

## 1. The Vegas Rule

What happens in the conversation stays in the conversation. A conversation cannot be sacred unless we can all trust that we are respected by everyone else involved. Protecting each other's sharing is the least we can do!

## 2. Share Time

I am not the only person there. I show up ready to listen far more than I speak. I plan to spend my time developing a genuine interest in the experiences, perspectives, and lives of the others in the conversation; I don't worry about getting them interested in *me*. I attend to each person's individuality, their social location and their privilege relative to my own. All this shapes the dynamics of our conversation.

## 3. Hold Space

One of the quickest ways to kill a conversation is to position myself as an expert. My role is not to solve someone else's problems or tell them what they should do. A sacred conversation happens when we share our own experiences and receive the experiences and perspective of others. I don't tell others what to do or how to think; I share my perspective and experiences. In that vein, I avoid **crosstalk** - sharing my experience as a passive-aggressive way to tell others what I think they should do.

## 4. Don't be a One Upper

We somehow got it in our heads that the best thing to do when someone shares is to share a similar story from our own experience. We *feel like* we're extending empathy when we're actually dismissing and devaluing the other person's share.

## 5. Attention is a Switch, not a Dimmer

We can all tell when someone is checked out. A conversation cannot be sacred when a participant is only half paying attention or only listening to respond. Treat your attention like an on/off switch, not a dimmer. Flip that puppy on and give the person sharing your undivided attention.

Don't fear the **pause**. We use the same part of our brain to share and respond. So, if we're truly listening to someone else, we will need a moment (or ten) to formulate a response. That silence is golden! It doesn't mean we weren't listening - it means we were!

## 6. Loop It!

We hate to break it to you, but we need to communicate more clearly than we think we do. That's why looping is essential. When one person finishes sharing, someone else in the group should say, "What I heard you saying is," and then restate the share in their own words. Did we all hear what was being said? Or do we need to dig a little? If we were debating ice cream flavors, this isn't super important. But when we're discussing a deep, emotional, or important topic, looping is vital to a truly sacred conversation.

## 7. One Conversation at a Time

Groups can be challenging. Our attention wanders, we get distracted, we think of a quip or comment we want to share with a neighbor, or someone keeps blowing up our phone. However, a sacred conversation values the sharing of each person in the group. So, we limit to one conversation at a time. This means, among other things, that we keep our cell phones dark, silent, and out of sight. We don't have side conversations.

## 8. Keep the Gem Statement at the Center

Conflict is inevitable in sacred conversations. We wade into turbulent territory; more often than not, we're going to dive in. When emotions run hot and drawbridges start to rise, we breathe and return to the **Gem Statement**: there's something beneath the disagreement we all agree on. If we can return to that statement as we engage in (healthy!) conflict, our relationships grow stronger.

## 9. Find the Disagreement Under the Disagreement

Mostly, when we argue or debate, we just keep restating our position more loudly and firmly, expecting the other person to eventually cave in the face of our verbal bludgeoning and see it our way. Not only does that not work, it's not interesting. What's more interesting is to explore the root of the disagreement. "Why, at heart, do we disagree? What is the values disagreement underneath our practical disagreement?" Not only does this keep us regulated, the conversation becomes a mutual exploration - the goal of sacred conversation.

## 10. Conversation > Consensus

We're used to the goal of church being an agreement on a particular set of beliefs - consensus. But at Haven, our goal is sacred conversation. The journey is more important than the destination because the journey is where we are together - and the destination isn't worth much if we don't reach it together. So, a successful conversation is one where everyone comes away feeling heard and understood - *not* one where we all agree.

While we pursue good conversation, what is not up for debate is our core values and our commitment to the innate dignity of each person.

## COMMITMENTS FOR A SACRED CONVERSATION

“Emotions are built on layers. Beneath hatred is usually anger; beneath anger is frustration; beneath frustration is hurt; beneath hurt is fear. If you keep expressing your feelings, you will generally move through them in that order. What begins with “I hate you” culminates in “I’m scared. I don’t want to lose you, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

-- Mark Goulston, *Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior*

"Being curious about your friend's experience is more important than being right."

-- Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett (neuroscientist)

“Such love has no fear, because love that’s whole and completed expels all fear.”

-- 1 John 4:18a

