

# Navigating Tricky Conversations Skillfully

*A “Connective Communication”  
primer for couples,  
coaches and  
communication enthusiasts*

A Healthy Relationships production

By Yogi Ramadin

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I invite you to express what feels true for you  
in a way that enlivens your spirit  
with a sense of possibility.

~ Yogi Ramadin



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# Preface

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Thank you for reading this book!

After years of study, field application and personal integration work, I find myself standing on the shoulders of giants and sharing with you just a glimpse of what I see from here. What follows is a synthesis of many contributions made by far too many people to mention. In a wide sweep, I will tell you that this text is informed by Humanistic Psychology, Yogic Philosophies, Compassionate Communication and more.

This book started out as an instruction booklet for a communication education and facilitation tool that I created, called the “Communication Journey Kit.”

Once the Communication Journey Kit was created, I realized that it wasn't enough to simply tell people how to use the kit. What they really needed was strong background and understanding in human conversational tension dynamics and how to navigate them gracefully.

It is my intention to share this information with you so that you may empower yourself and your communities in creating more trust, deeper intimacy and greater compassion through understanding of self and others.

I am most excited about the power of Body Wisdom and its potential to unite our subconscious mind and our conscious mind. Please pay special attention to how Body Wisdom applies in your own life.

I am intending to expand this text, so if there are sections that are not clear or you would like to see expanded, please contact me using the information in the Next Steps chapter.

This book would not be possible without the support of my friends

and ancestors. Thank you to so many people who put energy forward into humanity so that my life and this experience is even possible.

Thank you to my Mother who bore me into this world.

Thank you to my Father who provided for me and taught me about self-reliance.

Thank you to mother earth, who continues to support, feed and shelter me and so many others.

Thank you to Abraham Maslow, the Father of Humanistic Psychology for introducing the Hierarchy of Needs and the truth of interdependence.

Thank you to Nikola Tesla, who gifted more to humanity than can be fully comprehended. Thank you for liberating us with motorized equipment, harnessing the marvel of Alternating Current and uniting us with the power of communication over a distance.

Thank you to any and every person who has ever done yoga or any personal healing work or taken care of their own health and well being for any reason.

Thank you to scholars and poets alike who keep spirituality alive in their own daily works.

And thank you, to YOU, the reader, for taking the time to invest in your own life and your competency in skillful interpersonal relating. May this text be an asset to you and inspire many Connective Communications that flow into rewarding friendships.

Warmly,

*Yogi Ramadin*

Thank you also to my Editors and Contributors.

Julie Barr MA, LMFT

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Deborah Wiig Communications

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# Introduction

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Welcome to “*Navigating Tricky Conversations Skillfully*,” a “Connective Communication” primer for couples, coaches and conversation enthusiasts.

This book can be used alone or with the “Communication Journey Kit” to introduce helpful concepts in facilitating Connective Communication.

I have included pictures and descriptions of the Communication Journey Kit cards in this book. With understanding of the concepts in the cards and the materials within this handbook, you should be able to begin facilitating your own conversations more skillfully toward your own goals and the goals of others.

In this section, we will explore:

- Whom is this book for?
- Introducing the Communication Journey Kit
- Pitfalls
- Tips

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### ***Whom is this Book For?***

- Conversation Enthusiasts
- Couples
- Families
- Office Workers
- Conversation Facilitators: Psychologists, Coaches, MFT's, Lawyers, Business Negotiators

While it is obvious that the approaches outlined herein can be useful for mitigating family and relationship conflicts, it's also worth keeping in mind that these approaches are also very helpful in the workplace and in sales.

For example, marketing researchers have found that people largely make purchases based on emotion and then rationalize their decision later with supporting data.

