

Guide for Ben Franklin Continuing Circles

Congratulations on starting a Ben Franklin Circle with this new set of virtues!

As always, you can use this meeting guide as much or as little as you need. It can be intimidating to take on a new set of virtues, but we've provided some tips below to get started. We invite you to be creative. Don't be afraid to try some new approaches.

The Virtues: This list of virtues was compiled by current Circle hosts and others invested in the project. They voted on their top choices to narrow the list down to the 12 below.

The virtues are not presented in any particular order. You may wish to discuss them as they are listed or tackle them in a different order.

Empathy	Compassion
Gratitude	Humor
Courage	Honesty
Curiosity	Love of Learning
Equality	Generosity
Forgiveness	Non Violence

How to use this guide

Below you will find a general outline for a Ben Franklin Circle meeting. This structure will help your Circle incorporate the three main components of a Ben Franklin Circle: regular gatherings, discussion of a virtue, and monthly commitments. You do not need to incorporate everything you find here. Please use what you find helpful, create your own components, and adapt as you see fit.

Each meeting guide follows the same format: a welcome, check in, virtue discussion, and making commitments. For each virtue you will also find

- A sample icebreaker
- Sample discussion questions
- Sample commitments
- Relevant quotes

Structuring your meetings

1. Welcome

It is helpful to start each meeting with introductions (every time you have new people and while the group is getting to know each other) and an opening icebreaker or activity.

2. Check in on last month's virtue and how people feel about the commitments they made.

3. Virtue Discussion

- Remind your group that virtues are simply conversation prompts.
- Introduce the new virtue - associations, meanings, definitions.
Give everyone a chance to share their initial thoughts.
- Open discussion- You will find sample questions listed for each virtue or use your own. It can be helpful to use the last 30 minutes to consider the virtue in a community context. The last question prompt for this section will reflect this.

4. Making Commitments

Encourage group members to set actionable goals. We've provided sample commitments for each virtue. Encourage your circle members to come up with something that they will find useful. Remind them that commitments can be focused on self improvement and/or community improvement. For those who struggle, encourage them to pick one small specific action.

Save a few minutes at the end for general housekeeping. Go over details for the next meeting and thank everyone for attending.

Kicking off your Circle

Your first meeting: Instead of doing a check in, take the time to set a good tone and expectations.

About Ben Franklin Circles

National small group conversation initiative inspired by Ben Franklin's mutual improvement group, The Junto. Ben Franklin Circles were developed by 92nd Street Y as a tool to bring people together for conversations about members' goals and aspirations through the lens of civic virtues.

About this Group

- Introduce the origin of the group, how it started, its purpose.
- Share your reasons for deciding to host. What does it mean to you personally?
- Ask everyone to share why they are there / what they hope to get out of it.

Introduce Group Guidelines/Ground Rules. For example:

- Be Respectful
- Seek Understanding, Not Agreement
- Maintain Confidentiality
- Differences are a Benefit, Not a Deficit

You will probably approach your first meeting differently if you are starting new circle, continuing an existing one, or inviting new members to join an existing group.

For a new Circle

Take some time during your first meeting to welcome everyone with introductions and an icebreaker. Share your reasons and motivations for deciding to start and host the Circle.

For a continuing Circle

Give the group a chance to re-set & reconnect by giving some time to reflect on previous meetings (what did people like and take away from that experience?) and to look forward (what hopes, fears, or expectations are there for round 2?). This can be a good time to ask what people liked and what they would like to do differently. Take some time to set expectations for round 2 especially if you will be trying some new approaches or asking others to assist with leadership roles.

For a Circle with returning and new members

When new people join a group that already knows each other well it can take some time for newbies to feel like they belong. Help this process along by making sure the established group knows ahead of time that there will be new people. Take the time to welcome new members, have everyone do full introductions, and share information about the group's history and memorable conversations.

Acknowledgements:

The question "what does it look like to practice [virtue] as a community virtue" is adapted from strategies shared by BFC host Shellee O'Brian.

