



The Nine Asks

Creating Safer and More Courageous Spaces

By Kimberly Danielle

GUIDE FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

In *The Nine Asks*, author Kimberly Danielle provides a groundbreaking framework for organizations—churches, nonprofits, businesses, and beyond—seeking to foster spaces where people can show up fully as themselves, free from harm. At the heart of this approach are the Nine Asks: invitations that guide individuals and organizations toward authentic, equity-driven engagement. Intended for use in conjunction with the book, this guide equips readers with the tools to apply these principles, both in their personal interactions and the broader communities they participate in.

As the author writes, “When we trust a space and the people within it as contributors to and supporters of our journeys to be healthy, healed, and whole, we can better utilize our stories for good and change the world by speaking truth to power” (p. 5). Therefore, for each of the Nine Asks, this guide provides two pages. The first page is intended for individuals to reflect on and practice the Ask themselves so that they may come to the group meetings confident and prepared to begin wider implementation of each Ask, while also knowing their limitations for participating. The second page focuses on the organization or community, providing time for reflection, practice, and commitment.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE BOOK AND GUIDE

- Begin with a meeting on the first two chapters. Discuss your group goals for working through and implementing the Asks. As a group, plan out how this process will look. The Nine Asks process is not a quick-fix approach. Because of this, ensure that you are providing enough time for group members to do their personal reflection before meeting together. Be open to changing the timeline as needed throughout the process.
- Next, move through each of the Nine Asks (chapters 3-11). Remind yourselves that it’s reasonable if you want or need to spend more than one meeting on a particular Ask. Additionally, you may consider reaching out to group members before a scheduled group meeting to ensure they’ve had time to fully reflect on the Ask themselves.
- Finally, read through and discuss together chapter 12 along with the chapter in part three that best matches your organization or community. Review your previous work and further discuss how your group can fully integrate the Nine Asks.

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Be as **HONEST** and **VULNERABLE** as Possible.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

Reread the Red Light section on pages 34-37. What are your roadblocks? How do they show up in your interactions with others?

One of the roadblocks goes through the five f's (see pp. 36-37). Which of these is your typical response pattern? Describe a recent moment when you experienced that response.

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze
- Fawn
- Flock

PRACTICE THE ASK

The author writes, "The next time an opportunity presents itself to either listen or share sincerely, earnestly, and genuinely, embrace it!" (p. 42).

- Think about your schedule for the next few weeks. Do you have a meeting with someone or are you spending time with a friend? In addition to preparing for any details of the meeting, also write down any of the red flag roadblocks you worry may present themselves. When you envision yourself in this future situation, what thoughts or feelings rise to the surface? How can you address these sensations ahead of the interaction?
- Think about something you have not been completely honest about with yourself or someone else in your life. Using the skills and strategies presented in this chapter, make a plan for how you can be vulnerable and share your truth.





Be as **HONEST** and **VULNERABLE** as Possible.

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. What does honesty look like in our organization or community? How does it differ from brutal honesty or judgment?
2. How can we tell when anger is fueling our honesty, and what steps can we take to ground ourselves before speaking?
3. Which of the five f's (see pp. 36-37) do we, as a group, tend to respond with when faced with perceived threats within the group? How does it show up and what steps can we take to address it?
4. What systems or unspoken rules in our space might make it harder for people to be vulnerable (e.g., hierarchy, culture, tradition)?
5. How can we respond with care when someone shares a truth that challenges our assumptions or beliefs?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Sharing and Receiving

- In pairs, invite participants to take turns sharing and listening to one another. Have each person begin by sharing a simple fact about themselves (surface-level honesty).
- Next, ask each participant to share a feeling or perspective they don't often voice, but feel comfortable sharing (a deeper layer).
- Debrief as a group: How did it feel to share? To listen? What conditions made it easier or harder?

