



Gracious Space Definition:
**A spirit and a setting where we invite the ‘stranger’
and learn in public.**

Spirit:

Gracious Space has many elements, such as welcoming, compassion, curiosity, humor, that we each embody. When we bring these elements with us into relationships, we are “being” Gracious Space. This spirit of Gracious Space is what sets it apart from other communication or conflict resolution tools.

Setting:

Gracious Space has a physical dimension that can support or impede our ability to feel productive, healthy and connected with our work and with others. What is gracious about the room you are in right now? What about your work space? What would make it more gracious? Paying attention to simple hospitality (food, drink) and items that reflect your energy and personality, or goals for work (artwork, color, dramatic or elegant furniture) create your own unique Gracious Space.

Invite the Stranger:

Gracious Space moves into a “systems” perspective when we invite the “stranger.” Borrowed from Parker Palmer, the term “stranger” refers to any individual who is not typically involved in the conversation; someone with a different background, perspective, skin color, gender, geographic orientation, or any other quality that may make him or her seem different. We need the “stranger” when we are considering complex and new ideas; we need multiple perspectives to broaden our viewpoints before decision making lest we take actions that are too narrow-minded or short-term. Inviting the stranger is a strategic decision that is not always necessary. And it’s good to remember that we are each the stranger to someone else.

Learn in Public:

The second “systems” approach of Gracious Space is to apply deep listening and learning to the diversity you have gathered into Gracious Space. Learning in Public requires humility, a willingness to explore assumptions, let go of the “right way” of doing things, and being willing to change one’s mind.

Gracious Space has the potential to transform the human heart and entire groups or organizations. When we choose graciousness, we choose an approach that fosters understanding. We choose to be open-minded and welcoming of diverse opinions. This attitude grows within us and can be nurtured through practice.

Behaviors to create Gracious Space:

- Pay Attention to Spirit: compassion, curiosity, “being” Gracious Space
- Create Intentional Spaces
- Invite the ‘Stranger:’ when diverse perspective is beneficial
- Learn in Public: open your heart and mind to the thinking of others
- Build Trust: through character, competence, consistency and information
- Inquire: seek first to understand
- Listen Deeply and Slow Down

Oh, the comfort —
the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person —
having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words,
but pouring them all right out,
just as they are,
chaff and grain together;
certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them,
keep what is worth keeping,
and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.

-Dinah M. Craik, from her short story, “A Life for a Life”

Axiom Tic-tac-toe

CLE Axioms

1) Learning and Leadership are a Dynamic Social Process

Learning how to lead and learn within the context of relationships is at the core of leadership and the construction of the necessary conditions that nurture this development in an inviting and dignified manner.

2) Conversations are Critical and Central Pedagogical Processes

At the core of social learning theory is the need to create gracious spaces and healthy relationships for participants, learners, and teachers alike to share their stories. Storytelling and conversation are the mediating tools for the relationships that exist at the core of the learning process.

3) The People Closest to the Issues are Best Situated to Discover Answers to Local Concerns

CLEs organize around specific topics and participants share their individual and community stories, experiences, and strategies around those topics. Such engagement fosters a creative agency that helps people find their power and voice, and the process responds to the need for local communities to own their collective destiny.

4) Crossing Boundaries Enriches the Development and Educational Process

The willingness and ability to experience a world outside our daily comfort zone is necessary to break the isolation of people, organizations, and communities. This dynamic is activated when teams are invited to join national and local CLEs. The boundary-crossing that occurs at CLEs includes borders of geography, economic standing, age, culture and race, gender, faith, and personal abilities.

5) Hope and Change are Built on Assets and Dreams of Locals and their Communities

When CLE participants tell their stories, they begin to map their gifts, ideas, and hopes. This mapping process is ideological, relational, geographical, and political. The identification, construction, and naming of these assets invites CLE participants to view their lives, change efforts, and community in new ways. Issues that may have been viewed historically as intractable immediately become opportunities, invitations, and points of action. This shift occurring during CLEs from distress and hopelessness to hope and possibility represents radical transformation.

<p>Learning and Leadership are a Dynamic Social Process [In Professional Life]</p>	<p>Conversations are Critical and Central Pedagogical Processes [In Personal Life]</p>	<p>Crossing Boundaries Enriches the Development and Educational Process [In Personal Life]</p>
<p>Crossing Boundaries Enriches the Development and Educational Process [In Professional Life]</p>	<p>The People Closest to the Issues are Best Situated to Discover Answers to Local Concerns [In Professional Life]</p>	<p>Hope and Change are Built on Assets and Dreams of Locals and their Communities [In Personal Life]</p>
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