



**Full Partner  
Leadership**

[fullpartnerleadership.com](http://fullpartnerleadership.com)

# **GRASSROOTS GUIDE to DEPOLARIZING the USA**

Michael Welp  
Full Partner Leadership

# Hello!

I'm Michael Welp, founder of Full Partner Leadership and someone who's spent decades helping people rediscover what it means to truly partner, both in workplaces and in life. At the heart of all my work is a simple but powerful belief: **When we humanize ourselves and each other, we create spaces and places where people thrive.**

This guide is part of that larger mission.

We're living in a time when division feels like the norm — a time where fear, judgment, and polarization dominate not just our politics, but our workplaces, neighborhoods, and relationships. I believe we can change that. I believe we must.

**At Full Partner Leadership, we help organizations build cultures where people thrive together**, where trust, collaboration, and real partnership replace outdated models of control and separation. But this work doesn't stop at the office door. It's about transforming how we show up as humans, whether in meetings, around dinner tables, or across political divides.

That's why I created this **Grassroots Guide to Depolarizing the USA**. It's more than a toolkit. **It's an invitation to be part of a movement to rehumanize the world around us.** Every conversation you have, every moment you choose curiosity over judgment, brings us closer to a country — and a world — where everyone has the chance to thrive.

This guide is dedicated to my friend Wayne Pignolet, who always believed in the power of partnership.

I encourage you to share this guide freely. It's a living document, hosted at **FullPartnerLeadership.com**, where you'll find updates and additional resources as this work evolves. Please share feedback on this guide to me at [michael.welp@fullpartnerleadership.com](mailto:michael.welp@fullpartnerleadership.com) or to text or talk: +1.208.290.0132.

For America's children, let's build a future where thriving is possible for all.

*Michael Welp*

July 2025



+1 (503) 281-5585 **Full Partner Leadership**  
[info@fullpartnerleadership.com](mailto:info@fullpartnerleadership.com)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SECTION ONE: WHY THIS WORK MATTERS</b>	<b>4</b>
What Makes Polarization and Division Complicated	6
Where this Guide Fits	8
<b>SECTION TWO: DEPOLARIZE YOURSELF</b>	<b>9</b>
Media Reflection	11
Tips and Mindsets that Support Depolarizing Oneself	12
<b>SECTION THREE: HUMANIZE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>13</b>
Hallmarks of Exceptional Relationships	15
Foundational Partnership Skills	16
Leadership Development Arc	18
Relational Intelligence in Action	19
<b>SECTION FOUR: DISRUPT DEHUMANIZATION</b>	<b>23</b>
What is Dehumanization?	24
Dehumanization Intervention Tips & Strategies	25
From <i>Might Makes Right</i> to <i>Right Makes Might</i>	26
The Inner Cost of Disruption	28
<b>SECTION FIVE: BUILD THE CONNECTIONS</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>SECTION SIX: PRACTICE &amp; APPLY</b>	<b>33</b>
Tool: Humanizing Questions	34
Tool: Behaviors that Build or Damage Trust	35
Tool: Life Fulfillment	37
Tool: Regrounding in American Values	38
Tool: Breathe & Ground Yourself	39
Tool: Questions Crossing Political Divides	40
Tool: Operating Agreements	41
Resources	42





SECTION ONE

# WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

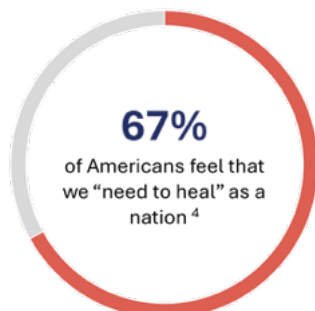
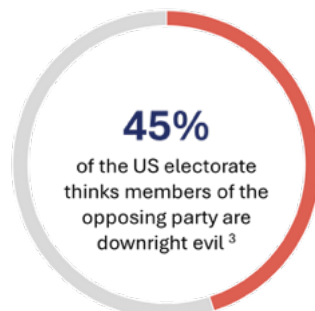
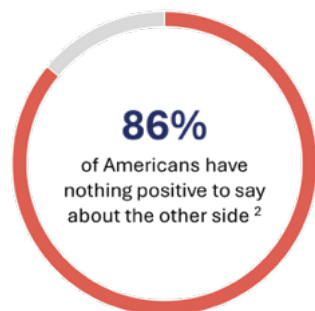
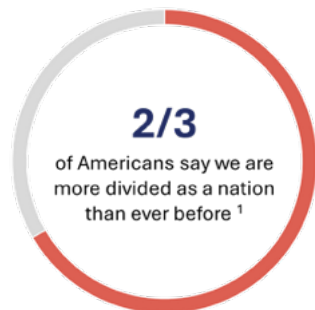
*Polarization traps us;  
real freedom comes from connection*





## WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

We live in a time of intense division. We're told daily that the country is split beyond repair. The crisis is deep. It's not just political trust that's eroded; it's neighborly trust.



### DO YOU TRUST YOUR NEIGHBORS?

60%

Americans  
Two Generations Ago

30%

Americans  
Now

19%

Millennials  
Now

Source: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzNS\\_Vp8FmA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzNS_Vp8FmA)

But the truth is, the majority of Americans, on both sides of the aisle, want many of the same things: safety, opportunity, and dignity.

**What's distorting our view?** Amplified narratives of fear, outrage, and difference. The result is the loss of freedom: the freedom to trust, the freedom to connect, and the freedom to build together.

1. [www.standtogether.org/stories/constitutionally-limited-government/political-polarization-in-america-whats-driving-it/](http://www.standtogether.org/stories/constitutionally-limited-government/political-polarization-in-america-whats-driving-it/)

2. [www.moreincommonus.com/publication/the-connection-opportunity/](http://www.moreincommonus.com/publication/the-connection-opportunity/)

3. [www.moreincommonus.com/publication/the-connection-opportunity/](http://www.moreincommonus.com/publication/the-connection-opportunity/)

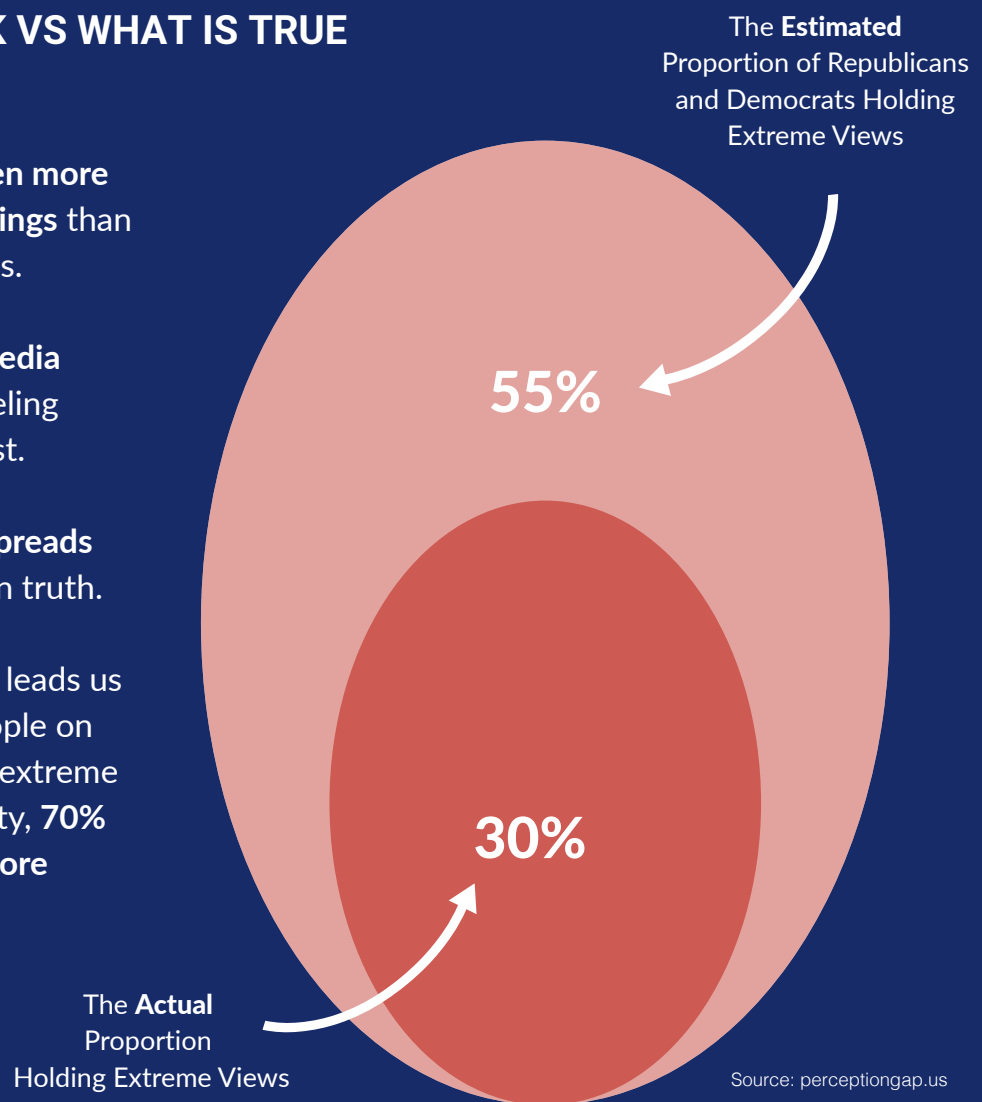
4. [www.moreincommonus.com/publication/the-priorities-gap/](http://www.moreincommonus.com/publication/the-priorities-gap/)