Option 2: Mindfulness Moment

- Practice a short mindfulness or breathing exercise together. You can search online for a guided meditation to begin the activity.
- Next, put this mindful space into practice by having individuals role-play the beginning of a regularly held meeting for your organization in a way that honors Ask #1 (see pp. 38-40 for an example).
- After each role-play, pause and ask: How would opening a meeting in this way make it easier for you to be more honest and vulnerable? Is this an approach we could commit to? What road-blocks might we encounter?

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

"In our organization, we commit to practicing honesty and vulnerability by . . . [list 2-3 concrete commitments, such as pausing before responding in anger, validating emotions, or honoring each person's full identity]."

Display or circulate the commitments as a reminder of the group's shared responsibility.





Respect **BOUNDARIES** and **THRESHOLDS**.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

Reread the Red Light section on pages 45-46. Think back to a recent moment when you felt dysregulated during an interaction. Being honest about how you reacted, reflect on the following:

- Did you admit to feeling uncomfortable or did you burst?
- What sensations came up in your body? By naming them here, you can more easily recognize them in the future.
- What was the trigger for you during the interaction?
- After this reflection, what boundaries and thresholds can you put in place for yourself?

PRACTICE THE ASK

The author writes that “Our heads can lie to us. Our hearts often lie to us. Our bodies never lie” (p. 43). And it takes practice to listen to our bodies, to figure out our boundaries and thresholds. The following practices aim to help you connect with your physical responses.

- Commit to a week of a daily mindfulness practice. An ideal practice for Ask #2 is a body scan. A body scan begins by settling into a comfortable position, either lying down or sitting with your feet grounded, and taking a few slow breaths to center yourself. You then gently bring your attention to one part of the body—starting at the head or the feet—and slowly move through each area in turn. As you scan, notice sensations such as warmth, tightness, tingling, or ease, without trying to change anything or judge what you find. If your mind wanders, simply return your focus to the body part you’re on. Continue gradually until you’ve brought awareness to the whole body, then pause to sense yourself as a whole being, breathing naturally before slowly returning to your surroundings. Notice throughout the week how this practice allows you to better notice and understand your reactions. Consider implementing a practice such as this on a more regular and permanent basis.
- Build your self-care toolkit. Referring to pages 50-51, write out the following for yourself:
 - Creating a personal safety plan
 - Incorporating an internal locus of control
 - Practicing regulation strategies, especially in tough conversations
 - Guarding your heart and bracing for the pain





Respect **BOUNDARIES** and **THRESHOLDS**.

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. What does it look like to respect personal boundaries in our organization? How do we currently respond when someone communicates a boundary? Where might we unintentionally cross them?
2. How can we balance encouraging growth with honoring someone's choice not to share or participate? How can we create a culture where people feel safe and supported in voicing their limits?
3. In what ways does stress, fatigue, or overwhelm make it harder for us to recognize and respect others' thresholds?
4. What structures, habits, or unspoken expectations in our organization might pressure people to over-disclose or go beyond what feels safe?
5. What role does power (e.g., that held by supervisors, leaders, elders) play in shaping whether people feel their boundaries will be respected?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Boundary Mapping

- In small groups, invite participants to list different kinds of boundaries (emotional, physical, spiritual, time/energy) they discovered during their personal reflection.
- Have each person identify one boundary that helps them feel safe in community and one boundary that has been hard for others to respect.
- Debrief as a group: How can our organization honor these different types of boundaries more consistently?

Option 2: Brainstorm Threshold Responses

- Present imagined scenarios where boundaries might be tested (e.g., a colleague oversharing personal details, a leader pressuring someone to volunteer, an officemate ignoring a need for quiet). As a group, brainstorm responses that set clear boundaries and show respect for the other person.
- Have two people role-play the scenario and then pause and ask: How did it feel to set/receive the boundary? What responses made it easier to honor?

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

"In our organization, we commit to respecting boundaries and thresholds by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as pausing when someone declines to share, building in breaks to avoid overwhelm, or normalizing boundary-setting without judgment]."

