



## **Resilient Leadership Conversation Starters**

### **OVERVIEW**

Resilient Leadership Conversation Starters are designed to introduce, expand, and sustain awareness of the Resilient Leadership Framework as identified by the Island Institute. Comprised of a variety of sentence stems, these Conversation Starters provide participants opportunity to reflect on their own experience encountering or using each competency of the framework.

### **ASSUMPTIONS**

It is assumed that participants have been introduced to the Resilient Leadership Framework prior to the use of these Conversation Starters.

### **METHODS FOR USE**

There are any number of possible ways Conversation Starters can be used in support of the Resilient Leadership Framework. Three such options follow. With presenter creativity and some process adjustments, each can be adapted for use in groups of a different size than noted.

### **NOTE**

The items underlined in the Large, Medium, and Small group protocols below are those experienced trainers have found essential to emphasize and/or prioritize for the processes outlined to be effective.

#### **Large Group Setting--PowerPoint**

##### **Time: Moderate**

- In large group settings (e.g., conference presentations), display four or five of the sentence stems on a PowerPoint slide.
  - You may want the entire group to focus on a single competency, in which case you'll pull all options from one of the following lists. If your preference is to be more expansive, pull from a variety of the competencies or utilize the competency prompts you feel will be most useful to the group with whom you are working.
- Invite everyone to select one in which they have an interest and consider it individually in silence for a minute or so, finishing the sentence(s) or answering the question(s) in the prompt based on their own experience. You can encourage them to jot down thoughts/notes as they reflect. Let them know their notes will remain private, but that you

will be asking them to have a brief conversation about their reflections with another participant in a few minutes.

- Provide the desired amount of reflection time.
- When the allotted amount of time has passed, or you sense the group is ready to move on, tell participants that they will now have a few minutes to have a brief conversation with one other person about the prompt they selected. Tell them that at your signal [indicate what the signal will be; it could be a unique word, like “lobster” or a sound, like a bell] they are to find someone not sitting directly next to them with whom they will discuss their reflections to the prompt they selected. Indicate that once they’ve found a partner, they should quickly introduce themselves if they don’t know one another by giving their name and organization or job role. Also tell them that once they’ve completed introductions, they should stand silently, with one of the partners’ hands raised to indicate they are ready to proceed. Let them know that they will have just two minutes to find a partner, quickly introduce themselves, and give the ready signal. Inform them that at that point you will provide the next set of directions.
- Provide your desired signal for pairs to form. Ensure everyone has a partner. (Invite the remaining person to join you for discussion if there is an odd number.) Once all pairs are formed ...
- Inform pairs that they will have a total of four minutes for discussion, which you will monitor. (Adjust the amount of time according to group needs and/or your comfort or desired outcomes.) In the first two minutes, the partner who did not raise their hand will share which prompt they selected and discuss their reflections on it. The listening partner is to acknowledge what they hear and can only ask questions that begin with “Tell me more about ....” Let them know you will interrupt at the end of the designated time to switch to the second partner. Ask for any clarification needed re: the instructions.
  - You may want to create a separate PowerPoint slide that retains the prompts on one side and these instructions on the other for participant reference during their discussion. At the very least, we recommend leaving the sentence stem prompts visible throughout the discussion period so people can refer to them.
- Monitor discussion time and ask participants to switch to the other partner at the midpoint.
- Call an end to discussion at the end of the allotted time.
- Invite comments from the group. Possible prompts include: What’s one insight you had? What’s one insight you heard shared by your partner? What results have you seen evident when the competency you addressed is effectively used by some providing formal or informal leadership? [Create your own reflection questions to add to this list. What would you want to know from the group?]
- Hear from a few participants as time allows.
- Invite everyone to return to their original seat.
- Thank everyone for their participation and mention that reflecting on leadership, especially as connected to a framework like the Resilient Leadership Framework, helps ground our opportunities for leadership in practices shown to be important and likely to lead to meaningful outcomes.
- Invite participant feedback on the process utilized using the common feedback form for this purpose.

