



A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR BUSINESS
ROUNDTABLES AND BOOK GROUPS

Ingaging Leadership

21 Steps to Elevate Your Business

By Evan Hackel

Leadership Guide compiled and edited by Barry Lenson

About this Leadership Guide

If you are a member of a book group or a business discussion group and would like to delve more deeply into the practice of Ingaged Leadership that I present in my book Ingaging Leadership, this Leadership Guide is for you.

I would encourage you to use this guide in one of several ways with your study group:

- If you plan to only devote one group meeting to the book, it would be best to read through this guide and select activities and questions that you would like to discuss. An alternative approach would be to distribute this guide to all group members ahead of time and invite them to select questions that they would like to discuss, then your session to those explorations.
- If you plan to devote several meetings to discussing Ingaging Leadership, you can explore the questions that follow in greater depth. You will find that each chapter section offers a wealth of ideas to explore as a group. Your time will be well spent.

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS INGAGEMENT?

Group Activity. Review this statement:

Ingagement is a leadership philosophy for those who believe that it is not enough to tell people what to do, but to involve their minds, creativity and even their emotions . . . When you align people and create an organization where everyone works together in partnership, that organization becomes vastly more successful.

Questions for discussion:

- What do you think of the concept of Ingaged Leadership?
- Is the company where you work managed in an Ingaged way? If so, how? If not, how?
- Have you tried to apply the philosophy of Ingagement in your own work, perhaps without realizing it? If so, what have your experiences been?
- Can you point to a leader – in business, politics, history – who you think could be termed an Ingaged leader? Can you explain why?
- Have you ever worked in a company, or for someone, who practiced controlling, unengaged leadership? What stories or insights can you share?
- The author writes that in the past, he presented himself as an active listener while in reality, he was only pretending to listen openly while inwardly searching for ways to find fault or prove the other person wrong. How do you think you stack up in this regard?

CHAPTER TWO: DOES INGAGEMENT REALLY WORK?

Group Activity (A). Review this information from page 22 about a Gallup study that found:

- Companies with world-class engagement achieve 3.9 times the earnings per share (EPS) growth.
- Companies with world-class engagement exhibit a “dramatic difference” in improved absenteeism, employee retention, workplace safety, customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability.

Questions for discussion:

- Do you think that the people you lead would be more productive if you practiced a more ingaged leadership style? What specifically could or should you do to become more ingaged?
- Do you think that you would be more productive if you practiced a more ingaged leadership style?

Group Activity (B). “Ingagement Works Its Magic at a Convention” (page 27) describes how the author dramatically improved attendance and involvement at a convention, simply by giving attendees the opportunity to help create a new store design.

Questions for discussion:

- Can you think of an opportunity in your organization where you could build excitement and participation by allowing people an opportunity to be more involved?
- Do you feel that your company is missing opportunities to apply similar strategies? If so, where and how?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER THREE: PRACTICAL WAYS TO MASTER THE ART OF ENGAGEMENT

Group Activity (A). Review “Define and Address the Causes of Problems, Not the Symptoms” (page 40). The author asks, “Are you addressing the symptoms of the problem, or the causes?”

Questions for discussion:

- Is there an issue that you have failed to solve in the past, or an ongoing challenge that you are not able to meet? Can you think of underlying issues that could bring progress if you identified and addressed them?

Group Activity (B). Review “Get in the Habit of Asking for Help” (page 46). The author notes that few people like to ask for help, but that doing so helps everyone.

Questions for discussion:

- How do you personally feel about asking for help? Are you comfortable doing so? If you started to ask for help more often and in the right way, do you think those changes would have the potential to improve your performance or provide other benefits?
- Over the next few days, consciously take time to ask people for more help. Consider their reactions. Be ready to report back the next time your discussion group meets.

Group Activity (C). Review “Focus on Key Performance Indicators” (page 40). The author writes that there is a lot of power in identifying the right performance indicators to measure.

Questions for discussion:

- What do you measure as part of your job? What are you learning from that activity?
- Are there things you are measuring that are not telling you what you need to know in order to improve processes and results?
- If you could wipe the slate clean, stop measuring what you already are, and start measuring new indicators, what would they be? Is that something you could realistically do?

Group Activity (D). Review “Take Time to Frame How You See Things” (page 49). The author notes that the way we frame and conceptualize problems and challenges has a big impact on our ability to lead and improve.

