

# Facilitating Discussion in a Challenging Environment

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**ICMA Conference Presenter**



# The Challenging Environment

- ◆ Complex and interdependent problems
- ◆ Lack of trust
- ◆ Hidden agendas
- ◆ Conflicting values and beliefs about the “problem” and the “solution(s)”
- ◆ No larger shared vision
- ◆ Competitive Relationships (i.e. power plays, secrets and lies, dysfunctional rescues)
- ◆ Using attacking, shaming, and blaming as strategies for value laden discussions

# The Seeds of Discontent

## ◆ A Changing Community

- Fast growth
- Increasing racial and ethnic diversity
- Immigration challenges
- Deterioration—housing/commercial/infrastructure
- Rising crime
- Responses to crime (i.e. relationship between police and citizens)
- Increasing income gaps
- Budget cuts/fiscal stress
- Shifting expectations between governments and its citizens

## ◆ Cataclysmic Community Events

- Scandal
- Industries closing/leaving

# The Collaborative Environment

## *A Healthy Community*

*A place where all people can meet their economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual needs; work together for the common good; and participate in creating their future.*

*The Community Leadership Handbook*

Krile James

# The Common Good

*A set of principles, laws, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures that achieve lasting benefit at reasonable cost and that tap and serve the stakeholders' deepest interest in, and desire for, a better world for themselves and those they care about.*

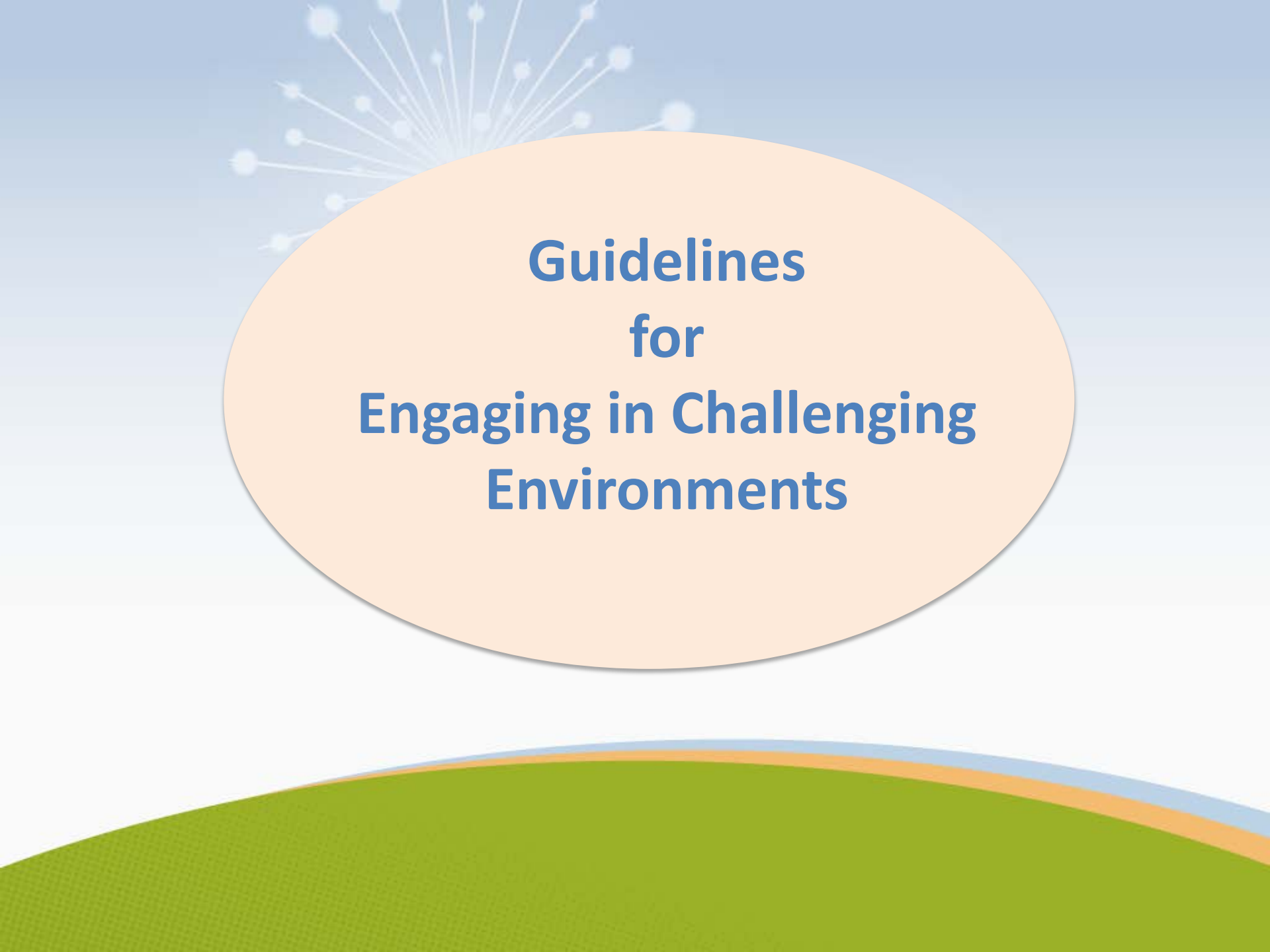
*Leadership for the Common Good*  
Barbara Crosby and John Bryson