“Emotion is the KEY to every decision we make, every thought we have... Human beings tend to take everything personally and respond with feeling.” - Kevin Roberts [Russel & Lane 2002]

What this means is, if you are able to support people in feeling great about an idea, then they are likely to “buy” your idea or product. So whether you are striving to pitch that upcoming trip to your spouse or to customers of your travel agency, Safe-porting, checking-in, appreciating and creating Somatic Resonance can all play a big part in getting “buy-in” and group agreement.

Office environments that encourage virtuous communication approaches are likely to have greater team coherence leading to higher efficiency and less sick time.

### ***How this Book is Organized***

When considering sharing the “Communication Journey Kit,” I realized that I wanted more than just support people in using the

kit. I wanted to support people in having profound satisfaction in relating. While it may be tempting for some readers to jump straight to the sections about the Communication Framework, I feel it's essential for conversationalists to approach relating with certain fundamental postures.

If conversationalists charge ahead without the fundamentals, then they risk the dangers of starting off on the wrong foot and possibly doing more harm than good.

Consequently, I have separated the book into three parts:

- Part 1: Guiding Principles
- Part 2: Using the Communication Framework
- Part 3: Improving Your Conversational Competence

Ideally, conversationalists will remain mindful of the guiding principles while they are using the framework. Since achieving mastery is a progression, I recommend revisiting Part 1 often and considering how each of the elements relates to your own life and consciousness. The guiding principles are as important, if not more important than the framework itself.

### ***Introducing the Communication Journey Kit***

This book you are reading now emerged from the creation of the Connective Communication Framework. The framework was originally created on 3x5 note-cards and then transformed into graphic cards with informative text. I then needed to create a user's manual for the card kit. I decided that simply describing the parts of the kit was not adequate. What I wanted to do was to help many people have satisfying conversations.

What has emerged now is this book, which contains snapshots of the Connective Communication cards and also rich discussion regarding many aspects of communication. The framework was designed as a concept and as such can be used in the field with or without the Communication Journey Kit. The kit just makes it easy to introduce others and to keep the conversation grounded by

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externalizing the process and breaking the conversation down into manageable parts.

### **What is the Communication Journey Kit?**

This communication tool is designed to facilitate heart- and spirit-opening conversations, otherwise known as Connective Communication.

The Communication Journey Kit is a toolkit that introduces people to setting intentions, establishing conversational roles and using communication modes. During a conversation journey, participants can pick an Intention Card and Conversation Mode Card to explore a particular topic together. While in a Conversation Round, use Appreciation Tokens and Speaker Moderation Cards to influence the conversation pace. Appreciation Tokens also offer an additional means to stay connected and develop alliance without interrupting the speaker.

Individuals using the kit are introduced to modes and skillful strategies that they can use in all conversations. Once you have become familiar with the modes and establish a practice of requesting specific modes, you will be able to do this casually in conversation even without the kit.

### **Why use the Communication Journey Kit?**

- To learn approaches in Connective Communication
- To facilitate conversations
- To educate others about Connective Communication

### **When to use the Communication Journey Kit**

Individuals and groups can use the Communication Journey Kit in the moment, when they need immediate support in keeping a conversation on track.

Participants are likely to get the best results in Connective Communication if they study it ahead of time with others or on their own to learn more about communication and understand the Communication Modes.

You may want to introduce others to Connective Communication. You could share the kit with others at a party, meeting or meal to educate them about communication and introduce them to styles of communication that you might be wanting to use with them.

### **Check the Conversation Climate**

Is it a "good time to talk" to get a collaborative discussion? Checking in with yourself and other conversation participants regarding these factors can assist you in getting your goals met by using mindful timing to schedule your conversation.

- Do the conversation participants have sufficient energy and attention to engage the discussion now?
- Is there enough time to discuss the topics of interest?
- Will there be any interruptions?
- Are any of the participants emotionally volatile?

### **What to Expect When Using the Kit**

- Conversations may move more slowly.
- The framework may feel rigid at first.
- Expect yourself and others to have better mastery in asking for the type of conversational engagement you would like.
- You will learn to identify the conversation climate and skillfully respond to destructive conversation tactics.