## THE CURRENT STATE OF POLARIZATION

Today's divides run deeper than political disagreements. They're about identity, belonging, and the stories we tell about each other. Media and social platforms amplify this polarization, shaping how we see "the other side" — and how free we feel to connect across difference.

### WHAT WE THINK VS WHAT IS TRUE

- Polarization is driven more by identity and feelings than by policy differences.
- Media and social media amplify conflict, fueling outrage and mistrust.
- False information spreads six times faster than truth.
- The perception gap leads us to believe most people on the other side hold extreme views — but in reality, 70% of Americans are more moderate.



This distortion leads us to see others as enemies, not humans, and it shrinks the space where freedom, connection, and shared solutions can flourish.



## WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

As tribal beings, we often experience criticism of our group as a personal attack. Our views and reactions are shaped not only by the behavior of leaders but by the media we consume.

Today's media amplifies this division. Mainstream media channels have become more partisan.<sup>5</sup> Algorithms are designed to grab our attention and reinforce what we already believe. False information, research shows, spreads six times faster than truth.<sup>6</sup>

The result? We begin to cast the other side as having negative intentions or negative character. We stop seeing the full humanity in each other.

70% of Americans do not hold extreme views.

*We have more in common than we think about what we want and hope for in our country.*

## WHY THIS MATTERS

The loudest, most extreme voices dominate headlines, drowning out the vast majority who share common hopes. Fear and anger rise. Dehumanization grows.

And yet, if we reclaim space for compassion, curiosity, and partnership, we can build something better.



## KEY RESEARCH INSIGHTS

### Shared Priorities

Surveys show both Democrats and Republicans prioritize quality healthcare, safe communities, an unbiased justice system, and a thriving middle class.<sup>7</sup>

### Common Governing Principles

In the documentary *Divided We Fall*, citizen retreats revealed bipartisan agreement on fundamental needs: equal access to healthcare, education, and basic human dignity.<sup>8</sup>

5. See [www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart](http://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-chart) and [app.adfontesmedia.com/chart/interactive](http://app.adfontesmedia.com/chart/interactive)

6. See [www.thesocialdilemma.com](http://www.thesocialdilemma.com)

7. [www.philanthropy.com/commons](http://www.philanthropy.com/commons)

8. [DividedWeFallTV.org](http://DividedWeFallTV.org)

## WHERE THIS GUIDE FITS IN CIVIC LIFE AND LEADERSHIP

This guide is part of a larger movement to rehumanize the spaces where we live, work, and lead. It's not just about tools. It's about restoring the freedom to show up as fully human, to listen with curiosity, and to rebuild trust across divides.



### BEING AN ACTIVE CITIZEN MEANS MORE THAN VOTING

Being an active citizen doesn't only mean casting a ballot or joining a protest. It also means engaging across lines, listening to neighbors, and turning strangers into collaborators.

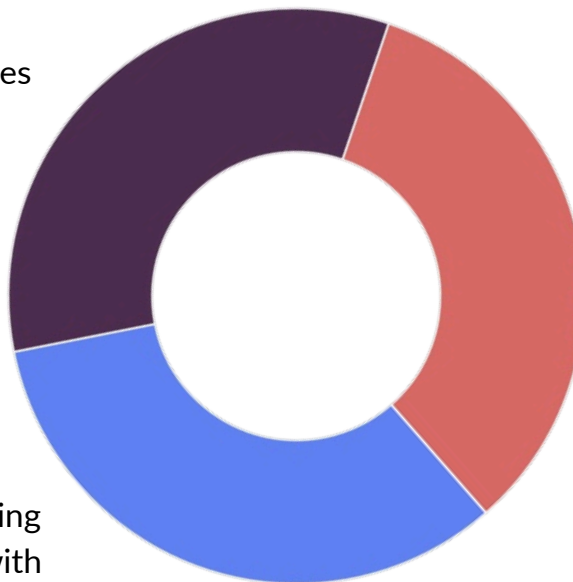
This guide focuses on the **relational path**, equipping you with the mindsets, skills, and tools to reclaim the freedom to engage meaningfully across difference.

#### Community Participation

- Joining forums
- Researching issues
- Volunteering
- Showing up in collective spaces

#### Civic Action

- Voting
- Contacting representatives
- Peaceful protesting
- Joining groups with whom you identify



#### Relational Action

- Engaging across partisan lines, turning strangers into neighbors
- Learn from neighbors, colleagues, strangers and their views
- Discover common ground and our greater humanity

In the following chapters, we'll explore how you can begin this work — starting with yourself.





SECTION TWO

# DEPOLARIZE YOURSELF

*Start by shifting your own  
habits, assumptions, and inner narratives*





## DEPOLARIZE YOURSELF

Depolarization doesn't begin in dialogue: It begins in self-awareness. It begins when we ask:

How do I participate in  
— or reinforce —  
the dehumanization  
I say I want to interrupt?

The work starts not with blame, but with honesty.

This section invites you to **examine what shapes your beliefs, reactions, and emotional responses**, not as a source of shame, but as a path to greater clarity and agency.

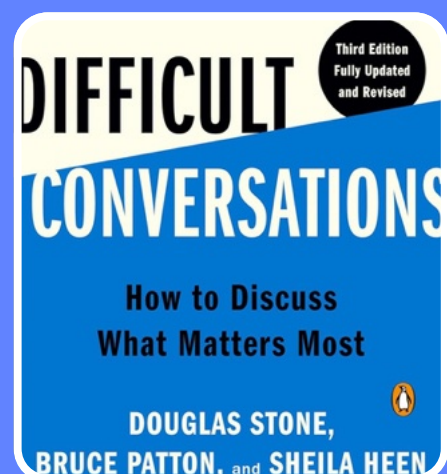
When we can notice our own reactivity, step back from certainty, and shift toward curiosity, we begin to unlock new relational freedom — the freedom to connect across divides.

## WHAT KEEPS US STUCK?

In the book *Difficult Conversations*, the authors identify one of the biggest reasons we stay stuck in conflict: **We assume the other person has bad intent or bad character.**

This assumption, often fed by media and partisan narratives, short-circuits connection. It trains us to distrust before we even engage.

The work of depolarization begins when we shift from judgment to curiosity.