Sample commitments that use strategies for increasing and exploring curiosity are adapted from strategies shared by BFC host Kim Crowley.

Meeting Guide: EMPATHY

1. **Welcome** and opening icebreaker. Here's one we like:

Superlatives: Remember superlatives from the yearbook? Ask everyone to share a superlative that would apply to them in the present or as their younger selves. Examples- Best Smile, Most likely to be on a reality show, Best Halloween costumes. Ask everyone to share their superlative and a brief explanation.

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Empathy.**

Ask: What comes to mind when you hear the word **empathy**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Oxford Dictionary: *noun* the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.
- Merriam Webster: *noun* the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.

Sample questions:

- "Stepping into another man's shoes," can give us insight into someone's world. When have you seen things from a different perspective by doing so? What did you learn?
- Do you think someone can be too empathetic? Why or why not? What boundaries do you set for yourself with regard to empathy?
- If you've ever been quick to judge someone, what were the results of your actions?
- How have you found common ground with someone who has an opposite viewpoint?
- What does it look like to practice empathy as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

"Empathy grows as we learn."

— Alice Miller. Swiss psychologist, psychoanalyst and philosopher. [Read More](#)

“No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

— Theodore Roosevelt. The 26th president of the United States and a writer, sportsman & conservationist. [Read More](#)

“Empathy may be the single most important quality that must be nurtured to give peace a fighting chance.”

— Arundhati Roy. Contemporary, award-winning, Indian author and human rights activist. [Read More](#)

“If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person’s point of view and see things from his angle as well as your own.”

— Henry Ford. Industrialist, business magnate, and founder of the Ford Motor Company. [Read More](#)

4. Time to set commitments!

We want to challenge ourselves to practice these virtues in our daily lives, so let’s set commitments! Before you conclude your meeting, ask everyone to take a moment and think how they can practice this virtue in their own life. Ask them to identify a goal, something they’d like to work on between now and the next meeting.

Sample commitments for empathy:

- Try a Swap. Attend services with someone of a different faith, shadow someone whose professional work is different from your own, go with someone to an activity that is important to them and new to you.
- Give your empathetic muscles a workout. Listen to a podcast, read an article from a news source, or view a TED talk expressing views you don’t agree with or don’t understand. Practice listening without responding (talking back, shouting at the TV, eye rolls, face palms!). See if you can find one point of commonality with the speaker.
- The oral historian Studs Terkel said, “Don’t be an examiner, be the interested inquirer.” Practice being curious about something new or something that troubles you. What questions can you ask? What information might you seek out?

Articles on empathy:

[Why Empathy is Your Most Important Skill \(and How to Practice It\)](#)

[“The Two Icebergs”- Diversity and PreValidation](#)

[Six Habits of Highly Empathetic People](#)

Meeting Guide: GRATITUDE

1. **Welcome.** Feel free to do an icebreaker. Here's one we like:

Coat of Arms: What would go on your coat of arms if you could design it today? Go around the group and ask what symbols, animals, or phrases represent you? Why would you choose those things?

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Gratitude.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **gratitude**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* A strong feeling of appreciation to someone or something for what the person has done to help you.
- Oxford Dictionary: *noun* the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.

Sample questions:

- When are you the most grateful? When do you find you are the least grateful?
- How has your gratitude changed over time? What did you appreciate when you were younger vs. what you are thankful for now?
- How might we practice gratitude around a negative experience?
- What does it mean to practice gratitude as a community? Have you seen this done well?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

"Grace isn't a little prayer you chant before receiving a meal. It's a way to live."

— Jacqueline Winspear. Contemporary mystery writer and bestselling author. [Read More](#)

"If you count all your assets, you always show a profit."

— Robert Quillen. American journalist and humorist. [Read More](#)

“Appreciate comfort. Also appreciate those things that knock us off course enough to realize we should appreciate the comfort.”