On the Communication Journey Kit cards, you will see that each card has pitfalls and tips.

Here are a few pitfalls and tips to get you started before we journey into more specific tips on each concept.

### ***Pitfalls***

Pitfalls are areas where you might fall into a trap, wasting time and energy, or have your goals sabotaged. Keep an eye out for pitfalls while on your Conversation Journey.

- Be wary of engaging in conversations when participants are

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lacking sufficient attention, energy or interest.

- Be wary of engaging when there is insufficient time to engage in the conversation in a relaxed manner.
- Be wary of engaging when You or Conversation Collaborators are feeling emotionally volatile.

### ***Tips***

Tips keep potential hazards in mind and help us get the best results possible with the resources at hand.

- Review all the Communication Modes ahead of time and take time to understand them.
- Learn to spot Shadow Modes like Attacking, Defensive and Venting when they occur unannounced or unsolicited.
- Question potential Conversation Collaborators to agree upon a good time to have the desired conversation.
- Before you start, check-in with all participants concerning the conversation climate and amount of time available for the discussion.



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# Part 1: Guiding Principles

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# Chapter 1

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## Goals and Intentions

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Whether they know it or not, Conversation Initiators will want to accomplish something through their actions of communication. It may be to alleviate some stress, to solve a problem or to influence others.

It is worth mentioning that usually goals are a measurable, achievable outcome. Intentions may be considered as something we want to strive towards but may not be easily defined by some clear deadline or end point.

For instance, a desire to be nicer to another person is not something that you will know when it's completed (goal.) It's a posture and way of being that one embodies in an ongoing way.

In this chapter, we will explore:

- Key Intentions
- Overt Goals
- Implicit Goals
- Goals of Others

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### ***Key Intentions***

Without Key Intentions, conversations are ungrounded without any fundamental direction. When one considers the idea of “Navigating Tricky Conversations Skillfully,” your Key Intentions are your compass to help guide you in staying true to your course. If you overtly state your intention to have things get better between you and another person, then you have laid the foundation to more easily reorient the conversation toward the intention originally stated.

Often times unmentioned, Key Intentions can be the most important and powerful element in creating conversational coherence.

Here are some examples of Key Intentions:

- mutual respect
- more pleasurable relating
- greater ease in relating
- shared understanding

Mentioning these intentions overtly can greatly help to create more trust and rapport.

### ***Stated Goals***

Stated Goals and Intentions are the changes that we are enthusiastic about discussing. For example, “Let’s figure out who gets to park in the driveway on Friday evenings.”

Stating an overt goal before creating mutually beneficial intentions can sometimes inhibit the collaboration process. This is because putting an operational need before the value of another person can be rude or offensive.

## **Chapter 1: Goals and Intentions 21**

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# Chapter 4

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## Conversation Pacing

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There are several ways to consider the conversation pace.

Conversations with high volatility or clear disagreement can have conversation participants feeling exhausted and disinterested quite quickly.

Meanwhile a conversation rich in resonant back and forth sharing and appreciation may go on for quite some time and leave participants feeling joyful and refreshed.

In an earlier segment of this book, I mentioned that emotional conversations are like unpacking. You need to have the space to unpack it and the time to air it out. You will also want to make sure that the conversation is well resourced.

In its more acute considerations, the pace may also refer to the back and forth of speaker and responder.

In this chapter, we will explore:

- Conversational Tension
- Effective Pacing and Shared Meaning
- Preventing and Repairing Blowout

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### ***Conversational Tension***

Whether the conversation has emotional volatility or not, there is still most certainly a conversational tension. This tension can be in the form of anger or anxiety, but also can be in the form of creative tension. The pace of the conversation can also refer to how quickly or assertively one person transfers the conversational tension to the Conversation Collaborator.

If the Conversation Initiator has a lot of emotion associated with the topic and has recently put a significant amount of time and energy into the subject of interest, they may say quite a lot all at once in a very passionate way. This would be considered a fast paced conversation. If the responder is not ready for the fast pace, the conversation may end up being over before it even starts.