## MEDIA REFLECTION: NOTICE WHAT SHAPES YOU

Our media diets shape our stories about who belongs, who threatens us, and who's worth listening to.

The stories we absorb about others often flatten complexity and fuel fear.

### Depolarization begins with self-reflection:

- From what media channels or sources do I get my news?
- What biases are inherent in these sources?
- What assumptions do they convey about the intentions and character of either partisan side?
- Do these sources stoke my anger and fear? Do they dehumanize a population?
- What alternative sources do I use to counter these biases?
- How am I at filtering out the “noise” of the media to stay tuned into my knowing we are each deeply complex humans?

At Voyageur Outward Bound School, we had a saying:

*“If you’re having trouble with a student, you need to get in the canoe and paddle with them.”*

It wasn't about solving a problem; it was about restoring the relationship.

When we took the time to be alongside our students, to experience their rhythms, challenges, and strengths, our perspective shifted. We saw them more fully.

**The same is true across political and social divides.**

When we “get in the canoe” with someone, we learn to see them as more than the views they hold. We begin to see their full humanity. We often find we share more than we thought.

**That's where depolarization begins.**

**GET IN THE CANOE**

Every time you choose curiosity over certainty — and connection over control — you expand the space where trust and transformation can grow.

## MINDSETS THAT SUPPORT DEPOLARIZING YOURSELF

### Slow down and be present.

- Make space for genuine connection.
- Take responsibility for how others feel seen, heard, and understood.
- Notice your tone and energy, not just your words.

### Listen with curiosity, not judgment.

- Ask: “What’s important to this person?”
- Explore what life experiences shaped their views.
- Look for what surprises, moves, or humbles you.

### See the person, not just their position.

- Look for their gifts, not just their arguments.
- Notice strengths, effort, and wisdom.
- Empathy means being with someone, not fixing them.

### Ground in humility and discovery.

- Acknowledge that your view is partial.
- Let others stretch or complicate your thinking.
- Stay open to being changed.

“When you do leadership, not only do you change the situation, but the situation changes you in a very profound way.”

Len Hirsch  
Former White House Director & Leadership Consultant

In the next section, we’ll explore how to bring these mindsets into your relationships.





## SECTION THREE **HUMANIZE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**

*Build trust, listen deeply, and strengthen the  
relational fabric that holds us together*

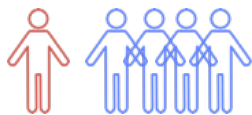




Isolation is fatal.  
Build your  
social capital.



Loneliness has been  
shown to be as  
harmful as smoking  
**15**  
cigarettes a day<sup>9</sup>



**1 in 5**  
in the US  
report being  
lonely



Social connection  
increases your  
odds of survival<sup>9</sup>  
**50%**

9. See *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023 Report* available at  
[www.vivekmurthy.com/surgeongeneral](http://www.vivekmurthy.com/surgeongeneral)

## HUMANIZE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Polarization doesn't just divide countries. It divides families, communities, and workplaces. When our relationships weaken, our sense of belonging, safety, and trust suffers.

*The U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness and disconnection a national health crisis.*

To heal what's broken in the world, we have to start with the relationships closest to us. Yet, our culture often teaches the opposite: stay surface-level, avoid vulnerability, and default to judgment.



Love Inner Child Burning Man sculpture

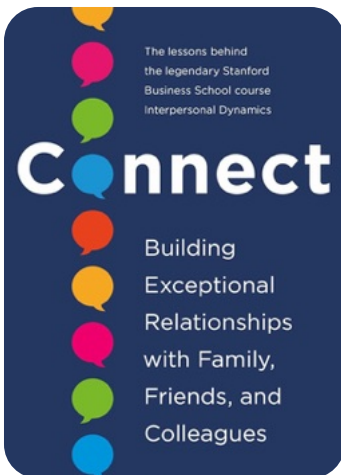
As organizational psychologist Edgar Schein observed, mainstream US culture leads us to build the minimal number of relationships necessary to get the task done.

But if we want to create a culture where people thrive, we need more. We need depth. We need empathy. And we need to reclaim the ability to really see each other. **We need psychological safety and trust.**

## HOW ARE MY RELATIONSHIPS?

Reflect on the current state of your relationships (personal, professional, civic, etc.) and **ask yourself:**

- How many friends feel like they can call me when they need help? Who are they?
- How many friends do I feel like I can call when I need help? Who are they?



## BEGIN WITH RELATIONSHIPS

Exceptional relationships aren't built overnight. But they can be built intentionally.

In *Connect: Building Exceptional Relationships with Family, Friends, and Colleagues*, authors David Bradford and Carole Robin outline the six hallmarks of deeply connected, trusting relationships.

Where do these six hallmarks show up in your relationships?

### SIX HALLMARKS OF EXCEPTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

	NOT TRUE		STRONGLY TRUE		
	1	2	3	4	5
You can be more fully yourself, and so can the other person.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Both of you are willing to be vulnerable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You trust that self-disclosures will not be used against you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You can be honest with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You deal with conflict productively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Both of you are committed to each other's growth and development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

“People who were most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80.”

Harvard Study of Adult Development<sup>10</sup>



## BUILDING PARTNERSHIP

How do we create exceptional relationships, the kind that foster trust, openness, and real connection? And not just with those who think like us, but also across difference?

At Full Partner Leadership, we've spent decades exploring this question.

What we've found is that **authentic partnership is a practice built through everyday interactions, intentional choices, and a willingness to grow.**

They're muscles we strengthen over time, in quiet moments and difficult conversations alike.

As you read through the six foundational partnership skills, reflect on how it shows up in your life today and where there's room to grow.



### SIX FOUNDATIONAL PARTNERSHIP SKILLS

These foundational skills help you strengthen connection, even in tough conversations:

1. Courage
2. Integrating Head & Heart
3. Listening
4. Balancing Key Paradoxes
5. Leveraging Ambiguity & Turbulence
6. Seeing & Thinking Systemically

*These foundational skills are the roots of relational integrity. They're what make courageous, systemic leadership possible.*



## CHECK YOURSELF

Do you have the building blocks for trustworthy and authentic partnership? Take a moment to reflect below.

### SIX FOUNDATIONAL PARTNERSHIP SKILLS

NOT TRUE 1 2 3 4 5 STRONGLY TRUE

#### COURAGE

I speak my truth, even when I face withdrawal of support or retribution.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I publicly reject narratives that dehumanize others.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### INTEGRATING HEAD & HEART

I consider others' feelings when trying to understand a situation.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am willing to be vulnerable and share my own emotions.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### LISTENING

I slow down in order to fully understand what is being said.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can hear another person's perspective without debating, interrupting or over-focusing on my own.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### BALANCING KEY PARADOXES

I look for the value in multiple perspectives, even when they appear contradictory.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I balance my tendency of being critical with being appreciative.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### LEVERAGING AMBIGUITY & TURBULENCE

I am willing to cause turbulence in service of disrupting and challenging norms to create solutions where everyone can thrive.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I possess the resilience to lead and partner especially when confused, overwhelmed or unsure.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

#### SEEING / THINKING SYSTEMICALLY

I notice when mindsets that limit partnership such as win/lose and us/them emerge from somewhere in the system.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I notice how culture lives inside me and shapes how I see and make meaning of the world.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## FROM RELATIONAL FOUNDATIONS TO SYSTEMIC IMPACT: THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ARC

These six foundational partnership skills build the muscle for courageous, human-centered leadership. Intentionally practicing and growing your foundational partnership skills builds deeper capacities, like managing complexity and disrupting the status quo in service of transformation.