Display or share these commitments as a reminder that respecting boundaries is a shared responsibility, not an individual burden.





Practice **NO JUDGMENT.**

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

On page 56, the author writes, “Take a moment to reflect on people, places, things, and ideas that evoke fear, discomfort, dislike, or disdain inside of you.” Reread the Red Light section on pages 56-58. Then, recall the last few interactions where you had immediate reactions of judgment of the person or what they were saying. Describe who these people are, your relationship with them, and the content of what you were discussing. After recording these descriptions, honestly answer the following questions:

- Where did these judgments come from? Try to pinpoint specific experiences to better understand the emotional connection you’re making with the judgment.
- Are your beliefs factual and true? How do you know this to be so?
- Are you committed to your unconscious biases? If so, which one(s) and why?
- After this reflection, what steps can you take to aim for a curious state of mind instead of a judgmental state of mind?

PRACTICE THE ASK

The author writes, “Remain open to the possibility that new information can come from anyone and anywhere. Be amenable to the idea that anyone of any background and identity at any given time can be the teacher that a moment and a receptive mind needs” (p. 65). With this in mind, look back at your reflection responses and choose one person toward whom you noticed an immediate judgmental reaction. Over the next few weeks, intentionally practice Ask #3 with this person—or with others who elicit similar reactions—using some of the following approaches (see pp. 62-64 for further information).

- Stay present in discomfort. Instead of avoiding interactions, seek them out to challenge your biases and cultivate empathy.
- Engage in storytelling—both sharing your own and listening to others—to discover shared experiences and move beyond the statistics that may be shaping your judgments.
- When anticipating an interaction, prepare by writing down questions that emphasize curiosity rather than criticism.
- Before beginning potentially judgmental interactions, remind yourself that it’s okay to slow down so you can examine your immediate responses instead of automatically reacting.





Practice **NO JUDGMENT.**

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. How do we notice when judgment—implicit or explicit—enters our interactions with others?
2. What rules or norms do we have in place to address public or private moments when judgment is triggered?
3. How can we respond when we feel triggered by someone else's words or actions without passing judgment?
4. What are common microaggressions or subtle judgments that appear in our organization, and how can we address them?
5. How can we use differences in perspective as opportunities for learning rather than conflict?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Examine Community Judgments

- As a group, discuss the demographic and identity makeup of your organization.
- Next, take a broader perspective and consider the demographics and identities of the larger community you are located in or serve. Identify who from that community is missing from your organization and explore whether any inherent biases or implicit assumptions within your organization may be preventing their participation.
- Finally, brainstorm ways to address these biases so that your organization can become a genuinely inclusive and welcoming space for those in the community who are not currently involved.

Option 2: Review Public-Facing Materials

- Break into pairs or groups and have each team review an aspect of your organization's identity such as your website, social media channels, mission statement, marketing materials, and the like. Have teams take notes on the following questions and then report back to the group.
 - Who does our organization explicitly state we are open to and where does that show up?
 - Who does our organization implicitly seem to exclude and where does that show up?
 - Do our internally stated ideals match the words and images we use to represent our organization? How or how not?
- Identify point people who can effectively address and remedy any issues raised during this activity.

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

"In our organization, we commit to practicing non-judgment by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as pausing before evaluating others or seeking to understand before responding]."

Display or share these commitments to reinforce that non-judgment is a shared culture, not just an individual effort.





Honor **CONFIDENTIALITY.**

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

To begin your reflection on Ask #4, first think of a story of yours that you consider to be personal. Now, imagine (or remember) a scenario where you learned that this story had been told by someone else without your permission.

- What emotions come up for you?
- What would you want to say to the person who told your story?

After sitting with this situation, honestly reflect on the last time you shared someone else's story without their permission. Write out the details of whose story it was, the circumstances in which you heard it, and who you shared it with.