Questions for discussion:

- Describe a current challenge you are facing and describe the way you and your colleagues are thinking about it. Are there other ways you could reframe that same issue – perhaps from the perspective of your customers, vendors, or other stakeholders? By changing your frame in different ways, are there lessons you can learn?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER THREE: PRACTICAL WAYS TO MASTER THE ART OF ENGAGEMENT (continued)

Group Activity (E). Review “Fight Complacency” (page 53). The author notes that business can stagnate if an attitude takes hold that is based on the view that “Business is good . . . if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Questions for discussion:

- Can you think of any areas where an unproductive mindset has taken hold in your own work or in your organization? Some possible examples: You aren’t improving products because they still sell; you are sticking with old ways of marketing or selling, because it would take too much effort to address them; you could invite a number of vendors to competitively bid for your business, but continue to use only ones you know.

Group Activity (F). Review “Decide How Much Collaboration to Encourage, and When” (page 55). The author writes the best kind of collaboration involves a large number of stakeholders in decision-making and organizational processes.

Questions for discussion:

- Describe how you have collaborated on specific tasks and projects in the past. Did you involve the right people? If you could attack the same challenges again, would you invite the same people to collaborate with you? If not, whom would you invite instead?
- Are there sources of collaboration that you should consider adding to your mix, such as professional organizations, colleagues from former jobs, or even business advocacy organizations like your local Chamber of Commerce? What are they, and should you connect with them?

Group Activity (G). Review “Have the Courage to Allow People to Take Risks” (page 58). The author writes that it is important to let people take risks in their work – even risks that could fail.

Questions for discussion:

- Do you agree with that idea?
- Is your organization willing to take the kind of risks that the author is describing? If so, how? If not, do you think it could be an area for productive improvement?
- Describe a time when you took a professional or personal risk. Are you glad that you did? Can you describe what the results were – both good and bad?
- Are you facing a risky action on the job that could solve a problem or lead to progress? If so, can you describe the possible benefits and risks of doing so?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER THREE: PRACTICAL WAYS TO MASTER THE ART OF ENGAGEMENT (continued)

Group Activity (H). Review “Cultivate Positive Reflection, not “Yes People” (page 60). The author writes that “yes people” who never question bosses or upper executives can cripple an organization.

Questions for discussion:

- Do your company leaders have the courage to stretch boundaries and hire people who have new ideas, new energy and new outlooks and skills?
- If yes, where is that working in your company? If no, what could your company leaders do to improve, and what would the potential rewards be?
- How could your own work be made better by applying this idea?

Group Activity (I). Review “Cultivate the Ability to Eat Elephants” (page 64). The author points up the advantages of starting big projects in small bites.

Questions for discussion:

- Are you delaying a big project or initiative? If so, how could you get started with just one or two simple steps? What would they be?
- If you are delaying about starting something important, can you take a first step by delegating key parts of it, creating a task force to tackle it, or applying other forces to move ahead?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER FOUR: UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING YOUR COMPANY'S IDENTITY AND PURPOSE

Group Activity (A). Review the “So who are you?” questions (page 69).

Questions for discussion:

- Are you and your company leaders addressing those questions? Could some of them open up new areas for progress?

Group Activity (B). Review the traits of positive and negative company cultures (pages 70-72).

Questions for discussion:

- Which of the positive traits do you share? Why do you feel that is the case?
- Which of the negative traits do you share, and how can they be improved?

Group Activity (C). Review “Practical Ways to Define Who You Are” (pages 75-77) about creating mission and vision statements.

Questions for discussion:

- How well does your organization's mission statement reflect its true values and way of doing business?
- Does your organization have a vision statement? If not, what is one, and how can you create one?
- If you already have a vision statement, how is it helping your organization?

Group Activity (D). Review “Create a Strategic Plan to Get to Where You Want to Go,” (pages 81-82). The author writes, “A strategic plan is an important tool that can help your organization grow, achieve specific goals on a schedule, and reach its fullest potential.”

Questions for discussion:

- How would you evaluate your company's long-term planning? Are there areas where it could improve?
- Do you feel that your organization is making plans that are either too short-term or too long-term?
- Are you currently doing enough planning, or should it play a bigger role?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER FIVE: COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR ENGAGED LEADERSHIP

Group Activity (A). Review the “what’s in it for me” and the “why” sections (page 92).

Questions for discussion:

- How widely are those protocols practiced in your company?
- How consistently do you apply them?
- Do you feel there are ways you could be using them more effectively?

Group Activity (B). Review “Take Pains to Differentiate Fact from Opinion” (pages 93-96). The author writes, “We are living in a time when many people express their opinions as if they were facts. Many do it unknowingly, others intentionally. We hear politicians do it. It has also become commonplace on talk radio and television news.”