Here's how:

Practiced over time, these six foundational partnership skills **expand our relational capacity** by growing these internal skills:

- Authenticity
- Empathy
- Resilience & agility



An expanded relational capacity gives us the **steady foundation to influence systems-level change**: Growing our authenticity, empathy, resilience, and agility better prepares leaders to step into more advanced, high-stakes challenges, such as:

- **Managing complex conversations**: Navigating power, emotion, and difference with clarity and care
- **Being an agent of change**: Disrupting outdated patterns and creating new cultures of partnership

Full Partner Leadership teaches this leadership development arc:

Internal skill-building → relational capacity → systems-level influence

### Full Partner Leadership Development Arc

#### 6 Foundations Skills

1. COURAGE
2. INTEGRATING HEAD & HEART
3. LISTENING
4. BALANCING KEY PARADOXES
5. LEVERAGING AMBIGUITY & TURBULENCE
6. SEEING/THINKING SYSTEMICALLY

#### 2 Advanced Skills





## RELATIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN ACTION: PRACTICING IN REAL TIME

Building relational trust lives in how we speak, listen, and respond. These practices help deepen connection, even in moments of tension, difference, or vulnerability.

### COURAGE

Courage builds trust: When you show up fully, others know your presence is real.

- I show up as who I am and what I believe without changing to fit in.
- I am congruent with and clear about my values.
- I manifest my will with
  - What I want,
  - What I intend,
  - What I decide,
  - What I do.
- I don't need others to change for me to show up as I am.

### LISTENING

True listening is more than hearing. Empathic listening is about being present to understand, not to fix.

If you're unsure what someone needs, ask:  
Do you want me to hear this, help with this, or handle it?

Notice the questions inside your head that drive if you're listening to understand or something else:

- Do I like this person?
- What's this got to do with me?
- Do I agree with this person?
- What's important to this person? (try listening with this question)

**Always remember:** The speaker decides if they feel heard. Check your understanding by summarizing what you heard, and then ask: "Did I get that right?"

## EMPATHY

Empathy is the fusion of the foundational skills of integrating Head & Heart and Listening. Empathy asks, “Can I be with this person’s story without trying to change it?”

Empathy can be used when someone else wants to grow as they better understand their own experience.

Empathy is a following activity. You go on the speaker’s journey:

- I suspend my urge to fix or solve and focus on getting into another person’s world.
- I assume the best answers lie inside the person.

Sometimes, we unintentionally step outside of empathy. If you reflect back what you think someone is feeling and you’re wrong (i.e., they feel misunderstood), you’re leading instead of following. If you reflect something they’re just beginning to become aware of (i.e., it resonates), you’re still in the space of empathic following.

If the person’s values threaten you, focus on bringing compassion for the fears that are beneath their anger or strong viewpoint. It means there’s a deeper level of humanity for you to connect with.

## NAVIGATIONAL EMPATHY

Navigational empathy is empathy with a compass. It adds awareness of the unseen burdens and freedoms each of us carries. It asks:

- What challenges does this person navigate that I don’t?
- What freedoms do I have that they may not?

Compassion grows when we recognize where someone else carries a burden and we carry a freedom. For example, being able-bodied is a navigational freedom some of us move through life with while others quietly navigate barriers.

By noticing these invisible dynamics, we build the capacity to respond with empathy, humility, and wise action. It helps us discern when to hold space and when to speak up.

*Relational intelligence  
is how you show up.*

*These are tools to  
master and practices  
to live.*

*Where’s one place  
you can begin to  
lead with more  
courage, listening, or  
empathy?*



## RELATIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN ACTION: HIGH-STAKES CHALLENGES

Once our relational foundations are in place, we can begin applying them to high-stakes challenges: Managing complex or difficult conversations and becoming an agent of change.

### MANAGING COMPLEX CONVERSATIONS

When it comes to difficult conversations, ask yourself: “What’s the hardest part for me?”

- Is it more difficult to bring your own voice forward (to speak with courage)?
- Or is it harder to tune in and truly hear the other person (to listen and integrate both head and heart)?

Start the conversation by clearly stating your intent and why the partnership matters to you. Ask if it’s a good time to talk or decide together on a time that works for both of you.

**Remember: Repair is a natural part of ongoing relationships.**

If your impact differs from your intent, resist the urge to defend yourself. Instead, focus on understanding how you were experienced and take ownership of that impact. Alison Armstrong once taught me a powerful question to ask in repair: “Is there anything I need to say I’m sorry for?”

### BECOMING AN AGENT OF CHANGE

To become an agent of change, start by affirming those who initiate positive shifts. Let them know their actions matter.

Be willing to act when you witness disrespectful dynamics, even if it means losing some friends or colleagues along the way. This work asks you to build your capacity for not having certain attachment needs met.

Learn what creates safety and trust, and surround yourself with networks that support the change you want to see.

Most importantly, keep inspiring others with your vision for what our country can become at its best.



## ADVANCED SKILL

### UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD

In addition to applying the foundational partnership skills explored so far, you can also practice **unconditional positive regard**, especially when you engage with someone whose values or beliefs strongly differ from your own.

Katy Meadows<sup>11</sup> describes this key relational skill, which she learned from her mentor Carl Rogers, as a way to stay grounded in connection even amid disagreement.

Start by temporarily suspending your judgments — not labeling what they say as good or bad. When you judge, you no longer take in new information.

**Remember: Listening doesn't mean you agree.** You can stay rooted in your own integrity and values while offering genuine presence.

Use impeccable empathic listening: Reflect back what you hear and ask for validation to ensure you understand them.

Look for the gold in their perspective, something that reveals their values or wisdom, even in opposition. **Release the need for them to be different.**

**Empathic listening paired with unconditional regard can soften polarization.** It gives the other person nothing to push against and creates the conditions for them to feel seen, heard, and humanized.

Once you've listened fully, you might ask if they're open to hearing yours. If not, you can leave that part aside for now.

*Relationships are where transformation begins.*

*Every time we choose empathy over assumption and presence over performance, we rebuild the foundation for trust, one interaction at a time.*

In the next section, we'll explore what it means to actively disrupt dehumanization and interrupt the forces that flatten, silence, or harm.

11. [www.instagram.com/competentrelating](https://www.instagram.com/competentrelating)



SECTION FOUR

# DISRUPT DEHUMANIZATION

*Recognize, challenge, and interrupt the forces  
that flatten, exclude, or harm*



## WHAT IS DEHUMANIZATION?

Dehumanization is what happens when **we stop recognizing someone's full personhood**—their thoughts, feelings, needs, and right to exist without coercion or erasure.

It is what happens when we stop seeing someone as a person and start seeing them only as an object, a problem, or means to an end. It shows up in our institutions, in our relationships, and even in ourselves.

If we want to create a country where everyone can thrive, we must learn to see and interrupt these patterns.

### FORMS OF DEHUMANIZATION

Dehumanization can be structural, interpersonal, or internalized. Often, it's all three at once.

Notice the power dynamic here: ***Might makes right.***

#### STRUCTURAL

Found in institutions—corporations, governments, schools—that treat people as commodities or burdens.

#### INTERPERSONAL

When individuals belittle, ignore, or harm others based on bias or power.

#### INTERNALIZED

When people begin to see themselves as undeserving of care, often due to long-term exposure to dehumanizing environments.

### KEY COMPONENTS OF DEHUMANIZATION<sup>12</sup>

#### Objectification

- Viewing people as instruments for productivity, profit, or convenience.
- Reducing them to roles: *a number, a burden, just an intern.*

#### Loss of Empathy

- Ignoring or minimizing others' emotions, needs, or suffering.
- Choosing efficiency, comfort, or dominance over consideration.

#### Moral Exclusion

- Placing someone outside the boundaries of who is worthy of respect or fair treatment.
- Justifying harm, neglect, or punishment by saying they *deserve it* or *are not like us*.

#### Stereotyping and Flattening

- Collapsing a person's complexity into a single trait, identity, or label.
- Seeing them only as their demographic category, job title, or behavior.

#### Control Without Consent

- Making decisions about someone without their input or autonomy.
- Removing choice, silencing dissent, or withholding information.