— Terri Guillemets. Contemporary quotation anthologist and author. [Read More](#)

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Sample commitments for gratitude:

- Keep a gratitude journal and write down three things you are thankful for at the end of the day.
- Who are the people you appreciate in your life? Commit to telling them in person, over the phone, or mailing them a letter expressing your gratitude.
- Commit to meditation and visualize the things you are grateful for in your life.

Articles on gratitude:

[8 Ways To Have More Gratitude Every Day](#)

[The 31 Benefits of Gratitude You Didn’t Know About](#)

Meeting Guide: COURAGE

1. **Welcome.** Feel free to do an icebreaker. Here's one we like:

Gift an Affirmation: Ask the group what affirmation they hold dear to them. The one that grounds them and builds them up, the one they return to most often. Go around the room and share the affirmations with each other in the hopes one will benefit someone new.

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Courage.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **courage**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* the ability to control fear and to be willing to deal with something that is dangerous, difficult, or unpleasant.
- Merriam Webster: *noun* mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.

Sample questions:

- Do you think of yourself as courageous? Why or why not? Can you share a time when you found yourself questioning your own courageousness or were proud of your own courageousness?
- What acts of courage inspire you most?
- What would happen if you said yes to the things that scare you?
- Where do you draw the line between being courageous and being stubborn?
- What does it mean to practice courage as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“It is curious—curious that physical courage should be so common in the world, and moral courage so rare.”

— Mark Twain. American writer, humorist, and entrepreneur. [Read More](#)

“The only real progress lies in learning to be wrong all alone.”

— Albert Camus. French philosopher, author, and journalist. [Read More](#)

“Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll
try
again tomorrow.”

— Mary Anne Radmacher. Contemporary writer and artist. [Read More](#)

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.”

— Alice Walker. Contemporary American novelist, short story writer, poet, and activist. [Read More](#)

“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.”

— Anais Nin. American-Cuban-French essayist. [Read More](#)

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Sample commitments for courage:

- Comedian Chris Gethard knows failures are a part of life and we shouldn't expect to win all the time—if at all. Commit to “losing well.” What would this look like for you?
- Get better at speaking up at work or in social situations when you disagree with what is happening. Practice what you might say on your own or with others, try different modes of expression (writing or artistic), collect good suggestions for approaching this in the workplace.
- Commit to saying “yes” to the things that scare you for a month.

Articles on courage:

[Courage is a Habit](#)

[How to be Courageous](#)

Meeting Guide: CURIOSITY

1. **Welcome.** Feel free to do an ice-breaker. Here's one we like:

Traffic Lights: Each person shares with the group what they feel they need to stop doing (Red Light), what they should minimize doing (Yellow Light), and what they should continue doing (Green Light).

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Curiosity.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **curiosity**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* an eager desire to know or learn about something. *noun* something that is interesting because it is rare and unusual.
- Oxford Dictionary: *noun* A strong desire to know or learn something.

Some sample questions to ask:

- What sparks your curiosity?
- How does a child see the world in comparison to adults? How can you learn from them?
- In our fast-paced lives, sometimes slowing down can cultivate curiosity. What do you notice when you take the time to think, walk vs. drive, take the long way home, etc.?
- What does it mean to practice curiosity as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

"Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why."

— Bernard Baruch. American financier, stock investor, philanthropist, statesman, and political consultant. [Read More](#)

“To be curious about that which is not one's concern while still in ignorance of oneself is absurd.”
— Plato. Athenian philosopher of the Classical period in Ancient Greece. [Read More](#)

“A sense of curiosity is nature's original school of education.”
— Smiley Blanton. American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. [Read More](#)

“To live a truly creative life, we always need to cast a critical look at where we presently are, attempting always to discern where we have become stagnant and where new beginning might be ripening. Risk might be our greatest ally. There can be no growth if we do not remain open and vulnerable to what is new and different.”
— John O'Donohue. Irish poet and philosopher. [Read More](#)

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Sample commitments for curiosity:

- Commit to trying at least one specific new thing. For example, pick a new restaurant you've never heard of, take the long way home on your commute, show up early to an appointment and explore what's around the area.
- Challenge yourself to be more curious about people you meet or people in your life. Ask: “what do I most want to learn about this person?”
- Practice stream of consciousness writing or writing to reflect on a new experience.

