

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

I developed the ideas and techniques in *How to Have a Good Day* over many years of working with people in organizations around the world. And although I've seen the advice work beautifully for individuals, I also designed the exercises so that they could be used in group discussions on how to improve work and life – whether or not people are interested in the underlying behavioral science.

So I've written this simple guide to help you get the most out of group conversations about material in the book – whether you're a formal team, a book group or just a collection of like-minded professionals who want to meet to talk about the book's ideas. (If you're the organizer, you might also want to refer to the appendix on "How to Have a Good Meeting" for more general tips.)

Here are my suggestions – most of which are reflections of the advice in the book. Have a go, and let me know how you get on!

## Before the session

- You probably want to choose one chapter as a focus for discussion. Perhaps one that feels highly relevant to the challenges and opportunities that people are facing right now – or simply start with chapter 1, since its advice on setting intentions is a theme that runs throughout the book.
- Encourage people to read the chapter beforehand if possible. At least suggest that they come ready to apply the chapter's techniques to real situations in their working life.
- Try to create the kind of environment that will help people relax and open up. It's surprising how much difference it can make to choose the coziest space available and play some music as people arrive, for example.

## Setting up the session

- Start with a positive frame, to put everyone's brains into *discovery mode*. For example, ask everyone to share the best thing that's happened in the past week. It's just a quick warm-up, so if it's a large group, people can do this in pairs or threes. It might be good for people

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

to mention something related to work, but it doesn't have to be. The idea is simply to think about the prize rather than the problem, to set the tone of your session.

- Consider agreeing some ground rules, to help create a sense of *in-group*:
  - Agree how to reduce the temptation of phones and tablets. It will lighten the load on people's brains and improve the quality of the discussion. Try setting up a "smartphone daycare" box in a corner.
  - For longer meetings, decide when you're going to take breaks, and/or when you're going to wrap up. Do go longer than 90 minutes without stretching your legs.
  - Agree on an approach to confidentiality. This is especially important if you're meeting with colleagues rather than friends. There's the Chatham House Rule, where you can tell people what was discussed in your group, but not attribute any specific comment to an individual. Or you might prefer the slightly tighter Las Vegas Rule: what happens in your discussion group, stays in your discussion group.
- Remind yourselves of the *brain-friendly feedback techniques*, and use these to comment on each others' ideas – especially when you want to challenge what someone's said. Consider writing them up on a flipchart or whiteboard, if you have one.
  - "What I like about that is... what would make me like it even more is..."
  - "Yes, and..." (rather than "yes, but")
  - "What would have to be true to make that work?"

## Understanding people's starting points

Ask each person to share their thoughts on the topic of the chapter. Try one of the following set-up questions:

- "Where is the biggest opportunity for improvement for you on this topic?" (Especially good if people haven't read the chapter.)
- "What interested you most in what you read?"
- "What have you been experimenting with, and what has worked well?" (if they've already applied some of the advice in the chapter)

TIP: Hearing insights from other people's experiences never fails to be a helpful encouragement and inspiration. But keep an eye on the time, so that

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

everyone gets to speak. If you're in a sizeable group, split into smaller groups if you're not going to have time to give everyone 3-5 minutes.

## Option 1: Practicing the exercises

Select an exercise from the chapter to work through together. Although the advice comes in many forms, it will generally work well with the following format:

- Make sure people are clear on the steps they're working through.
- Ask everyone to pick a relevant real example that's going on in their life right now, as a focus for the exercise.
- Get them to spend a couple of minutes thinking about their own answers
- Then, get into pairs to discuss in more depth – perhaps 5 minutes each way for the simpler exercises, or 10 minutes each way for the more complex ones. (Again, take care to split the time evenly to make sure you both have time to share your reflections.) The nice thing about pair discussions is that it's often easier to share personal situations in a 1-1 conversation than in the whole group.
- Bring everyone back into "plenary", and ask people this simple question: "what struck you most about your discussion?"

Depending on the complexity of the exercise, you can usually expect one exercise to take between 20-40 minutes. It can be more if people really get into the discussion.

TIP: If you're finding that people in the group have different views on which exercise to work on, and you have limited time, consider using the "red dot technique". Write up the options on a piece of paper that everyone can see. Give everybody three votes – what would they most like to work on? Then, ask them to put a dot (if you have stickers, great, otherwise a bold red pen can work) next to their favorites. They can put all their votes on one exercise if they feel especially strongly. Why is this helpful? Because it plays to the human brain's need for fairness. And it also gives everybody a say in the focus of the session, which helps meet everyone's need for autonomy.

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## Option 2: Peer coaching

Another way to use the book in groups is to use some peer coaching techniques. Here is one set-up that I've seen work well, which draws on several of the techniques in the book:

- Get into groups of 3-4 people.
- Each person is allocated between 20-30 minutes to be coached on an issue they're facing – ideally related to the chapter you're all focusing on.
- Split the time like this:
  - Person being coached gives brief description of the issue they'd like help with (2-3 min)
  - The other two or three people ask *quality questions* - truly open questions that aren't just suggestions with a question mark slapped on the end. So instead of "have you tried X or Y?", ask "what have you tried so far?" Instead of "is that because of A or B?", try "what do you think is causing that?" (10-20 min depending on time available)  
TIP: The aim is partly to understand the situation better, but mostly to help the coachee think things through. So make sure to let the coachee reflect as you ask them questions. NB This is not where you give advice. Hold that back for now, and police yourselves if you start giving it!
  - Now, each person gets to give one piece of advice to the coachee, based on what they've heard and what they know from the book. (5-10 min)
  - The rule is that the coachee needs to write down the advice, and say what they appreciate about it, even if they don't agree with it – a useful tiny step toward overcoming the *confirmation bias* that might lead people to reject advice they don't instinctively accept. (2-3 minutes)

## Option 3: Open group discussion

If you want to do something less structured than working through exercises or using the peer coaching set-up, you can still encourage a practical focus on solutions by doing the following:

- Ask people to share the questions that the chapter provoked. Collect these on a list so you can see what common themes emerge. Perhaps

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

it's a query about how to apply some of the advice, or a specific type of situation that's troubling people.

- Then tackle the theme that's most common across the group. Try the *GROW coaching questions* to structure the discussion:
  - First, get clear on the **Goal**, to help you focus the conversation.
    - What's really the heart of the issue?
    - So what would it be helpful for the group to come up with? (Maybe it's a list of ideas for handling a situation.)
  - Explore the **Reality**.
    - What's the problem? And what's causing the problem? And what's causing that?
    - What does the ideal situation look like – and are there any times or places that this ideal occurs?
  - What are the **Options**?
    - What are the main ideas for tackling this issue?
    - What tips or suggestions do people have to share from their own experience?
  - What is the **Way Forward**?
    - What are the first concrete small steps people can take?

## Wrap up

The value of your session will be far greater if you make sure to take a few minutes at the end, to reflect on what people have found useful.

You can try the DATE format, if you like: ask everyone to think about something they've Discovered, Achieved, are Thankful for, and found interesting in the whole Experience. Or simply ask people to share one thing that they've learned and one thing that they're going to do differently as a result of the discussion.

It's so easy to skip these few minutes as everyone is dashing for the door – but all the evidence suggests that people will learn more and do more as a result of a just a few moments of reflection at the end of your session. And that has to be a very good thing for your good day prospects.