- Did you use any of the hazards listed on page 69 to justify why you shared someone else's story?
- Reread the guidelines for practicing Ask #4 on pages 73-75. How would you handle this situation differently in the future?

PRACTICE THE ASK

As with any change in behavior, implementing Ask #4 in your daily life will take practice. As the author notes throughout this chapter, this Ask is not only important in professional organizations, but also within family and friend circles. Who is the person in your life whose stories you share the most? Most likely they are someone you're very close to and they would be open to helping you practice this Ask. Share with them this chapter and let them know that you want to respect their stories. Through your conversations, discuss the guidelines the author describes on pages 73-75, especially requesting permission to share, respecting an ask for anonymity, and reciprocation of sharing stories.

After these conversations, make a personal plan for how you'll handle the stories of everyone in your life.

- Write down your personal values surrounding this Ask so that asking for permission to share someone's story doesn't feel like a daunting question to ask out loud.
- Intentionally share your own stories with others as a show of reciprocity. Be clear about when you are and are not comfortable with that person sharing your story. By doing this, others will understand that they can trust you with their stories.





Honor **CONFIDENTIALITY.**

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. Why is it important that people maintain agency over how and when their stories are shared?
2. What does confidentiality look like in our organization beyond formal policies (e.g., in everyday conversation, storytelling, or meetings)?
3. How can we balance transparency or accountability in our organization with the need to protect individuals' privacy?
4. When is it appropriate to share someone else's story or experience, and what permissions or boundaries must come first?
5. How can we model confidentiality so that newer members of our community understand and practice it too?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: The Story Telephone Game

- Have one participant write out a short story (one paragraph) on a piece of paper. Ask them to privately share the story verbally with the next person, who repeats what they remember to the next, and so on, until it reaches the last person. The last person retells the story out loud to the group.
- Afterward, instead of the original storyteller simply pointing out what changed, have the first listener ask the storyteller for permission to share the story. Once permission is given, they read the original written version aloud.
- Debrief as a group: How did it feel to have your story passed along without permission or accuracy? What changed when permission was sought and the story was told as written? What does this reveal about trust, respect, and confidentiality in communication?

Option 2: Policy Brainstorm Session

- In small groups, brainstorm concrete ways your organization can protect confidentiality. Consider areas such as meetings, mentoring relationships, pastoral or managerial care, public storytelling, and social media use.
- Have each group share one proposed policy or practice and discuss how it could be implemented.

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

"In our organization, we commit to honoring confidentiality by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as asking permission before sharing stories, protecting sensitive information, or building systems that reinforce trust]."

Display these commitments as a reminder that confidentiality protects not only information but also the dignity and autonomy of every person in the community.





COME BACK to Me.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

On page 79, the author writes that “This chapter will examine specific temperaments of introversion, extroversion, ambiversion, and empathy (see chart on the following page). It’s important to know which temperament you are to better understand how you show up in spaces, how others may perceive you, and what you need to do to make others feel safer when in community together.” Review the charts on pages 80-81 and spend some time writing out the specifics of your temperament, including:

- How do you show up in spaces?
- How do you think others may perceive you?
- What do you need to feel safer when in community with others?
- What do you need to do to make others feel safer when in community together?
- Based on the above, how can you be brave when in community with others (see “Temperament Tips for Ask #5” on pp. 87-89)?

PRACTICE THE ASK

It is important to note that there is not a “correct” communication style. Still, as you can see throughout the chapter, having different communication styles can cause tension and lead to less-effective (and less-compassionate) relationships. Given the details of your communication style that you noted in your reflection above, write out some phrases that you can use in different situations, such as at work, with friends, with strangers, and so forth.

For instance:

- If you are an introvert in a work setting, you might say: I need some time to process this new information. Could we get back together tomorrow to continue discussing?
- If you are an extrovert in a friendship setting, you might say: I’ve noticed you haven’t chimed in on this. I have a lot of ideas and would love to hear your opinion. Maybe we should check back on this in a few days?