Articles on curiosity:

[How to Practice Curiosity](#)
[Happiness with Life](#)

Meeting Guide: EQUALITY

1. **Welcome.** Feel free to do an ice-breaker. Here's one we like:

Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover: What is one thing that people might not guess about you? Have people go around and share a surprising fact about themselves to the group.

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Equality.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **equality**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* the right of different groups of people to receive the same treatment.
- Merriam Webster: *noun* the quality or state of being equal. Equal :*adjective* of the same measure, quantity, amount, or number as another (2): like in quality, nature, or status (3) like for each member of a group, class, or society.

Sample questions:

- How were you first taught about equality? What messages did you get as a young person? Has your understanding changed over time?
- Do you see a difference between equality and equity. What might this mean for decisions about policies or resources?
- What privileges do you have that others might not? How do you confront your own personal prejudices?
- What does it mean to practice equality as a community?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“People are pretty much alike. It's only that our differences are more susceptible to definition than our similarities.”

— Linda Ellerbee. Contemporary American journalist and late-night news anchor. [Read More](#)

“Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”

— Paulo Freire. Brazilian educator and philosopher who was a leading advocate of critical pedagogy. [Read More](#)

“It's an odd thing about this universe that, though we all disagree with each other, we are all of us always in the right.”

— Logan Pearsall Smith. American-born British essayist, critic and expert on 17th Century divines. [Read More](#)

“Don't be in a hurry to condemn because he doesn't do what you do or think as you think or as fast. There was a time when you didn't know what you know today.”

— Malcolm X. American Muslim minister and human rights activist. [Read More](#)

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Sample commitments for equality:

- Take an implicit bias test. Learn more about the concept of implicit bias, your own biases, and how you can change them. [Project Implicit at Harvard](#), [Look Different](#)
- Don't be silent. Commit to speaking up about injustice when you see something wrong.
- Examine your own biases. What can you learn about how you were raised and how to combat those ideas?
- Read something that challenges you to think about equality in a different way. If you need a place to start, explore the [open syllabus project](#) where you can do a [topic search](#). Or ask a partner or acquaintance to recommend an article on equality that they find meaningful. Give them your recommendation and then discuss.

Articles on equality:

[The Difference Between Equity and Equality](#)

[The Problem with that equity vs. equality graphic you've been using](#)

[6 Equality Trends to Watch in 2019](#)

[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

Meeting Guide: FORGIVENESS

1. **Welcome** your guests. Feel free to do another ice-breaker. Here's one we like:

Two Truths and a Lie: Participants share two truths and one lie about themselves. For example, "I've never broken a bone. I'm the middle child. I own four snakes." The rest of the group has to guess which statement is a lie.

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Forgiveness.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word forgiveness?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* the act of forgiving or the willingness to forgive.
- Oxford Dictionary: *noun* the action or process of forgiving or being forgiven.

Sample questions::

- Some think of forgiveness as a gift to yourself, not the other person. How does it affect you when you forgive someone?
- Many faiths and traditions have customs or practices around forgiveness. Is this or has this been part of your experience? Is it different than the way you think about forgiveness in other aspects of your life?
- Sometimes people say it is better to beg for forgiveness than ask for permission. Do you feel this is an abuse of power or knowing when to push the boundaries?
- What does it mean to practice forgiveness as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

"Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future."

— Paul Boese. American businessman and writer. [Read More](#)

“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

— Mahatma Gandhi. Indian activist and leader of the Indian independence movement and nonviolent civil disobedience. [Read More](#)

“For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?”