Trainer Notes:

### **Small Group Setting--Cards**

#### **Time: Brief**

- Invite participants to take two cards at random from the deck of Conversation Starters.
- Tell them to select which of the two prompts they are most interested in reflecting on for a few minutes.
- Ask them to reflect on the selected card in silence for a minute or so, finishing the sentence(s) or answering the question(s) contained on the card based on their own experience. You can encourage them to jot down thoughts/notes as they reflect. Let them know their notes will remain private, but that you will be asking them to have a brief conversation about their reflections with another participant in a few minutes.
  - You can expand this activity slightly by asking participants to also think, during this reflection time, about someone they've seen display this competency very effectively. How did they display this skill? What benefits did they see as a result of the individual having the skill? Expand reflection and discussion time to allow for this additional task.
- Provide the desired amount of reflection time. Get everyone's attention at the conclusion of this time period.
- Ask everyone to turn to a neighbor and discuss their reflections/thoughts about their selected card for 1-2 minutes each (you choose the amount of time, monitor it, and notify pairs when it's time to switch). Partner with the remaining person if there is an odd number of people to allow everyone to have a partner and monitor timing to stay on track.
- Monitor discussion time and ask participants to switch to the other partner at the midpoint.
- Call an end to discussion at the end of the allotted time.
- Invite comments from the group. Possible prompts include: What's one insight you had? What's one insight you heard shared by your partner? What results have you seen evident when the competency you addressed is effectively used by some providing formal or informal leadership? [Create your own reflection questions to add to this list. What would you want to know from the group?]
- Hear from as many participants as time allows.
- Thank everyone for their participation and mention that reflecting on leadership, especially as connected to a framework like the Resilient Leadership Framework, helps ground our opportunities for leadership in practices shown to be important and likely to lead to meaningful outcomes.
- Invite participant feedback on the process utilized using the [common feedback form](#) for this purpose.

Trainer Notes:



## **Medium Group Settings--Handout; requires easily flexible seating**

### **Time: Moderate to Substantial, depending on process**

- Ensure everyone has a copy of the handout listing the Conversation Starters for all competencies.
- Ask participants to count off by seven. (1-2-3-4-5-6-7; 1-2-3 ...) Tell them it's critical that they remember their number!
- Invite all participants to reflect on the competency area designated by their number. (You will have assigned a number to the competency areas randomly in advance. Display the assigned numbers by groups on a whiteboard, newsprint sheet, or PowerPoint for reference.)
- Ask participants to select one prompt (Conversation Starter) from the competency area indicated by their number. They can choose any prompt they wish.
  - You can be more directive by providing participants with a qualifier to help make their selection. Examples include: Choose the prompt that most intrigues you.  
Choose the prompt that addresses a skill you'd like to know more about.
- Ask participants to reflect on the selected prompt in silence for a minute or so, finishing the sentence(s) or answering the question(s) contained on the card based on their own experience. You can encourage them to jot down thoughts/notes as they reflect. Let them know their notes will remain private, but that you will be asking them to have a brief conversation about their reflections with another participant in a few minutes.
- Provide the desired amount of reflection time. Ask for everyone's attention at the conclusion of the allotted time.
- Invite participants to form groups by their assigned number and await further instructions. (This process is made easier by clearly identifying locations for each group to form. Posting the numbers 1-7 in advance or during their reflection period can facilitate this process.)
- [Once everyone is in their assigned group ...] Regain everyone's attention. Indicate that you will be providing a series of reflection questions for them to consider as a group. They will have [5 minutes]<sup>2</sup> to discuss each prompt. Let them know you will be monitoring time and interrupting when it's time to move to the next prompt.
  - You can vary this time according to the size of the group, the number of discussion prompts you choose to use, and the overall time available for this activity.
- Potential discussion prompts: (You'll want to display these in some way. A whiteboard, newsprint sheet, or PowerPoint will work well, as long as all participants can see it. Alternatively, you can provide one list of the prompts to each group, then indicate which number on the list you want them to discuss next.)
  - Which of the sentence stems listed for this competency did you select and why?
  - What struck you as you reflected on the sentence stem you selected?
  - When have you seen someone exhibit most of the kinds of skills reflected in this competency area?
  - Looking at the full list of competencies for a moment, what do you notice?
  - [Create your own reflection questions to add to this list. What would you want to know from the group?]