COME BACK to Me.

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

The most effective way of discussing Ask #5 is to come together as an organization to better understand everyone's temperament and communication style. Take time to have everyone share what they discovered about themselves when going through the personal reflection questions for Ask #5. Then, as a group, discuss how you can use the unique makeup of your group to maximize the potential of what you are aiming to achieve.

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Practice Silence

- Read aloud the section on "Noise" on page 83 to the group.
- Tell the group that you will be practicing silence in response to a question, and then ask the group: "What is your reaction to silence in group settings?" Set a timer for one minute of silence.
- When the minute is up, invite people to share their responses to the proposed question. Be sure to practice "unending invitations" as described on page 86.

Option 2: Review Community Practices

- Break out into pairs or small groups, assigning one of the below to each group, and review your community's current practices regarding temperament and communication styles. Have each group use the suggested practices described on pages 86-87 to inform their review. After the pairs have completed their review, have them provide the group with a list of suggestions for ways to implement Ask #5.
 - Meetings
 - Onboarding new team members
 - Communication practices (in-person, email, phone, instant messaging platforms, etc.)
 - Feedback requests
 - Other (if there is something specific to your organization/community not included here)

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

"In our organization, we commit to honoring temperments and communication styles by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as practicing silence or learning how each team member communicates]."

Display these commitments as a reminder that knowledge and acceptance of all the possible gifts, talents, and abilities of those we work with not only provides safe communication but enhances what we're about to accomplish together.





RESPECT THE PROCESS

of Learning the “Right” Language.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

On page 95, the author writes that “The right wording in human engagement is often subjective. The most correct answer in considering how to identify the most appropriate (or least offensive) phraseology is ‘it depends’—on situations, circumstances, preferences, and personal stories.” Review the Red Light section and practice example on pages 96-97. Thinking of topics that you’ve discussed recently with others, reflect on the following questions.

- Can you recall a recent moment when someone has corrected a statement you’ve made? If so, what emotions came up for you and how did you react? If not, do you believe that you’ve been fully engaged in conversations, or has your fear of being wrong limited your interactions?
- Similarly, can you recall a recent moment when you’ve corrected someone else? If so, how did you provide the correction? Did the correction help advance the conversation or halt it? If the conversation were to take place again, what, if anything, would you do differently?

Ignoring our emotions only inhibits our abilities for effective communication with others. With this in mind, spend some time journaling on the seven “speed bumps and potholes along our journey to respect the process of learning the right language” as described on pages 97-100. For each emotional obstacle, write about how it shows up for you internally (physical, emotional, and mental manifestations) and externally (your words and actions); a recent time you experienced the obstacle; and how you’d like for yourself to embrace this obstacle moving forward.

PRACTICE THE ASK

Throughout the chapter, the author continually reminds us that Ask #6 is a *process*. We will hit roadblocks in our conversations and we need to repeatedly practice this Ask to gain the courage to create and inhabit safe spaces. With this in mind, think about a difficult conversation you need to have where you’re worried about using the “right” language with the other person. This should be a situation where you know constructive feedback is good (see p. 102) and not a situation where you should consider letting it go. Using all the tools and insights from this chapter, particularly the Yellow Light section on pages 100-101, prepare for the conversation. Specifically, think through the following:

- What would make the interaction “good,” knowing that it doesn’t need to be “great”?
- How can you be right without being condescending?
- What negative reactions might you encounter, how will you notice them, and how can you practice humility in light of them?

Now that you’ve prepared, have the conversation. How did it go?





RESPECT THE PROCESS

of Learning the “Right” Language.