— bell hooks. Contemporary American author, professor, feminist, and social activist. [Read More](#)

“Forgiveness and faith are like writing a story; they take time, effort, revisions.”

—Daisy Hernandez. Contemporary, award-winning, Columbian-Cuban author and editor. [Read More](#)

“It’s easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission.”

— Grace Hopper. American computer scientist and United States Navy rear admiral. [Read More](#)

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Sample commitments for forgiveness:

- Commit to expressing how you feel if someone has wronged you. If you aren’t up for a direct conversation, write out what you might say, practice with a friend or adviser.
- Are you currently holding a grudge? Consider taking the steps to examine why and what you would need to do to forgive the person.
- Do you have anyone who you need to make amends with in your life? Commit to reaching out if you feel you’ve done wrong.

Articles on forgiveness:

[Nine Steps to Forgiveness](#)

[The Practice of Forgiveness](#)

Meeting Guide: COMPASSION

1. **Welcome** your guests. Feel free to do another ice-breaker. Here's one we like:

Personal Eulogy: What would you like said about you at your funeral? Have everyone share what they hope to best be remembered by. The qualities they are proud of that people will share at their memorial service. For example, "I hope people say that I was good at organizing things and that I wasn't bossy about it."

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Compassion.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **compassion**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for other people's suffering or bad luck and a desire to help.
- Merriam Webster: *noun* sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

Sample questions:

- Studies have shown when we do something nice for someone, our brain releases endorphins which are associated with euphoric feelings. How do you physically feel when you help someone? Do you experience this "helper's high"?
- Do you try to cultivate compassion for those who have perpetrated harm against others? Have you experienced compassion for someone you strongly disagree with?
- What are some nice things people have done for you that have stayed with you?
- What does it mean to practice compassion as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“No one has ever become poor by giving.”

— Anne Frank. German-born Jewish diarist who wrote a book about her life in hiding from the Nazis. [Read More](#)

“When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.”

— Dom Helder Camara. Brazilian Roman Catholic Archbishop. [Read More](#)

“It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business.”

— Mahatma Gandhi. Indian activist and leader of the Indian independence movement and nonviolent civil disobedience. [Read More](#)

I like to think that I have two eyes that I don't have to use the same way...I try to see with one eye where these people are as they perceive themselves to be...You have to start where people are, because their growth is going to be from there, not from some abstraction or where you are or someone else is.

— Miles Horton. American educator, socialist, civil rights activist and cofounder of the Highlander Folk School. [Read More](#)

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Sample commitments for compassion:

- Commit to giving time or money to a charity of your choice. Bonus if you go volunteer and rally others to join you!
- Pay it forward! Buy someone else's coffee or meal who is ahead of you in line without telling them.
- Be present and respectful of others. When in conversation, commit to listening fully and avoid interrupting.

Articles on compassion:

[A Guide to Cultivating Compassion in Your Life](#)
[How to Turn Your Brain from Anger to Compassion](#)

Meeting Guide: HUMOR

1. **Welcome** your guests. Feel free to do another ice-breaker. Here's one we like:

House on Fire: Ask the group, "Your house is on fire; everyone is safe. You now have thirty seconds to grab three or four articles you want to save from your house. What do you grab?" Have everyone explain what they would rescue and why.

2. Check in on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Humor.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word humor?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* the ability to be amused by something seen, heard, or thought about, or the quality in something that causes such amusement.
- Merriam Webster: *noun* : that quality which appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous : a funny or amusing quality : the ability to be funny or to be amused by things that are funny.

Sample questions:

- When has humor helped diffuse a heated moment? Have you used humor to communicate difficult truths?
- Do you take yourself seriously? Do others take you more or less seriously because of that? How does bringing humor into a situation lead to trust?
- From making people laugh, to bringing levity to situations, what does having a good sense of humor mean to you?
- What does it mean to practice humor as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“Humor is just another defense against the universe.”

— Mel Brooks. American filmmaker, actor, comedian, and composer. [Read More](#)

“There is a thin line that separates laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt.”