**Creating A Different  
Environment for  
Discourse**

# Assumptions

- ◆ Change is a constant
- ◆ Change evokes fear, doubt and insecurity
- ◆ Change in an environment first requires “personal change”
- ◆ Personal change asks and answers the question, “What’s in it for me?”
- ◆ Mayors, Managers, City/County Councils, and Citizens each have a role in moving from what “isn’t working” to what works for the common good
- ◆ Change accounts for diverse experiences and perspectives in the common good



**Guidelines  
for  
Engaging in Challenging  
Environments**



# Guidelines

- ◆ “Try on”
- ◆ It’s okay to disagree
- ◆ It is not okay to blame, shame, or attack, self or others
- ◆ Practice “self-focus”
- ◆ Practice “both/and” thinking
- ◆ Notice both process and content
- ◆ Be aware of intent and impact
- ◆ Confidentiality

# “Try On”

- ◆ Be open-minded to others’ ideas, worldviews, ways of doing things
- ◆ Feel free to take those things that “fit”
- ◆ Feel free to leave or file away those things that don’t fit

# “It’s Okay to Disagree”

- ◆ Assumes that disagreement is not only inevitable but necessary to help individuals and groups reach better decisions
- ◆ Acknowledge what we have in common AND recognize, understand, and appreciate what is different between us
- ◆ This guideline assumes we can disagree and still stay connected and resolve issues

# “It’s NOT OK to blame, shame or attack”

- ◆ Ourselves or others
- ◆ Make the other person wrong in direct, indirect, verbal or non-verbal ways
- ◆ Assume that attack, shame, or blame will automatically shut down discussions. Each discounts the other person/group

# “Practice Self Focus”

- ◆ When you find yourself getting irritated with someone, before speaking listen to your internal thoughts, feelings, and reactions
- ◆ Reacting outwardly before checking internally potentially invites blaming, shaming or attacking
- ◆ Use “I” rather than “we”, “you” or “one” statements
- ◆ Speak from your own experience(s) using “I have found....”or” I think, I feel, I believe.... And include feeling words, e. g. mad, sad, scared, happy, relieved, etc.

# “Notice Both the Process and Content”

- ◆ Notice “what you say”, “how you say it”, and “why you say it” AND notice the group’s reaction
- ◆ Process speaks to the “elephant” in the room—the climate in the room
- ◆ Ask questions that continually test the climate (i.e. feelings) in the meeting
- ◆ Not attending to the engagement “process” invites a “meeting and after the meeting” or disruption in the meeting

# “Practice “both/and” thinking”

- ◆ Invites seeing more than our own reality
- ◆ Assumes there are multiple realities
- ◆ Assumes that everyone is right from their perspective
- ◆ Assumes that reality is not strictly “either/or, right or wrong, good or bad
- ◆ Assumes that conflicts that do not present easy solutions can be resolved
- ◆ Tool: Use “AND” rather than “BUT”

# “Be aware of the “intent” and “impact” of your actions

- ◆ Assumes we will make mistakes in our interactions
- ◆ Assumes a willingness to receive honest feedback, “Ouch”
- ◆ Assumes one can be well-intentioned AND still say and do hurtful things - have a negative impact
- ◆ Understand “you” in relationship to those different from you. The more different you are from the other person/group the more chance for a negative impact
- ◆ Assumes a willingness to shift your behaviors and actions



# “Confidentiality”

- ◆ Honors personal disclosures and a willingness NOT to repeat personal information (i.e. for personal or political gain)
- ◆ Recognizes that breaking confidentiality is a two-edged sword
- ◆ Creates a safe space for disagreements
- ◆ Invites you to be “rigorous” in defining confidentiality and reach agreement
- ◆ Confidentiality invites a recognition, understanding, and appreciation for “what you bring to the table”
- ◆ Confidentiality invites a recognition, understanding, and appreciation for “what others bring to the table”



# **Closing Considerations**

# Levels of Analysis and Change

## Personal

- ◆ Values
- ◆ Beliefs
- ◆ Feelings
- ◆ Attitudes
- ◆ Opinions

## Institutional

- ◆ Policies
- ◆ Practices
- ◆ Rules
- ◆ Procedures
- ◆ Systems

## Interpersonal

- ◆ Treatment
- ◆ Relationships
- ◆ Behaviors
- ◆ Communications

## Cultural

- ◆ Worldview
- ◆ Stories
- ◆ Climate
- ◆ Shared Values
- ◆ Unwritten Rules
- ◆ Media
- ◆ Public Opinion
- ◆ Symbolic/Ritual
- ◆ Group Dynamics
- ◆ Norms

# Sustaining a Healthy Environment for Discourse

## ◆ Appreciations

*Self, Others, The Process*

## ◆ Regrets

*Acknowledgement(s)*

## ◆ Learnings or Re-learnings

*"We are caught in a web of mutuality. What affects one of us directly affects the other of us indirectly.*

*- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*People may forget what you say. They may forget what you do. They will not forget how you made them feel.*

*-Maya Angelou*

# Questions/Comments?



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