



Creating Gracious Space Facilitator Guide

Module One: Introduction to Gracious Space

Purpose

- To build a safe and supportive space in a group
- To define Gracious Space and help groups understand how to intentionally address each element

Materials

- Definition of Gracious Space
- Chart paper

Background

Developing collective leadership for community change requires a space that can hold relationships and the work. They need a supporting structure that will allow them the time and environment to build trust, learn to work together in new ways, develop shared purpose and plans and take action.

Community leaders of the 21st century need the skills to create this supportive holding space for the collective leadership and action to emerge. At the Center for Ethical Leadership, we call this creating Gracious Space. We define Gracious Space as: **a spirit and setting where we invite the stranger and learn in public.**

Gracious Space is not a conflict-free space. As people work together in community, it is inevitable that conflict will occur. People carry their past assumptions about others, different world views can lead to friction, and solutions offered can trigger competition among group members. It is important to have the space for conflicts to emerge and be addressed productively.

People may use different words or terms to describe the space. It is not important what the community calls this space. What is important is to intentionally create this supporting structure and to know the key components essential to its creation.

Facilitation Instructions

To introduce Gracious Space to a group, it is helpful to engage the group in building a description of the kind of environment and supporting guidelines they would like to create for their meeting or gathering. This exercise should take approximately 25 minutes.

With the first three steps of this exercise, participants will identify individual Gracious Space and then widen that space to include the whole group.

1. Ask participants to consider Gracious Space individually. "Think of a time when you have experienced Gracious Space -- whatever this means to you. What was the setting? What did you experience?"
2. Have participants to split into pairs. "Find one other person in the group to talk to. For the next five minutes share your stories with each other." While the group is talking, write the definition on chart paper: Gracious Space is a spirit and setting where we invite the stranger and learn in public.



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3. Gather the large group together. Ask participants to share some of the characteristics of the Gracious Space you experienced. Discourage a retelling of the stories. Write down these characteristics on chart paper.
4. “Your stories and descriptions indicate you already know a lot about creating Gracious Space. I want to share the Center for Ethical Leadership’s definition.” Read the definition out loud and emphasize the four different elements. Briefly go over each element.

Spirit

“What do you do to prepare for a difficult conversation or an uncomfortable new situation?” Share an example. “When I know I will be entering a discussion with a difficult person, a conversation starts in my head. Why do I have to keep dealing with this person? Why do they have to make things so hard? An alternate way of preparing for this meeting is to bring a positive intention into the conversation. In my head I tell myself “the other person means well.” I tell myself to “look for their gifts” that might help the situation. The spirit you bring into any situation can have a big impact.

Spirit is also about the energy we create together as a group. Do we want to have our solution be adopted or do we want to understand each other? Gracious Space seeks to create a spirit where people develop their ideas together.”

Setting

“The external setting matters. Look around the room we are gathered in. What about this setting supports the kind of interaction we want?” Listen to four or five responses. “When working on the setting it is important to ask the question, how can the setting support the type of interaction we want to have? This requires us to look three elements:

- *Physical space.* Do we want to be in a retreat setting away from distractions? How important is natural lighting and air?
- *Time.* How much time will we allocate? Is the time sufficient to have the depth of conversation we intend?
- *Format.* Do we want to sit in a large circle to be able to face each other and share stories? Do we want to be at round tables to support small group discussion?”

Welcome the stranger

“We want to welcome difference – background, experience, perspective, etc. We need to ask who else in our community needs to be included in this work.”

Learn in public

“How will you open up to learning? What do you need to let go of – certainty, expertise, solutions, etc.—to open up? How will you create space for the ideas, wisdom, and expertise of others to show up?”



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5. “Can we create this space here and now for our gathering?” Share the poem “Friendship.”

*Oh, the comfort —
the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person —
having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words,
but pouring them all right out,
just as they are,
chaff and grain together;
certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them,
keep what is worth keeping,
and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.*

--Dinah M. Craik, from her short story, “A Life for a Life”

Reference: Hughes, Patricia. Gracious Space: a Practical Guide for Working Better Together, Center for Ethical Leadership, Seattle. 2004.