— Erma Bombeck. American humorist who wrote a newspaper column describing suburban home life in the 1960s. [Read More](#)

“Humor is emotional chaos remembered in tranquillity.”

— James Thurber. American cartoonist, author, humorist, journalist, playwright. [Read More](#)

“It's your outlook on life that counts. If you take yourself lightly and don't take yourself too seriously, pretty soon you can find the humor in our everyday lives. And sometimes it can be a lifesaver.”

— Betty White. American actress and comedian. [Read More](#)

4. Time to set commitments!

We want to challenge ourselves to practice these virtues in our daily lives, so let's set commitments! Before you conclude your meeting, ask everyone to take a moment and think how they can practice this virtue in their own life. Ask them to identify a goal, something they'd like to work on until the next meeting.

Sample commitments for humor:

- Commit to smiling more. Bonus if you keep a journal of how it affected your interactions and the way you feel.
- Find and share a humorous news story.
- Channel your inner child and commit to silliness. Have dance parties, make funny faces, or skip instead of walk to break up your regular routine.
- Get a group together for the laughter yoga exercise “head on the belly laughter” ([video](#)) also known as the ha-ha-ha game ([activity guide](#)).

Articles on humor:

[Here's Why You Need to Stop Taking Life So Seriously](#)
[19 Ways to Enhance Your Sense of Humor](#)

Meeting Guide: HONESTY

1. **Welcome** your guests. Feel free to do another ice-breaker. Here's one we like:

Heroes: Ask the group who are two or three people, past or present, they admire and why? What would they ask them if they could meet them? Or if they have met them, what was it like?

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Honesty.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **honesty**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* the quality of being honest. Honest: *adjective* (of a person) truthful or able to be trusted; not likely to steal, cheat, or lie, or (of actions, speech, or appearance) showing these qualities.
- Merriam Webster: *adjective* free from fraud or deception; genuine, real; reputable, respectable, worthy of praise; marked by integrity.

Sample questions:

- What does honesty mean to you? Generally speaking, are most people honest?
- Do you think about honesty differently when it comes to children versus adults?
- There are some who practice "radical honesty," and work to eliminate all lies from their lives (other than "when telling the truth would result in terrible consequences for someone who does not deserve it.") If you were to practice radical honesty, what would be the hardest adjustment?
- What does it mean to practice honesty as a community virtue? What about when it comes to history and historical narratives?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.”

— Oscar Wilde. Irish poet and playwright. [Read More](#)

Honesty is the quality I value most in a friend. Not bluntness, but honesty with compassion.

— Brooke Shields. Contemporary American actress and model. [Read More](#)

“Pretty much all the honest truth telling in the world is done by children.”

— Oliver Wendell . American jurist who served as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court and Acting Chief Justice of the United States. [Read More](#)

"The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off."

— Gloria Steinem. Contemporary American feminist, journalist, and social political activist. [Read More](#)

Time to set commitments!

We want to challenge ourselves to practice these virtues in our daily lives, so let's set commitments! Before you conclude your meeting, ask everyone to take a moment and think how they can practice this virtue in their own life. Ask them to identify a goal, something they'd like to work on between now and the next meeting.

Sample commitments for honesty:

- Commit to eliminating frivolous lies. If you don't want to go to a party, tell your friend you just aren't in the mood instead of making up an excuse.
- Is there something you've been meaning to tell someone? Commit to being honest with someone if you've been avoiding the truth. What would the first step be?
- Practice being more honest with yourself about something you think you need to approach differently. Find one way to push yourself to do this.

Articles on honesty:

[6 Ways to Be More Honest in Your Everyday Life](#)
[Radical Honesty](#)

Meeting Guide: LOVE OF LEARNING

1. **Welcome** your guests. Feel free to do another icebreaker. Here's one we like:

If You Knew Then: Regrets, we all have a few. Is there anything that you would go back and change if you knew then what you know now?

