

FOREWORD

In the last 25 years, educators and benefactors have contributed to the spread of Dialogue as an increasingly used form of discourse in all sorts of learning organizations. I have participated in Dialogues in schools, colleges, corporate offices, medical schools, foundations, administrative headquarters, and coffee houses.

Not long ago at one of these events, a program officer of a major foundation asked me bluntly—and publicly—“What is the ultimate purpose of Dialogue that would justify spending so much time and foundation money to become skillful at Dialogue?” My reply was simple: Dialogue is good preparation for leading a virtuous life.

Of course, someone in the room immediately asked me to define “virtuous life.” My response was not as brief as one might wish—no surprise.

A virtuous life issues from a confluence of causes: reason, faith, knowledge, skills, understanding, morality, and a well-practiced habit

of thoughtfulness in applying these qualities to life's important questions and to the answers that translate into action.

That is what Peter Winchell's book is about. If virtue is your aim, Dialogue is your game. Think of it as Coach Peter's Workout Regimen for brain fitness.

For many readers, the more important chapters may be those that give you transcriptions plus annotations for an actual Dialogue and subsequent Critique. Other parts of the book help you to understand the theory and structure of Dialogue and to become proficient in practice. But the heart of Dialogue pulses in the two exemplary chapters, which so vividly draw us into the circle of the participants' minds.

There is a powerful reason for my belief that Peter Winchell is making a needed contribution to the welfare of any organization seriously seeking to become a true learning organization. This much is clear from nearly thirty years of attempted "reform" in education and business and government. While Dialogue cannot guarantee the success of reform efforts, the absence of Dialogue leaves standing an untouched status quo with its entrenched guardians still in charge.

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