- Monitor time for each discussion period. Move the group to the next topic/question at the conclusion of each designated period of time.
- At the conclusion of your last discussion question, ask each group for one observation, trend, or comment they would make based on their discussion. It may be helpful to give them a few minutes to discuss this as a group and to identify someone willing to stand and share that comment to the full group. Indicate that you are looking for a single statement, without explanation or extensive details. It should be a sentence or two in length.
- Obtain each group's comment.
- Thank everyone for their participation and mention that reflecting on leadership, especially as connected to a framework like the Resilient Leadership Framework, helps ground our opportunities for leadership in practices shown to be important and likely to lead to meaningful outcomes.
- Invite participant feedback on the process utilized using the **common feedback form** for this purpose.

Trainer Notes:

## Conversation Starters by Competency Area

### Competency: Practices self-awareness

- One of the things I do to identify, reinforce and share a strength in myself is...
- One of the things I do to identify and cultivate the strengths of others is to...
- An example of when I have asked for and received valuable feedback on my leadership approach was...  
What made it valuable was...
- It's easiest for me to receive feedback on my leadership style/approach when...
- How have your own attitudes impacted the work of a group you were leading? What is an example of how you knew you had an impact?
- How has your own behavior impacted the work of a group you were leading? What is an example of how you knew you had an impact?
- One example of a time I realized I needed to adjust my approach when leading a group was...
- I find it easiest to recognize limitations in my own leadership approach/style when... An action I can take to reduce the impact of this on others is...
- To me, "acting ethically" means... An example or situation that illustrates leadership "acting ethically" is ...
- To me, "acting with integrity" means... An example or situation that illustrates leadership "acting with integrity" is...
- When it comes to my own self-awareness as a leader, I'd like to understand how to better..., in order to...
- When I receive feedback that makes me feel uncomfortable and/or defensive I can try to...
- To me, engaging in reflexive communication practices means...

### Competency: Communicates effectively

- I do my best at clearly and openly communicating with a group I'm working with when...
- Things I've noticed interfering with my communication skills when working with a group are...
- I've found that the best clarifying questions to ask are...
- A communication challenge I've encountered in groups I've worked with is... I'd love to know how others have addressed this!
- In order to be fully present with a group, I've found it most effective to...
- For my own self-improvement, one form of diversity I could really use help knowing more about is ...
- I plan for addressing different learning styles (e.g., auditory, visual, kinesthetic/interactive) when I share information by ...
- I find it most challenging to prepare and present content a) verbally, b) in writing, c) by an active or interactive method and could develop my skill and confidence by ...
- When it comes to communicating effectively as a leader, I'd like to understand how to better..., in order to...
- I've found that in order to communicate my needs in team settings, I need the following from team members....
- I hold expertise in the following areas...which may influence the specialized language that I use when communicating. An action I can take to reduce the impact of this on others is....

### Competency: Develops effective connections and relationships

- A successful experience I've had making a controversial decision while leading a group was when... What I learned from that experience for the future was...
- An unsuccessful experience I've had providing leadership for a controversial decision while leading a group was when... What I learned from that experience for the future was...
- I've had success in drawing out various perspectives from others by...
- I find others are most willing to share their point of view, even if it differs from others in the group, when...
- When I notice someone disengaged from a conversation and/or decision-making process, I take the following actions...
- To me, what "active listening" looks, sounds, and feels like is...
- When it comes to practicing active listening, I need to do the following...
- I find I'm best at being empathetic, diplomatic, and patient with conflict when...