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Love of Learning.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the phrase **love of learning**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- The Authentic Happiness website from the Positive Psychology Center at Penn State University, describes love of learning as a character strength where people are motivated to acquire new skills or knowledge or to build on existing skills or knowledge. They feel good when they are learning new things, even though they may occasionally become frustrated when the material is challenging.

Sample questions:

- What sparks your interest to learn? How can you recreate that same feeling in your everyday life?
- Do you think you can passively seek out knowledge or does it have to be an active pursuit?
- Curiosity plays a good part in a love of learning. How do you stay present in the world so that you are open to new experiences?
- What is a recent thing you've learned about that really struck you and made you want to learn more?
- What does it mean to practice love of learning as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether this happens at 20 or at 80. Anyone who keeps on learning not only remains young, but becomes constantly more valuable, regardless of physical capacity.”

— Henry Ford. Industrialist, business magnate, and founder of the Ford Motor Company. [Read More](#)

“Once you learn to read you will be forever free.”

— Frederick Douglass. American social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer, and statesman. [Read More](#)

“The beautiful thing about learning is no one can take it away from you.”

— B.B. King. American blues singer, electric guitarist, songwriter, and record producer. [Read More](#)

“From my experience of hundreds of children, I know that they have perhaps a finer sense of honour than you or I have. The greatest lessons in life, if we would but stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn not from grown-up learned men, but from the so-called ignorant children.”

— Mahatma Gandhi. Indian activist and leader of the Indian independence movement and nonviolent civil disobedience. [Ride More](#)

Time to set commitments!

We want to challenge ourselves to practice these virtues in our daily lives, so let's set commitments! Before you conclude your meeting, ask everyone to take a moment and think how they can practice this virtue in their own life. Ask them to identify a goal, something they'd like to work on between now and the next meeting.

Sample commitments for love of learning:

- Ask someone else to pick out a podcast, show, or book for you that you wouldn't normally seek out.
- What's something you've always wanted to try? Learning a language? Taking an art class? Commit to taking the first step to make it happen.
- Teach somebody something new. See if the process impacts your own learning or understanding.
- Find a way to give someone else access to a new learning experience they might not otherwise have.

Articles on love of learning:

[10 Ways to Inspire a Love of Learning](#)

[The Love of Lifelong Learning - Playlist](#)

Meeting Guide: GENEROSITY

1. **Welcome** your guests. Feel free to do another icebreaker. Here's one we like:

Time Machine: Ask the group to share the advice they would give their younger selves if they had the opportunity to go back in time.

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Generosity.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **generosity**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* a willingness to give help or support, esp. more than is usual or expected.
- Merriam Webster: *noun* The quality of being kind and generous; abundance.

Sample questions:

- You can be generous in a wide variety of things: compliments, your attention, money, etc. How do you currently practice generosity?
- When has fear gotten in the way of your generosity?
- Does generosity have a role to play in address major social issues and inequalities? What is that role?
- What does it mean to practice generosity as a community virtue?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“Real generosity is doing something nice for someone who will never find out.”

— Frank Howard Clark. An American screenwriter.

“True generosity lies in striving so that these hands--whether of individuals or entire peoples--need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world.”

— Paulo Freire. Brazilian educator and philosopher. [Read More](#)

“He who gives what he would as readily throw away, gives without generosity; for the essence of generosity is in self sacrifice.”

— Henry Taylor. Contemporary American artist and painter. [Read More](#)

“What seems to be generosity is often no more than disguised ambition, which overlooks a small interest in order to secure a great one.”

— Francois de La Rochefoucauld. French author of maxims and memoirs. [Read More](#)

"Happy people don't expect a return. They give because it comes from the heart and they believe that joy and happiness are abundant. They aren't going to run out."

— Maimonides. Medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher and Torah scholar. [Read More](#)

Time to set commitments!