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. When was the last time our organization had to learn or adjust its language—around identity, feedback, or communication—and how did that process unfold?
2. How do we currently handle moments when someone says something imperfectly but with good intent? Do people feel safe to make mistakes and learn?
3. Are there phrases, frameworks, or scripts in our organization that could use updating to reflect new learning or more inclusive understandings?
4. How can we encourage a culture where people can admit, “I don’t know,” without fear of being dismissed?
5. In what ways can leaders model gratitude when corrected or when learning something new?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Give Constructive Feedback

- Read aloud the section “Constructive feedback is good” on page 102. Tell the group that while this exercise may seem inconsequential, it will allow you to practice Ask #6 in a non-threatening way.
- Have a group member write on a whiteboard or similar surface a sentence that uses incorrect grammar, such as: “When the team arrives, *their* going to begin setup immediately.” Then have other members correct this error in each of the below ways and allow for conversation to happen.
 - Aggressive: “You messed up. It shouldn’t be ‘their.’”
 - Constructive: “I noticed you used ‘their,’ when it should be ‘they’re.’ Can we update that?”
 - Letting it Go: “Sounds good.”
- Repeat this exercise, allowing people to take on different roles, then discuss as a group best practices for presenting constructive feedback.

Option 2: Create an Evolving Language Document

- As a team, create a shared document with lists of terms and phrases that have evolved within your organization. Include context for why changes were made and what was learned in the process. Once created, determine how often this document should be reviewed and updated, who is responsible for keeping it updated, and how it will be distributed to your larger community.

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

“In our organization, we commit to respecting the process of learning the ‘right’ language by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as embracing feedback with gratitude, creating safe spaces for questions, or updating language in our materials to reflect inclusivity].”

Display these commitments as a living reminder that learning the right language is a continual act of respect, growth, and community care.





Take the Time to **LISTEN FIRST.**

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

Review the warning signs on pages 107-108. Which of the below are you most guilty of doing during conversations with others? Describe a recent interaction where you acted in this way. What prompted that action and how could you avoid doing so in the future?

- Interrupting
- Distracted listening
- Offering mindless (versus mindful) feedback
- Providing radio silence
- Being dismissive
- Stonewalling

When you are speaking, which of the above reactions from someone else are most likely to dysregulate you? Do you know why this is? What steps could you take to inform conversation partners?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Most of us have the opportunity to practice Ask #7 every day. All of our relationships are built, in part, through the conversations we have. Sometimes we're the speaker and other times we're the listener. When it comes to listening, the author has provided some key practices on pages 114-15 that we can incorporate. Take time to review these practices and write out phrases or actions you can use so that you can actively listen in your relationships.

For instance:

- ***Ask the person what they need.*** What question can you use at the beginning of a conversation?
- ***Gauge your capacity to listen.*** How do you know when you're not able to fully engage with others? What physical or emotional sensations arise? When you recognize these sensations, what is a phrase you can use to communicate with your conversation partner that you do not have the capacity to be an active listener at that moment?
- ***Listen with your whole body.*** What are small things described in this section and throughout the chapter that you can do to let someone know they have your full attention? Be sure to note what you are most comfortable doing in different situations.
- ***Be prepared to do nothing but hold space.*** Think of a time when someone simply held space for you. Taking note of those deep feelings, work toward being more comfortable doing the same for others.
- ***Don't take it with you.*** As you grow your active listening skills, be sure you are not carrying the weight of other's stories with you. Thinking back to the self-care toolkit you created for Ask #2, what steps can you take to acknowledge that the heaviness doesn't belong to you?





Take the Time to **LISTEN FIRST.**

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. How do we currently create space in our organization for people to feel heard, especially those whose voices are often overlooked or interrupted?
2. What internal habits or organizational norms make it difficult to listen first? For example, rushing to solutions, allowing interruptions, valuing expertise over experience, aiming for the quickest meetings, and the like.
3. How does our organization signal whether someone's input is genuinely welcome or just tolerated?
4. How can we help one another notice when we're preparing a response before the speaker is finished? How can we formalize and inform people about these agreed upon practices?
5. Are there individuals or groups in our community whose experiences we need to listen to more deeply and consistently?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Listen without Responding

- In pairs, have one person speak for two minutes about a topic that matters to them related to your work together. The listener's task is to give full attention without interrupting. Afterward, the listener paraphrases what they heard ("What I understood you to say is . . ."). Switch roles and repeat.
- Debrief as a group: What did it feel like to be fully listened to? As the listener, what was difficult about remaining silent?