- If I know I'll be entering a group situation that may generate conflict, I prepare myself in advance or respond in the moment by...
- One of the best empathic listeners I know is... What I see in how this person develops effective connections and relationships is...
- I recall leading a group where structures or ways of the group functioning (i.e., "systems") got in the way of building group connections and cohesion. We effectively addressed that by... and I knew it made a positive difference because...
- One fun and effective strategy for building connections between group members is...
- To build trust among group members, I've... and know that the results were positive because...
- I once witnessed another leader build group trust by...
- When it comes to developing interpersonal connections as a leader, I'd like to understand how to better..., in order to...

### **Competency: Innovates and Encourages Innovation**

- In the type of leadership situations I most often find myself in, the need for highly innovative solutions is:
  - Frequently needed
  - Occasionally needed
  - Never needed
  - **DESCRIBE or EXPLAIN your response and offer 1 or 2 relevant examples**
- When innovation is needed in groups I lead, I find it effective to create space for creative thinking/planning to occur by...and I can gauge success by...
- A challenge I see in groups when it comes to embracing innovative approaches is...
- In trying to address challenges of groups embracing innovative approaches, I've found it most effective to ...
- My favorite activity to invite innovation in a group is to...
- Knowing whether or not it's appropriate to be innovative and creative when leading a group can be challenging. I've found it helpful to make this determination by...
- If a group wants to experiment or move in an innovative direction and see quantifiable results, I've found it imperative to...
- When it comes to being innovative as a leader (or encouraging it in others), I'd like to understand how to better...in order to...

### **Competency: Navigates Systems**

- The best leaders I've seen [fill in the blank] to successfully navigate complex social or organizational systems.
- When it comes to providing leadership in complex social or organizational systems, the best leaders can successfully navigate [fill in the blank].
- As a leader, I've come to understand that some of the best ways to identify and engage allies in understanding and influencing the opportunities and challenges of complex systems is to...
- If a group I'm participating in seems to be losing sight of the goal(s) and shared vision we are trying to accomplish, I've found it really effective to...
- To help groups celebrate incremental progress toward a short-term goal or shared vision, I like to...
- I've seen people leading systemic change or alignment efforts/projects really "step in it" and lose credibility in our community when they...
- A skill set needed to acknowledge and seek to repair the harm when a group's direction is out of alignment with community culture/norms could be...
- Three essential things a leader needs to know about our community (related to people's sense of place, culture, and history) if they want to be respectful and earn trust and buy-in are...
- When it comes to navigating systems as a leader, I'd like to understand better how to..., in order to...

### **Competency: Promotes engagement**



- Recognizing and utilizing the differences and similarities of others is essential to effective leadership. I've seen that done really well by...
- I'm really proud of a time when I was able to see and support someone else's strengths to advance the results on an opportunity, issue or shared goal. Here's how I would describe that situation and what led to success...
- Some of the ways I've found to create safety for group members to foster a learning culture of risk-taking and trying out new leadership skills, qualities, and roles is to... What I find hinders or dampens that safety is...
- In our community, the groups that often have less power and voice than others in contributing and influencing change are...
- To create space for individuals or groups who don't have as much voice and power as others in situations or groups, I have experienced effective leadership doing [what?] Which has yielded [what?]
- When it comes to my role as a leader in growing engagement and leadership, I'd like to understand how to better..., in order to...

**Competency: Influences Change**

- When change happens REALLY FAST or in unpredictable ways, people can feel out of control and anxious. I've found it helps reduce or manage the tension in these times when...
- I've seen leadership nurture flexible, resilient responses to change when they...
- To build the kinds of relationships and partnerships needed to solve really complex issues, I've seen leadership [do what?], that has led [to what?]
- To help groups establish shared goals and connect their efforts, I've experienced successes when I... I have learned from failures that...
- My greatest strength(s) in helping others see, understand or influence changes pursued by a group is/are...
- When it comes to the leadership skills needed to influence change, I'd like to understand how to better..., in order to...