12. These next three pages, excluding the strategies for interrupting dehumanization, were generated by ChatGPT. See [chatgpt.com/share/680eacac-7ebc-8006-aca3-1389ddaf4f6a](https://chatgpt.com/share/680eacac-7ebc-8006-aca3-1389ddaf4f6a)



## DEHUMANIZATION INTERVENTION TIPS

Dehumanization takes many forms — some loud, some subtle. It's in the ways we reduce, dismiss, or divide.

Before we can intervene, we have to recognize what we're witnessing.

**Can you spot it? What does dehumanization look or sound like?**

## SPOTTING DEHUMANIZATION

- Pumping out fear and anger > love
- Spewing us/them or win/lose thinking
- Referring to anyone as less than human
- Denying rights, due process, or belonging
- Assigning negative character to an entire group
- Flattening someone's complexity
- Defining a person by one part of who they are
- Closing off to their lived experience

**90%** Time spent advocating positions to each other in stuck conversations, according to Difficult Conversations.

## STRATEGIES FOR INTERRUPTING DEHUMANIZATION

### OWN YOUR EXPERIENCE.

Speak from your experience, not judgment. Own your impact:

*When you say \_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_.*

Share how someone's words or actions impact you. You know you're owning your experience when what you say is unarguable: *When you speak about this group that way, I feel angry and hurt.*

That's very different from saying: *That's inappropriate*, which is a judgment and assumes intent, not your truth. Naming your impact brings more of your humanity into the conversation and often invites more of theirs in return.

**NAME THE ENERGY OR EMOTION BEHIND THE WORDS.** Use Sean Harvey's pivot:

*What's it like to feel that anger?*

Respond not to the content, but to the energy underneath it. My colleague Sean Harvey calls this **the pivot**: Naming the emotion behind someone's words rather than debating their point.

Questions like, *What's it like to express all that frustration?* reach for connection at the human level.

It can soften defensiveness and open a new portal for dialogue that might not otherwise be possible.

**SLOW DOWN THE CONVERSATION WITH INQUIRY.** Don't debate to win. Ask open-ended questions. Listen. Reflect. Invite mutual sharing.

Don't try to change someone; try to reach them with your heart. Shift from debate to curiosity. Breakthroughs happen when we spend more time in inquiry than advocacy.

Let the pace of exchanges match the strength of the relationship. Don't invite turbulence until the container can hold it.

This isn't a TV debate; it's a conversation built at the speed of trust.

## FROM MIGHT MAKES RIGHT TO RIGHT MAKES MIGHT

One way dehumanization persists is through a cultural belief that power justifies itself: *Might makes right*. What if we reversed that idea? What if legitimacy came not from dominance, but from dignity, fairness, and consent?

***Might makes right*** is the idea that **power confers legitimacy** — that whoever holds the most power gets to define morality, set rules, and determine truth, regardless of ethics or justice.



A more ethical foundation would be ***right makes might*** where **justice, consent, and mutual respect** are the basis for legitimacy, not domination. **Power is accountable, not absolute.**



You embed **principled power**, power rooted in mutual respect, truth-seeking, and consent, **into the structure** of your conversations, spaces, and leadership behaviors.

To disrupt dehumanization, we don't need to overpower others. We need to lead with integrity, presence, and process.



## RIGHT MAKES MIGHT FRAMEWORK

As detailed below, applying **right makes might** in bridge-building work means you:

- Lead with integrity, not persuasion.
- Center process, presence, and respect.
- Create environments where all voices are heard, and power is earned through ethical conduct.

### CENTER MUTUAL RESPECT OVER WINNING

**Right makes might** begins with the assumption that legitimacy comes from fairness, not domination. **Instead of proving a point, foster mutual recognition:** *I may not agree, but I respect that you arrived at this belief through your life experience.*

- **Practice:** Set norms that **protect dignity, not ego.**
- **Frame conflict as a shared inquiry, not a debate** to be won.

### MAKE LISTENING A FORM OF POWER

If **right makes might**, then active, non-defensive listening becomes a show of strength, not weakness. **Listening becomes the ethical foundation that shifts the culture from hierarchy to humanity.**

- **Practice:** Create space for people to **tell their stories**, even if uncomfortable.
- Build in pauses or **structured turn-taking** to avoid domination by loudest voices.

### ELEVATE PROCESS OVER POSITION

**Right makes might** means the **how** matters as much as the **what**. The method reflects the morality. **Invite disagreement** as long as it **adheres to principles: Clarity, accountability, and shared ground.**

- **Practice:** Use **consensus-based or deliberative dialogue models**, not adversarial formats.
- Focus on **co-creating meaning**, not converting others.

### DEFINE SHARED “RIGHT” THROUGH SHARED VALUES

Rather than “my truth vs. your truth,” use a collective inquiry to explore:

- What does fairness mean to us?
- What do we owe each other as neighbors?
- What kind of world do we want to live in together?

**Right is not dictated, but discovered** in relationship.

- **Practice:** Ground the conversation in **shared principles**, not partisan labels.

### BUILD TRUST BY PRACTICING ACCOUNTABILITY

**Power is legitimate only when it is accountable.** That’s the heart of **right makes might.**

- **Practice:** Acknowledge mistakes or harms when they arise.
- Create feedback loops and check-ins that show people they’re being **heard, not managed.**



## THE INNER COST OF DISRUPTION

Intervening in dehumanization isn't just about strategy — it's about freedom. Most of us were conditioned to trade parts of ourselves to maintain belonging. Challenging the beliefs or behaviors of our social group risks losing that sense of connection.

**This is why disrupting dehumanization requires inner work.**

It calls us to examine how we learned to perform, stay silent, or stay safe. Below is my story:

### FREEDOM REQUIRES INNER WORK

*Intervening requires freedom. Most of us derive our attachment needs and belonging needs from our social groups. Our perception of reality is influenced by our social groups. Our beliefs are interwoven with our peers' beliefs. To challenge a belief held by your social group is to also put your membership in your social group at risk.*

*Are you capable of disrupting your peers' view of reality? To put it more frankly, are you willing and capable of losing some of your peer friendships? The price to be free may be temporary loneliness.*

*“I couldn't intervene at the level I wanted to until I looked at the unhealthy ways I learned to get my attachment needs met.”*

*Fortunately, I had a great therapist in April Dawn Harter of The Kaivalya Institute.<sup>13</sup> According to April, most of us learn to either harm ourselves or harm others. I had learned to minimize myself and my voice in order to get along or be liked.*

*The result? My behavior was more performative than authentic.*



*With a lot of EMDR and well over one-hundred*

*90-minute sessions, I am now much more free to stay true to myself and be willing to challenge or disappoint others.*

*“Whatever your pattern is, know that disrupting dehumanization asks us to come from a place of deep internal freedom — and that freedom is a gift we get to give ourselves.”*

*The last thing we want to do in the process of getting to a world where all humans can thrive is to continue harming ourselves and others.*

***Creating a country where we all thrive means getting ourselves free to thrive, too.** We have to collectively model healthy, full partnership. We have to model the world we want to co-create.*

*When you regain more connection to your authentic self, you unnumb the core values you had to suppress. Your moral principles become more available to apply as a compass.*

13. Learn more about The Kaivalya Institute at [www.thekaivalyainstitute.com](http://www.thekaivalyainstitute.com)

## HOW FREE ARE YOU TO DISRUPT DEHUMANIZATION?

We can only help others get free to the degree that we are free ourselves. This is a noble and sacred journey. It's important to get good support along the way.

### CHECK YOURSELF

Take a moment to reflect on the internal habits, fears, or beliefs that may be keeping you from stepping in more boldly.

### DEHUMANIZATION SELF-REFLECTION: HOW FREE ARE YOU?

- Which behaviors do you engage in that lead to either minimizing or harming yourself or others?<sup>14</sup>
- What beliefs do you use to justify these behaviors?
- What degree of pain does this cause in your life or others' lives?
- Have you ever hit "rock bottom" where these maladaptive strategies don't work anymore?
- What part of your true self might you be suppressing with these patterns?
- Who are good supports for me in this journey? What are good resources in this journey?
- In order to get my attachment needs met, how do I know if I'm operating from my true authentic self versus performing what I think others want me to be?