I discuss Conversational Tension further in the Body Wisdom chapter.

### ***Effective Pacing and Shared Meaning***

In Connective Communication, we have discussions in manageable segments of listening and responding.

This interplay of listening and response creates an affirmation of shared meaning.

If the pace of one communication participant is faster than another, then it becomes challenging or impossible to achieve shared meaning.

It may also be helpful to achieve a sense of balance of talking time between listener and responder. If one person dominates the talking time then it may be challenging to achieve affirmation of shared meaning.

It is also essential to understand the importance of Appreciation. Adding appreciation to a conversation can help to ease the stress of participants and enhance the satisfaction of all conversation participants.



### ***Preventing and Repairing Blowout***

Blowout is when a conversation ends abruptly, often with a sense of loss of collaboration, frustration or anger. This can easily occur when conversation participants are insensitive to pacing and using Shadow Modes.

- Use bite size pieces for all Communication Modes. Keep conversations simple to avoid blowout and exhaustion
- If you experience overload and waning attention ask for continuation of the conversation at a later time

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# Chapter 5

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## Body Feedback and Intuitive Wisdom

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In addition to speakers listening to each other, speakers and listeners both may want to consider listening to their own body as a somatic feedback device. By monitoring your body response, you can see if you are having a reaction to conversation. It can be quite powerful for a listener to check in with their body responses as another channel of communication.

However, this is a sophisticated level of awareness and may not be possible or necessary for some conversations.

In this chapter, we will explore:

- Cognitive and Somatic Tensions
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Somatic Resonance
- Transference
- Diffusion and Integration
- Why Choose Conflict?

### ***Cognitive and Somatic Tensions***

Whether tension is in our body or in our mind, it will certainly influence our behaviors. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Cognitive Tensions can evolve into Physical Tensions. Reciprocally, Physical Tensions can erode one's cognitive presence. Consequently it is wise to have approaches in both reducing Physical and Cognitive Tensions.

Continuing to focus on anxiety- or anger-producing thoughts creates more anxiety and anger. This increases both the Cognitive and Somatic Tensions. For example if someone continues to focus on an angering thought, their somatic tension is the elevated heart rate and the cognitive tension is the unexpressed thought projections that the thinker is waiting to express. The more thoughts they have that they want to express, the more cognitive and somatic tension build up.

Anger is only one example of emotion. These same dynamics apply to both destructive or creative tensions. It is also worth pointing out that tension in and of itself is not a bad thing. What I suggest striving for is graceful expression of these tensions that embody evolutionary progress.

A common contributor to emotional and cognitive tension is Cognitive Dissonance. In the upcoming segments I will discuss Cognitive Dissonance and its inverse, Somatic Resonance. I will also detail processes of Diffusion and Integration.

### ***Cognitive Dissonance***

Festinger states that:

“Cognitive Dissonance is the feeling of discomfort when simultaneously holding two or more conflicting cognitions: ideas, beliefs, values or emotional reactions. In a state of dissonance, people may sometimes feel "disequilibrium":

frustration, hunger, dread, guilt, anger,  
embarrassment, anxiety, etc.” [Festinger 1957]

**“How to Reduce Cognitive Dissonance**

Kendra Cherry offers three key strategies to reduce or minimize  
Cognitive Dissonance: [Cherry n.d.]

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# Chapter 6

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## Yogic Approaches

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As a result of thousands of years of research, tradition and development, the fundamental philosophies of Yoga have been cultivated by, tested and improved on by countless sages, devotees and scholars who committed lifetimes to creating practices that serve humanity.

The fundamental basis for any yoga practice, before any postures or poses or activity, is Mindfulness. Without Mindfulness, no yoga is there. Yogic Mindfulness is composed of what Westerners might consider as Do's and Don'ts for creating a Graceful life.