Questions for discussion:

- How do you think that this problem can affect good communications?
- Can you think of someone in your organization who presents opinions as though they were facts? If so, can you think of steps to take to encourage him or her to change?
- Over the next two days, pay attention to times when people state opinions as facts. Watch some commentary shows on television and notice when it’s taking place. Pay attention to your own communication too, and try to make sure that others know when you are stating an opinion. What do these steps tell you about how effectively you and other people in your organization make this important distinction? Be ready to discuss those questions the next time your discussion group meets.

Group Activity (C). Review “Invest Energy to Become a Good Listener” (pages 98-99). Among other steps, the author recommends acknowledging positive things that have been said, then building on them by digging deeper.

Questions for discussion:

- What do you think about those steps?
- Do you think they are indicative of communication problems in your organization or in your own way of communicating?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER SIX: MASTERING THE THREE TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Group Activity. Review the chapter (pages 101-116) or assign it to be read before your next discussion group meeting.

Questions for discussion:

About Evasive Communication...

- Can you think of a time when you practiced evasive communication? Did you do so intentionally, by force of habit, or for some other reason?
- What were the results?
- Can you think of a time when someone else at work practiced in evasive communication? What happened, and were the outcomes good or bad?

Regarding Conclusive Communication...

- Can you think of a time when you took part in conclusive communication?
- If you have communicated in this way, was it intentional? If so, why?
- How useful were the outcomes?
- Who in your organization uses this type of communication, either habitually or from time to time? What effect are they having on your company culture, efficiency and success?
- Think of a conversation you had when you were conclusive – and when you could have benefitted from being more open and honest. If you could now repeat that talk at a higher level, how might the results have differed?

Regarding Open and Honest Communication...

- Are you able to comfortably take part in open and honest communication? If not, can you pinpoint any roadblocks that are holding you back?
- If you have engaged in open and honest communication, were the outcomes good or bad?
- Are there people in your organization who take part in open and honest communication at this level, either habitually or from time to time? If so, what effect are they having on your company culture, efficiency and success?
- If you were able to strategically achieve this level of communication within your organization, what do you believe the results would be?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER SEVEN: BUILDING A STRONG AND ENGAGED TEAM

Group Activity (A). Review “How Can You Cultivate a High Level of Engagement” (page 120). The author notes how important it is to recruit and hire employees who possess a variety of skills.

Questions for discussion:

- How well does your organization do in this regard?
- Are there ways you would like to change your own hiring practices to include this insight?

Group Activity (B). Review “The Problem with Hiring People Who Are Just Like You.” The author notes that Many company owners, managers and executives make the mistake of hiring people who are just like they are, or putting together teams of similarly minded people.

Questions for discussion:

- Is this a pattern in your company and if so, do you think it should be changed?

Group Activity (C). Review “Hire and Support People Who Have the Right Attitude” (pages 123-125).

Questions for discussion:

- How does your company evaluate the attitudes of applicants who are being interviewed and recruited?
- Do you agree that your company should be placing more weight on attitude during the hiring process? If so, what steps do you think you and your company leaders should consider adding to your recruiting process?

Group Activity (D). Review “Create a Plan for Each Employee” (pages 125-126).

Questions for discussion:

- Do you think that it would be feasible to create individual plans for every employee in your organization?
- What improvements and opportunities do you think would be created in your company if you did so? Can you envision any downside?

Questions and Activities for Discussion

CHAPTER SEVEN: BUILDING A STRONG AND ENGAGED TEAM

Group Activity (E). Review “Invest Wisely in Training” (page 127).

Questions for discussion:

- Can you identify some areas in your organization where training could have the potential to improve performance dramatically?
- If so, what plans can you make to cause it to happen?

Group Activity (F). Review “Perform Regular Reviews” (pages 128-132).

Questions for discussion:

- How are you doing in this regard? If you are not conducting regular reviews, you could be causing more problems with your team members than you realize.
- Does your organization use 360° reviews? If not, do you think it is a process that could provide benefits to your HR processes? Do you see any obstacles that might prevent you from doing so?

Group Activity (G). Review “Remember that Benefits Matter” (pages 132-133).

Questions for discussion:

- Review your benefits plan by comparing it to those that are being offered by other companies where your employees could be looking for jobs. If your benefits aren't in the ballpark, you could be encouraging your people to leave you.

Group Activity (H). Review “Strategies for Recruiting and Hiring Engaged Staff Members” (pages 135-137).

Questions for discussion:

- Do you think it would be a good idea to incorporate some of the author's strategies in your hiring process?
- Are there some that feel might work better than others?
- How and when do you plan to get started?