*The best way to inspire others is to be free yourself.  
Face your own dehumanization.*

In the next section, we'll explore how to create the conditions where people and teams can truly thrive: By building the trust, safety, and care that make courageous connection possible.

14. For a provocative list of examples of behaviors to question number one above, see my former therapist and mentor April's webpage at [www.thekaivalyainstitute.com/services](http://www.thekaivalyainstitute.com/services)



SECTION FIVE

# **BUILD THE CONDITIONS**

*Create the psychological safety and collective care where people and teams thrive*





## WHY THESE CONDITIONS MATTERS

Thriving relationships, teams, and communities don't happen by accident. They are built intentionally, one interaction and one choice at a time. At its core, **this is about reclaiming the freedom**, as individuals and as communities, to care for what matters most.

### WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

**Amy Edmondson** defines team psychological safety as a shared belief that **the group is safe for interpersonal risk-taking**, where people feel free to speak up, take risks, and show up authentically without fear of humiliation or punishment.

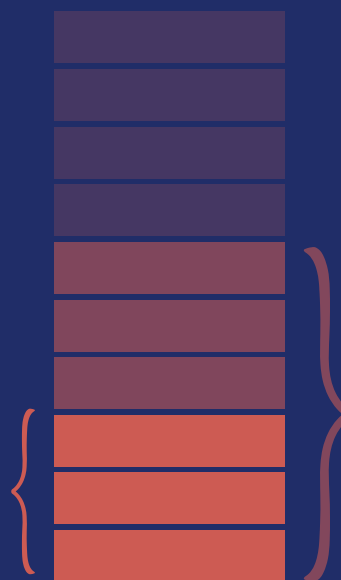
Psychological safety is built at what **Adrienne Maree Brown** calls the **speed of trust** — the speed at which relationships can be attended to and built. This is not the speed of urgency; it is a pace that allows trust to deepen.<sup>15</sup>

This section explores how we create the conditions where people flourish, focusing on psychological safety, trust, and the freedom to tend to your own well-being.

### WHY YOUR VOICE MATTERS

The impact of psychological safety is profound. According to Gallup polling:

Only  
3 in 10  
U.S.  
workers  
strongly  
agree  
that their  
voice  
matters  
at work.



If that number increases to 6 in 10, employers see:

- 27% reduction in turnover
- 40% reduction in safety incidents
- 12% increase in productivity

Psychological safety creates a foundation for trust and meets core human social needs.<sup>16</sup>

Creating the conditions where people and communities can thrive is not just a systems challenge — it's also a relational, cultural, and human one.

15. See Adrienne Maree Brown's book *Emergent Strategy*

16. The source for data in the Why Your Voice Matters blue box is:

[news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/223235/create-culture-psychological-safety.aspx](https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/223235/create-culture-psychological-safety.aspx)

## FREEDOM AS THE ABILITY TO TEND TO WELL-BEING

Peter Block defines freedom as the ability to tend to our own well-being.

### Applied Individually

Do I have the freedom to care for my own well-being?

### Applied Collectively

Do we, as a team or organization, have the freedom to tend to our shared well-being?

## THREE QUESTIONS THAT SHAPE GROUP BELONGING

In every group we're part of, we are constantly (often unconsciously) asking:

	OUT	1	2	3	4	5	IN
Am I "in" or "out"?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do I have a voice and influence?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Am I appreciated for my skills and resources?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Think about a current group you're part of and ground these questions in your own experience. Your answers reflect how much psychological safety and trust you experience, which directly impacts your sense of well-being.<sup>18</sup>

## OUR COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

We can zoom out even further and ask:  
**How do we measure the well-being of our country?** As one politician put it:

Are people better off than they were before?

Do our children have a brighter future?

Are we coming together instead of being torn apart?

Research shows that happiness is less correlated to income above \$75K, suggesting that connection, meaning, and collective thriving matter deeply.<sup>17</sup> We must ask:

Do we believe our well-being is intertwined as a country — that for the nation to succeed, we all need to succeed?

What level of interdependence do you feel with other Americans across the political spectrum?

How well are we, as a country, tending to our own well-being?

In the next section, we explore how you can take action, applying these insights to real-world conversations and interventions.

17. See Peter Block's book *Activating the Common Good*, and [peterblock.com](http://peterblock.com)

18. Adapted from Marvin Weisbord's classic book *Productive Workplaces*.





SECTION SIX

## PRACTICE & APPLY

*Turn insight into action with tools, questions,  
and strategies for real-world change*





## TURN INSIGHT INTO ACTION

The practices in this guide are only as powerful as the actions they inspire. This section is designed to help you take the next step, whether it's deepening a conversation, reflecting on your values, or disrupting dehumanization in everyday moments. **Most important is the willingness to try, learn, and keep showing up.**

### THE 36 QUESTIONS THAT LEAD TO LOVE



In her *Modern Love* essay, *To Fall in Love With Anyone, Do This*,<sup>19</sup> Mandy Len Catron shares a study by psychologist Arthur Aron that explores how **mutual vulnerability fosters connection**.

The idea is simple: Sustained, reciprocal self-disclosure, even between strangers, builds closeness.

The questions aren't just about falling in love; they're about **becoming more human to each other**.

### TOOL: HUMANIZING QUESTIONS

I once walked up to a man on the street and asked him, *What are you most proud of in your life?* He looked up at the stars for a while before turning to me: *Just helping people.*

**It was a profound moment of connection.** I felt his impact lingering in me all day. It felt like a full-course meal.

**Try it yourself.** Begin with the questions below to discover your respective humanity and to see each other in more complex ways than just a member of a partisan group.

- **Follow your natural curiosity** in what you ask others.
- **State your intent** to learn and connect beyond our identities.
- **Give permission** for them to decline to answer the question.

### SAMPLE HUMANIZING QUESTIONS

- What are you most proud of in your life?
- Who have been the most important teachers in your life?
- What crossroads are you at in your life?
- What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
- For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
- What is your greatest accomplishment of your life?
- What is your most treasured memory?
- When do you feel most alive?
- What question do you wish I would ask you?
- If I really knew you, what is one thing I would know?
- What is your biggest challenge in the next year?
- What is the biggest piece of wisdom from your life you would want to pass on?

19. Read the article here: [www.nytimes.com/2015/01/09/style/no-37-big-wedding-or-small.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/09/style/no-37-big-wedding-or-small.html)



## TOOL: BEHAVIORS THAT BUILD OR DAMAGE TRUST<sup>20</sup>

Trust is built through everyday behaviors: how we listen, how we show up under pressure, and how we honor or betray our word. These patterns speak louder than our values — they are our values in action.

This tool invites you to reflect on how your presence and patterns shape the trust others place in you. Use this as a guide for self-awareness, for team development, or to prepare for the moments that matter most.

### REFLECTING ON YOUR TRUSTWORTHINESS

As you read through the trust-building and trust-damaging behaviors on the following page, reflect on these questions:

- What behaviors do you recognize in yourself when trust is high?
- Which behaviors do you fall into under stress?
- Which behaviors show up most often in your day-to-day interactions?
- What impact do they have on your team, relationships, or leadership?
- How might you show up differently in a high-stakes moment this week?