In this chapter we will explore:

- Yamas and Niyamas
- 4 Yogic Keys for Interpersonal Relating
- Liberating Language
- Noticing Resistance to Joy

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## **Part 2: Using the Communication Framework**

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# Chapter 7

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## Communication Framework

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The Connective Communication Framework was designed to help individuals consider any conversation, figure out the underlying intention, figure out who the initiator of the conversation is and how to relate with the conversation in a way that is most likely to satisfy the goals of all involved.

In the upcoming sections we will explore:

- Conversation Roles
- Conversation Intentions
- Communication Modes

Using these concepts you can more effectively navigate conversation toward a more grounded and connected outcome. Read ahead to explore each of the framework sections.

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### ***Conversation Roles***

#### **What is the importance of Roles?**

By having specific Conversation Roles, participants are able to make focused progress on a specific topic with reduced risk of getting DE-railed from the Conversation Intention. Participants are able to engage the subject matter more deeply with a higher chance of satisfaction and interpersonal connection. Also, agreeing to and honoring the roles can be seen as an overt demonstration of intention to collaborate. This can be especially important in tense conversations.

#### **What are the Conversation Roles?**

- Conversation Initiator
- Conversation Collaborator
- Conversation Facilitator

The Conversation Initiator often has an idea of the Conversation Intention and what sort of mode they might like Conversation Collaborators to engage with. The Conversation Initiator is the best person to guess what the climate is, what pacing might work and what points need to be addressed.

Facilitators work to maintain integrity of the conversation. You can learn more about Conversation Facilitators in Chapter 10.

It is worth mentioning that the other remaining role is “Conversation Collaborator.” By recognizing someone as a Conversation Collaborator, we are acknowledging that they are someone we value and respect and we are inviting them to the conversation. They are at choice and only remain in the conversation as long as it feels collaborative.

These roles establish that the underlying intention of the process is for collaboration and mutual respect.



## ***Conversation Initiator***

The Conversation Initiator picks intention and mode cards and invites the Collaborator(s) to use the specific conversation mode to engage the topic of the Conversation Initiator's choosing.

### ***Pitfalls***

Being rude, inconsiderate, abrupt or overly directive may scare off collaborators and end the conversation before it starts.

### ***Tips***

Collaborators should feel invited to participate in the round. If you know about your conversation ahead of time, come prepared with any informing details or clear goals that may support the conversation.

***Card Family:***  
***Conversation Roles***

<http://healthy-relationships.us>



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### ***Conversation Goals / Intentions***

Quite commonly, people will start having a conversation without even knowing what their intention is. Individuals may be speaking out from a place of reactivity in an effort to reduce their own stress or discomfort in the moment.

If we can get past this sense of urgency and more deeply understand the intentions of the conversation, we can then prepare ourselves to relate with the discussion in a way that feels more satisfying for all.

When we share our intentions with others, it opens up more opportunity for getting what we want.

We will now review the following Conversation Intentions. More specific intentions usually fall under one of the three main categories:

- Seed Planting
- Tending, Feeding, Nurturing
- Weeding and Clearing

The Conversation Initiator is responsible for stating their intention while making a Conversation Invitation and requesting a specific Communication Mode. You can read about Communication Modes and example invitations in the upcoming sections.



## ***Seed Planting***

In Seed Planting, we are bringing ideas to the table to see what takes root. These conversations can often be exploratory and end in agreements to take some action, gather more information or have a follow on conversation at another time.

### ***Pitfalls***

Be wary of Clearing / Weeding conversations disguised as Seed Planting.

### ***Tips***

Keep an open mind and take time consider other ideas that emerge. Consider reviewing Pro's and Cons of the situation.

***Card Family:  
Intentions***

***<http://healthy-relationships.us>***



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### ***Communication Modes***

Communication Modes describe our ways of sharing information and relating at the moment. Modes are described extensively in the Journey Kit chapter. Some examples are: Attentive Listening, Interpreting, Devil's Advocate, and Defensive.