Option 2: Find Those Missing from the Conversation

- As a team, decide on a recent discussion or decision to review.
- Ask: Whose voices were not in the room or were not listened to in the room? Whose perspectives did we assume or overlook?
- Brainstorm concrete ways to bring those perspectives in. Consider actions such as inviting input, holding listening sessions, or adjusting meeting formats to ensure everyone's voice can be heard.

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

"In our organization, we commit to taking the time to listen first by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as pausing before responding or allowing space for all voices to be heard]."

Display these commitments as a reminder that patient, attentive listening creates space for understanding, trust, and authentic collaboration.





Grant Permission to **GO DEEPER** or **DECLINE**.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

On page 120, the author writes “Comfort comes with being understood and with understanding others. When we feel comfortable and possess solid comprehension of the message, we minimize distraction and increase the likelihood that we will be better listeners.” Additionally, as with all the Asks, there are barriers to successfully practicing Ask #8. Think back to a recent conversation where you needed or wanted more information from someone. Reflect on the following questions:

- Did you ask your conversation partner to go deeper? If so, did they accept or decline? If not, did any of the hard stops described on page 121 factor into your unwillingness to ask?
- How did you feel after the interaction and how would you react differently in future conversations?

One of the goals of Ask #8 is to deepen our relationships with others. Think about someone in your life with whom you have more of a surface-level relationship and would like to connect with more deeply. Reflect:

- Why is it important for you to build this relationship?
- Why do you think the relationship has not gone deeper? Do any of the barriers described on pages 122-23 factor into how you approach and communicate with this person?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Practicing Ask #8 takes place on both sides of the conversation. When we’re the listening partner, it invites us to examine our intentions when asking for more information and to remain open if the storyteller chooses not to share further. When we’re the storyteller, Ask #8 encourages us to share more when we feel safe and to recognize our limits, practicing self-advocacy by declining to offer more when we do not feel comfortable doing so.

Much of the personal work you’ve put into the first seven Asks allows you to more easily implement Ask #8. Each of those Asks contributes to creating a space where deeper relationships can grow and where people feel safe enough to say “no” to providing additional information.

Take this week to review not only your reflection and practice notes from the previous Asks, but also to provide yourself with updates on how your overall communication practices have changed since beginning this process. Where are you excelling and what are your sticking points?

After this further reflection, return to the relationship you hope to deepen that you reflected on above. Prepare for your next conversation with this person by considering what you’d like to know more about based on previous interactions. And remember: part of practicing Ask #8 is being ready to graciously accept a “no.”





Grant Permission to GO DEEPER or DECLINE.

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. How do we signal that it is safe to ask questions or seek deeper understanding in our organization?
2. How do we respond when someone declines to answer a question? Do we honor the decision or unintentionally pressure them?
3. Are there situations where our curiosity might unintentionally cross boundaries or put someone at risk? How do we navigate that?
4. What role does power or hierarchy play in who feels safe to ask or decline questions?
5. How can we ensure that asking for deeper insight is for learning and understanding, not for judgment or evaluation?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Role-Play Asking and Affirming

- Have everyone review the practice example on pages 126-27.
- In pairs, assign one person the role of Uncle Dan and the other the role of Kyron. Update the names to match the participants and have them role-play this scenario in their own voices. Switch roles and repeat.
- Debrief as a group: How did it feel to be met with curiosity while also having your limits respected? Which role felt more natural to you and how might that inform your role in the group?