*We build — or erode — trust moment by moment,  
choice by choice.*

## TRUST-BUILDING BEHAVIORS

### PRESENCE & INTEGRITY

- Acts authentically, even under stress
- Congruent in words, tone, and body language
- Speaks frankly and directly, with care
- Stays consistent over time
- Keeps commitments and follows through
- Clarifies ambiguity when possible
- Faces conflict directly and appropriately
- Doesn't avoid hard conversations; initiates and manages them when needed
- Sets context and states intent clearly

### OPENNESS & COLLABORATION

- Listens to understand, not just to respond
- Remains open to feedback
- Shares thoughts, ideas, and feelings transparently
- Uses an "and/both" mindset, not "either/or"
- Communicates openly without distortion
- Seeks mutual benefit over personal agenda
- Fully participates in decision-making conversations
- Cooperates and looks for ways to help others succeed
- Builds people up and acts as an equal

### EMPATHY & INCLUSION

- Demonstrates empathy
- Acknowledges individuals and their group identities
- Values others' input, even when there's disagreement
- Treats others as whole people, not roles or categories
- Friendly without demanding friendship
- Generous with time and energy
- Shows confidence in others' abilities
- Challenges and supports; doesn't shrink or dominate

## TRUST-DAMAGING BEHAVIORS

### DISCONNECTION

- Ignores others or doesn't listen
- Withdraws under pressure or anger
- Hides thoughts and feelings, or distorts them
- Avoids responsibility; passes the buck or drops the ball
- Acts aloof, disengaged, or cold
- Withholds effort, energy, or appreciation
- Talks negatively about colleagues
- Ridicules, stereotypes, or insults others

### CONTROL

- Competes instead of collaborates
- Uses privilege dishonorably
- Uses power to punish or intimidate
- Breaks agreements or reopens them unilaterally
- Sends mixed messages; hard to read or trust
- Focuses on personal wins over shared purpose
- Acts more concerned about self-interest than team priorities

### UNACCOUNTABILITY

- Refuses to see nuance; convinced, close-minded
- Jumps to conclusions without checking in
- Stresses the negative, fixates on deficiencies
- Holds grudges, avoids helpful confrontation
- Makes excuses or blames when things fall short
- Seeks control over shared problem-solving



## TOOL: LIFE FULFILLMENT

This page offers two simple frameworks to help you reconnect with what makes life truly meaningful. Renowned author Richard Leider and U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy remind us that purpose, reflection, relationships, and service are key to a meaningful life.

### RICHARD LEIDER

Richard Leider is a renowned purpose coach and bestselling author of *The Power of Purpose*. He has spent decades researching how people find meaning, especially later in life, and is known for helping individuals align their lives with values, reflection, and legacy.

Learn more:

[richardleider.com](http://richardleider.com)

### END OF LIFE REFLECTIONS

After interviewing thousands of elders, Richard Leider found the same three reflections surfaced again and again:

- I wish I had **been more reflective**, looking at my whole life and the big picture.
- I wish I had **taken more risks to be more authentic** about my values, beliefs, and point of view.
- I wish I had done more to **make a difference** in others' lives.



*Which of these speaks to you most right now? What might change if you paid more attention to that wish?*

### DR. VIVEK MURTHY

Dr. Vivek Murthy is the 21st U.S. Surgeon General and author of *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*. A leading voice on public health and well-being, his work focuses on combating loneliness and uplifting purpose, service, and relationships as essential to a fulfilling life.

Learn more:

[vivekmurthy.com/partingprescription](http://vivekmurthy.com/partingprescription)

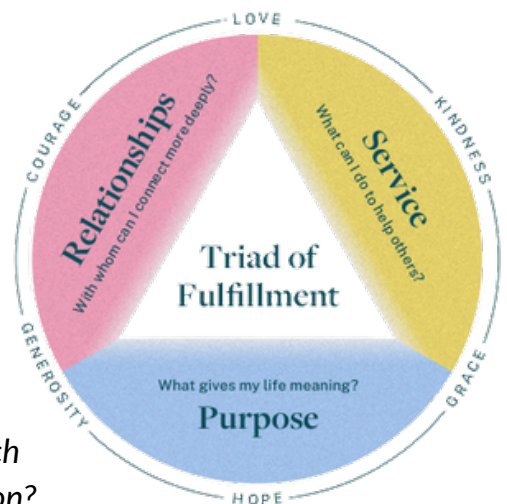
### THE SURGEON GENERAL'S TRIAD OF FULFILLMENT

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy urges Americans to prioritize three core ingredients of fulfillment, not just for happiness but for long-term well-being:

- **Relationships**
- **Service**
- **Purpose**

Together, these form the **Triad of Fulfillment**, which he calls "a prescription for a life that matters."

*Which of these three sources of fulfillment are strong for you? Which one could use more care or attention?*



*If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?*

Richard Leider

## TOOL: REGROUNDING IN AMERICAN VALUES

This exercise invites you to reflect on **the values you hold most precious** and **what you're willing to protect, defend, or pass on.**

Getting clear on your core values helps you recognize when they're being violated and where you have opportunities to step in and lead.

## REFLECTING ON YOUR VALUES

- Which of these values is most precious to you?
- What life experiences have you had that have strengthened this value?
- Which of these values would you most want to have be alive and well for your grandkids?
- What has been your proudest moment as an American? Least proud moment?
- Overall, what about America makes you most proud?

How **PRECIOUS** is this value to you?

### WHAT VALUES DO YOU HOLD SACRED?

How willing are you to act to **DEFEND** this value?

← NOT 1 2 3 4 5 VERY →							← NOT 1 2 3 4 5 VERY →					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe in freedom of speech.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe in freedom of religion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe everyone has the right to the pursuit of happiness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe everyone has inherently equal worth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe everyone should have an equal opportunity to succeed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe every citizen should have the right to vote.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe in due process: no one can be deprived of life, liberty, or property without fair legal procedures and a just process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe everyone should have the opportunity to work hard and achieve success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		I believe _____ (what else is core for you?).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

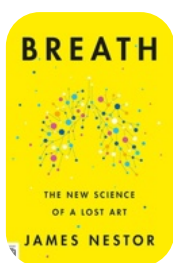
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain Inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The Declaration of Independence (1776)

## TOOL: BREATHE & GROUND YOURSELF

The work of depolarization requires us to stay present, emotionally regulated, and open, especially when conversations get tough. One of the most powerful tools we have is something we carry with us everywhere: Our breath.

Intentional breathing and grounding practices calm the nervous system, interrupt reactive patterns, and bring us back into a state of curiosity, compassion, and choice. Below are a few trusted resources to support your practice:



### BREATHWORK

James Nestor's bestselling book *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* explores how small shifts in breathing can improve physical health, mental clarity, and emotional balance.

Learn more:

[MrJamesNestor.com](http://MrJamesNestor.com)

Explore guided breath techniques and videos on his site.



### HEART-CENTERED GROUNDING

HeartMath offers decades of research and tools for cultivating emotional regulation and compassion by syncing heart and brain coherence.

Learn about their research:

[heartmath.org](http://heartmath.org)

Tools + Techniques:

[/resources/heartmath-tools](https://resources/heartmath-tools)



### FREE & GUIDED MEDITATION TOOLS

For calming your body and mind in daily life or just before a high-stakes conversation:

The Calm App

Popular for sleep, stress, and focus  
[calm.com](http://calm.com)

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center

Free guided meditations  
[uclahealth.org/uclamindful/guided-meditations](https://uclahealth.org/uclamindful/guided-meditations)

The work of depolarization begins with how we choose to show up in our homes, communities, and country — not to win, but to rehumanize, rebuild, and make freedom possible for all.



## TOOL: QUESTIONS FOR CROSSING POLITICAL DIVIDES

Bridge-building begins when you stay grounded in your beliefs *and* make room to understand someone else's. This section offers questions to help you move beyond positions and into the stories, values, and experiences that shape them.

### DIALOGUE ACROSS DIVIDES

Use these paired prompts to guide a meaningful conversation and then reflect on your own experience in return. This practice is designed to create mutual understanding, not agreement.

- What is at the heart of your political beliefs?
- What hopes, concerns, and values do you have that underlie your beliefs?
- What in your life experience has led you to believe the things you do?
- What are the political issues today that impact your life the most? Can you tell a story from your life that helps me understand how that issue impacts you?
- In what ways have you felt out of step with the party or groups you generally support, or in what ways do those groups not fully reflect what's important to you?