We want to challenge ourselves to practice these virtues in our daily lives, so let's set commitments! Before you conclude your meeting, ask everyone to take a moment and think how they can practice this virtue in their own life. Ask them to identify a goal, something they'd like to work on between now and the next meeting.

Sample commitments for generosity:

- You can be generous in a variety of ways: compliments, your attention, money, etc. Pick a new way to be generous for the month.
- Commit to being generous to yourself. Lighten your schedule and do less so you have more time to reflect on what is important.
- Remember that generosity doesn't have to mean donating money. Commit to being generous with your time, your attention, your compliments, your sympathy, your unconditional respect, or other ways that aren't financially based.

Articles on generosity:

[The Practice of Generosity](#)
[Generosity vs. Giving](#)

Meeting Guide: NONVIOLENCE

1. **Welcome** your guests. Feel free to do another ice-breaker. Here's one we like:

A Win, A Loss, A Runner Up: Everyone goes around the room and says something they're proud of—something they would consider a “win,” then a “loss”—something they didn't feel as accomplished about, then something they deem a “runner up”—something that was almost a win had something gone differently.

2. **Check in** on their experience with the last month's virtue and commitment. What surprised them about practicing it? What did they learn? Was it easier than they thought it would be? Was it harder? Did they keep their commitments and achieve the goals they set for themselves?
3. **Turn the discussion to this month's virtue: Nonviolence.**

Ask: What comes to mind most immediately when you hear the word **nonviolence**?

*Suggestion: Encourage the group to approach this as a brainstorm or word association before you discuss definitions. People may think of times in their life, quotes, historical or literary figures, people who are important to them etc. Ask: What stands out about the things we have shared?

Share a definition or ask people to offer their own.

- Cambridge English Dictionary: *noun* the use of methods that are not violent to cause a political or social change.
- Merriam Webster: *noun*: abstention from violence as a matter of principle: nonviolent demonstrations for the purpose of securing political ends.

Some sample questions to ask:

- What is your understanding of nonviolence as a principle and a practice? Who do you associate it with?
- Today we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. for his pursuit of social change with principles of nonviolence. Yet in his day, senior FBI officials talked about him as a danger to the people and to the nation. What does this mean for your understanding of nonviolence?
- Malcolm X said, “Nonviolence is fine as long as it works.” What have you observed about nonviolent social change movements? Is this something that has impact your life?

Pro tip! Reinvigorate the conversation with a notable quotable! Write some quotes on index cards and leave them on the table. While natural lulls in conversation are to be expected, if discussion stalls, have people take turns reading a quote and ask the group to respond with their thoughts.

Sample quotes:

“Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with conflict by peaceful means.”

— Ronald Reagan. American politician who served as the 40th president of the United States. [Read More](#)

“Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him.”

—Martin Luther King Jr. American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement. [Read More](#)

“One of the principles of nonviolence is that you leave your opponents whole and better off than you found them.”

— Andrew Young Contemporary American politician, diplomat, and activist who served as a US Congressman and Mayor. [Read More](#)

“Nonviolence is a good policy when the conditions permit.”

— Nelson Mandela South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, political leader, and philanthropist who served as President of South Africa. [Read More](#)

“The sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil.

— Hannah Arendt. German-born American political scientist philosopher and political theorist. [Read More](#)

Time to set commitments!

We want to challenge ourselves to practice these virtues in our daily lives, so let’s set commitments! Before you conclude your meeting, ask everyone to take a moment and think how they can practice this virtue in their own life. Ask them to identify a goal for something they’d like to achieve or work on until the next meeting.

Sample commitments for nonviolence:

- Improve your understanding of nonviolence by attending a training on nonviolence with a group that practices nonviolent tactics.
- Practice introducing meditation into your daily routine. At the very least, if you feel stress in the moment, focus on your breath.
- Speak out against injustice. Commit to civil discussions while working to find common ground and understanding.

Articles on nonviolence:

[Nonviolence as a Way of Life](#)
[Practicing Nonviolence Toward Self](#)