Option 2: Practice Declining

- Situated as you would be at a meeting, have each person prepare a brief statement showing a connection they have to your organization's work. For example, if your organization works on food insecurity, someone might state: "As someone who struggled to make ends meet earlier in my life, it's important to me that we recognize the specific struggles of young adults."
- Ask each person to read their statement aloud and then take turns having others ask the storyteller to go deeper. At each request, the storyteller should politely decline the request.
- Debrief as a group: How did it feel to decline to offer more information? How did it feel to hear "no" to your request? What norms can you instill in your community to ensure the practice of Ask #8?

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

"In our organization, we commit to granting permission to go deeper or decline by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as inviting questions with care, honoring boundaries when someone declines, or creating structured spaces for dialogue]."

Display these commitments as a reminder that curiosity and consent go hand in hand, and that asking or declining are both acts of respect—for others and for oneself.





STAY in Your Seat.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

REFLECT ON THE ASK

Read through the list of reasons we struggle to remain present on pages 132-35. Taking time to reflect on each one, ask yourself:

- Does this reason describe how I frequently show up in interactions? If so, continue through the following questions. If not, move on to the next reason for struggling to remain present.
 - How does this challenge surface? Internally, what physical, mental, and emotional reactions do I have? Externally, what verbal or non-verbal signals do I send?
- Is there anything that causes this challenge to be more or less present in my interactions?
- How can I work to lessen the effect of this challenge in my interactions?

PRACTICE THE ASK

On page 138, the author writes that “What we do regularly can be reinforced and become our automatic responses in human systems and in human engagement.” Review the three suggestions for how to practice Ask #9 on pages 138-39. Determine how you can implement each of these suggestions.

For instance:

- How can you stay aware of your priorities so that when someone wants to talk, you know whether you can be fully present with them or whether it's better to schedule another time to give them your full attention?
- What does your process of being prepared look like in different situations? Before a meeting? Before having coffee with a friend? Before a difficult conversation with a loved one? What steps do you need to take to be the most prepared?
- What does healthy communication look like for you? How do you prepare to both speak and listen? What aspects of healthy communication can you work on to improve your relationships with others?





STAY in Your Seat.

GROUP GUIDE

DISCUSS THE ASK

1. What rules or norms do we have in place for meetings regarding distractions such as phone usage, being off-camera during virtual meetings, and the like?
2. How can leaders model “staying in their seat” in ways that build psychological safety for others?
3. What are some early warning signs (physical, emotional, or behavioral) that signal disengagement or dysregulation in our group?
4. How can we distinguish between taking a necessary pause for self-regulation and abandoning a conversation prematurely?
5. What support systems or practices can we put in place to help team members return to presence after a challenging dialogue?

PRACTICE THE ASK

Option 1: Enact a Grounding Practice

- Begin this meeting by inviting everyone to take a moment to physically feel their seat, their feet on the floor, and the breath in their body. Ask participants to silently identify what emotions or thoughts they bring into the space and reflect on how that may affect their engagement.
- Throughout the meeting, pause occasionally for a “seat check”: a few seconds of silence where everyone consciously returns to their seat, breath, and presence.
- At the end of the meeting, discuss how this simple practice affected focus, connection, and ability to stay engaged. Consider whether this is a practice your group wants to enact moving forward.

Option 2: Create a System of Support

- As a group, brainstorm practices or norms your community can put in place to help team members stay present during meetings. Refer to the challenges on pages 132-35 for ideas on what types of needs to address.
- Discuss how you can formalize this support system and communicate it to your wider community.

COMMIT TO THE ASK

As a group, complete this statement:

“In our organization, we commit to staying in our seats by . . . [list 2–3 concrete commitments, such as practicing mindful presence in meetings, pausing before reacting, or supporting one another through difficult dialogue].”

Display these commitments as a reminder that progress depends not on perfection, but on the willingness to stay, listen, and work through discomfort together.