1

#### ASK SOMEONE ELSE

to tell you how they answered the question.

2

#### REFLECT

on what they shared with you.

3

#### SHARE YOURSELF

how you answered the question.

*Let the relationship guide the pace, not ideology.*

### ESSENTIAL PARTNERS

The questions in this exercise come from Essential Partners' *A Guide to Conversations Across the Partisan Divide*, available on their website: [whatisessential.org](http://whatisessential.org). See the full guide for more context, tools, and insight.

Essential Partners draws on decades of research and practice to foster trust, understanding, and meaningful connection across even the deepest divides.



## TOOL: OPERATING AGREEMENTS

At Full Partner Leadership, we use operating agreements to support the kinds of conversations that matter most — the ones that invite vulnerability, difference, and growth. Below are the practices we model in our four-day leadership learning labs. They can be adapted to fit your own group, team, or setting:

### OUR AGREEMENTS

- 1 **Choose your own level of participation and disclosure.**
- 2 **Listen to understand rather than to respond.**
- 3 **Speak your truth respectfully.** Each person's perspective adds value to the group.
- 4 **Give yourself and others permission to not make sense.** Learning occurs through exploring our confusions and apparent contradictions.
- 5 **Be on time.** If you will be late, please let someone know.
- 6 **Honor confidentiality.** Share what you — not someone else — are learning. When in doubt, ask permission before sharing a story that's not yours.

*Operating agreements create brave space where complexity, honesty, and connection thrive.*

### CREATE YOUR OWN

#### Step 1: Individual Reflection (10 minutes)

Ask participants to recall and journal about a time when they were part of a team that functioned really well:

- “What helped that group thrive? What unspoken or explicit agreements were at play?”
- “What agreement could you suggest that would help this group take risks, support each other, and learn together?”

#### Step 2: Small Group Sharing (10 minutes)

Form small groups of 3–5 people and have each person share their agreements. As a group, choose and write down your top three favorite agreements to bring forward.

#### Step 3: Large Group Harvest & Agreement (30 minutes)

Reconvene as a full group. Ask each small group to share one favorite agreement at a time. As each is shared:

- Chart it using their own language
- Ask for clarification if needed
- Ask the full group to raise hands if they can agree to the agreement for the duration of the session

Remind them that unanimous agreement isn't necessary; it's more important to know what alignment *is* present. If someone hears an agreement similar to their own, they can cross it off. Continue until all groups have shared or affirmed a contribution.

## RESOURCES

### DOCUMENTARIES

The documentary, **Divided We Fall Television**, reveals ordinary people wrestling with what it truly means to be an American, the divides that prevent unity, and what we can do to bridge the gaps: [www.dividedwefalltv.org](http://www.dividedwefalltv.org)

### ARTICLES

- **How Americans Came to Hate Each Other.**  
[www.vox.com/politics/381789/partisanship-polarization-political-violence](http://www.vox.com/politics/381789/partisanship-polarization-political-violence)
- **Sean Harvey article on bridge-building skills**  
[www.whartonhealthcare.org/grounded\\_neutrality\\_the\\_bridging\\_mindset\\_for\\_leaders\\_in\\_a\\_polarized\\_world](http://www.whartonhealthcare.org/grounded_neutrality_the_bridging_mindset_for_leaders_in_a_polarized_world)
- **Does Money Buy Happiness?**  
[www.whartonhealthcare.org/grounded\\_neutrality\\_the\\_bridging\\_mindset\\_for\\_leaders\\_in\\_a\\_polarized\\_world](http://www.whartonhealthcare.org/grounded_neutrality_the_bridging_mindset_for_leaders_in_a_polarized_world)

### BOOKS

- **Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most**, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen
- **Connect: Building Exceptional Relationships with Family, Friends, and Colleagues**, by David Bradford and Carole Robin
- **Activating the Common Good: Reclaiming Control of Our Collective Well-Being**, by Peter Block
- **Fierce Civility: Transforming Our Global Culture From Polarization to Lasting Peace**, by Joe Weston
- **Emergency Kit for Finding Common Ground: Helping Americans Get Along**, by Andrea Molberg
- **Beyond Contempt: How Liberals Can Communicate Across the Great Divide**, by Erica Eteleson
- **Possible: How We Survive (and Thrive) in an Age of Conflict**, by William Ury
- **The 10 Lenses**, by Mark A. Williams
- **Bringing Citizen Voices to the Table**, by Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer
- **Politics, Dialogue and the Evolution of Democracy: How to Discuss Race, Abortion, Immigration, Gun Control, Climate Change, Same Sex Marriage, and Other Hot Topics**, by Kenneth Cloke
- **We Can't Talk About That at Work: How to Talk about Race, Religion, Politics, and Other Polarizing Topics**, by Mary-Frances Winters



## WEBSITES

### Organizations helping facilitate cross-partisan conversations.

- [braverangels.org](http://braverangels.org)
- [whatisessential.org](http://whatisessential.org)
- [nicd.arizona.edu](http://nicd.arizona.edu)

### Research supporting a belief that what we have in common is stronger than what divides us.

- [moreincommonus.com/publication/the-connection-opportunity/](http://moreincommonus.com/publication/the-connection-opportunity/)

### Track how much your elected representatives engage in personal attacks via AI tools.

- [americaspoliticalpulse.com/#content](http://americaspoliticalpulse.com/#content)

### Positive stories of people partnering to address our country's biggest problems.

- [standtogether.org](http://standtogether.org)

### Experiments in providing balanced news.

- [www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news](http://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news)
- [ground.news](http://ground.news)

### Impact of social media on polarization.

- [bhr.stern.nyu.edu/publication/fueling-the-fire-how-social-media-intensifies-u-s-political-polarization-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/](http://bhr.stern.nyu.edu/publication/fueling-the-fire-how-social-media-intensifies-u-s-political-polarization-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/)
- [www.humanetech.com/insights/60-minutes-social-media-and-political-polarization-in-america](http://www.humanetech.com/insights/60-minutes-social-media-and-political-polarization-in-america)
- [www.humanetech.com/take-control](http://www.humanetech.com/take-control)
- [www.humanetech.com/key-issues](http://www.humanetech.com/key-issues)

### Report on Harvard Study about the importance of relationships on health.

- What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness | TED [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI)

### U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy's parting prescription:

- Murthy urges Americans to prioritize their relationships, embrace service, and find a purpose. He calls this the "triad of fulfillment." Each of these, he insists, lie at the heart of our health and happiness:  
[www.vivekmurthy.com/partingprescription](http://www.vivekmurthy.com/partingprescription)

A large, detailed image of the Statue of Liberty, showing her head, crown, and the torch she holds in her right hand. The statue is green and set against a white background.

# Full Partner Leadership

## A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

Thank you for reading this guide. I hope it sparked insight, reflection, and possibility. As you turn the final page, take a moment to ask yourself:


**What stood out to me the most?**

**What conversation or action do I feel called to take next?**

Whether it's with a friend, a neighbor, a colleague, or a family member — start there. Try something. See what shifts. I'd love to hear how it goes.

Feel free to email, text, or call me with your reflections:

michael.welp@fullpartnerleadership.com 

00.1.208.290.0132 


## ABOUT US

We create culture change agents through leadership development work so your organization learns new ways to solve complex problems. We are best at experiential learning that engages the heart. This enables breakthroughs in the capacities leaders need today to thrive in a world of constant change. In the end we do three things: Shift mindsets, build skills, and create powerful new partnerships.

## CONTACT US

www.fullpartnerleadership.com 

info@fullpartnerleadership.com 

00.1.503.281.5585 

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Ramandeep Singh for the initial layout work. Special thanks to Gwendoline Van Doosselaere for the extensive refinement of the layout, structure, and content. And, thank you to Jim Healey for copy editing.