You will see that modes are broken into a scale based on levels of assertiveness.

- Soft Modes
- Moderate Modes
- Assertive Modes
- Shadow Modes

You will also see Shadow Modes are included so that they may be identified when used UN-consciously or so that they may be requested for strengthening or purifying ideas and our presentation of the information.

Each of the modes, even the Shadow Modes, have a particular time and place where they may be requested by the Conversation Initiator.

Once you have reviewed each of the Communication Modes in the upcoming sections, you can familiarize yourself with how to know which mode to use in the Tips for Navigating Tricky Conversations Skillfully section.



### **Soft Modes**

Soft Modes are well suited to use in situation of high intensity, distress or emotional charge. For example, people who are in a process of expressing their frustration are not interested in receiving advice. They are interested in having a chance to express themselves and vent their frustration. After that, they may then go into requesting advice while reverting into dismissing advice followed by more venting.

Soft Modes are excellent for giving a person who is expressing and exploring their own inner content an opportunity to feel seen, heard and supported in their experience.

From my coaching practice I can tell you that soft modes are the most powerful for DE-escalating intense emotional charge and getting to a place of integration.

Echoing can be such a powerful tool for creating Somatic Resonance that I'm surprised it is still legal!

Types of Soft Modes we will explore:

- Attentive Listening
- Echoing
- Reassurance



## ***Attentive Listening***

This round is all about the speaker experiencing being heard without interjection. Give your full attention to the speaker. Demonstrate understanding & empathy with body posture, eye contact, head nods, and "mm-hmms".

### ***Pitfalls***

Listeners often want to reply to the content of the speakers sharing with their own ideas, suggestions, objections, corrections.

### ***Tips***

Save any sharing, Interpretation, Echoing or other Conversation Modes for another round. Attentive Listeners may use the Yellow Speaker Moderation Cards if they notice their attention waning.

***Card Family:  
Soft Modes***

***<http://healthy-relationships.us>***



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# Chapter 11

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## Examples

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This chapter contains basic examples that you may adapt to your own situations. While you could repeat much of what has been written here word for word and have it be effective, it is intended to be a guide for you to create your own meaningful, heartfelt responses.

It is also worth mentioning that you should only say what feels authentic. Some people may think it's “out of reach” to be appreciative and friendly in the face of a difficult or stressful topic. However if you can maintain a sense of gratitude and respect for the person contributing their time and attention to the conversation, then you are bound to get more effective results.

In this chapter I will introduce:

- Opening with Appreciation and Intention Setting
- Creating Conversation Invitations
- Verbally Naming Modes in Use
- Reorient to the Conversation Intention
- Reorient to the requested Conversation Mode
- Requesting a Pause in the Conversation
- Close with Appreciations

### ***Opening with Appreciation Intention Setting***

Your opening statements set the tone of the conversation to come. Starting out with appreciation can put conversation participants at ease in the beginning and create a rich environment for collaboration.

“Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. It's really important to me that we can be respectful and collaborative with each other and it means a lot to me that you would make the time to be in the conversation.”

#### **Optional:**

{Unsolicited Safe-porting / Reassurance}

“I also know that this has been a stressful topic in the past and I want you to know that I’m interested in this being an easy conversation for us both and that I'm interested in you getting your needs met here also.”

### ***Creating Conversation Invitations***

Individuals often have resistance to tricky conversations because they may want to avoid stress or fear of loss. Crafting conversation invitations that address the invited party's needs can help create more interest and collaboration.

“... I know that there has been some tension about the Friday night driveway parking and I would love to have a friendly conversation together about it at some time that works well for you. Would you be willing to discuss it with me on Tuesday at 6pm

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Thanks again for reading this book. May it inspire and support you in co-creating mutually satisfying relationships for many years to come.

May you be deeply nourished by the blessings in your life.

Peace be with you, all ways.

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Warmly,

Yogi Ramadin

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