task, reiterating the question or topic. Examples: "This is a really interesting discussion, hopefully that will continue during breaks or at lunch. The piece we need to focus our attention on now is…" "Let's go back to the original question."

12. Paraphrasing – restating to promote group understanding. Example: "A number of different ideas are emerging; let me try to synthesize them into three major points."

13. Resolving – conciliating differences, cooperative problem solving. Examples: "Even though you feel that way, Donna, can you understand what Naomi is saying?" "This is a complex issue with a lot of different perspectives."

14. Remaining – honoring silence, allowing participants enough time to reflect and formulate thoughts. Example: "Let's take a few more minutes before we begin so that everyone can gather their thoughts." Allow the silence to exist. Count to 10 silently before asking another question.

15. Returning – keeping all participants engaged in the dialogue, putting the conversation back to the whole group. Examples: "Does anyone have a different perspective?" "What feelings did this activity bring up for others?" "What do others think about this issue?"

16. Seeking – asking for clarification, suggestions, more information. Examples: "What has your experience been?" "Can you say more about that?" "What does that term mean to you?"