

## MEETING NEEDS AT WORK

By Kathleen Ryan

In the fast paced, over-committed, and worried-about-the-economy lives most working people lead, there is a real hunger for true engagement around important issues and honest connection with one another. This high-quality interaction sets a group apart and tells members they've got something special going on. Too often, however, especially in white-collar worlds (does anyone have a better phrase??), people race from one meeting to the next to the next. They find little time to think and even less time to connect with co-workers on topics other than tasks. In this swirl, conversations about meaning or significance are rare. Groups plow through agenda item after agenda item, slide deck after slide deck without slowing down to consider how any of this work connects to a larger view or the greater good.

These days, there is no end to tools and methods available to team leaders and facilitators—all designed to insure a more productive meeting. In our volunteer lives and with our clients, Geoff and I use many of those tools. But here's what we've learned: The tools and techniques may help group members to get through an agenda, make a decision, set priorities, or sort out a difference of opinion. But without an intentional effort to discover or discuss the significance of any of those accomplishments, the group misses out on an experience that will help it to become extraordinary.

But how to initiate that level of discussion? Our Group Needs model is a good place to start. The six needs are:

- Accepting ourselves while moving toward our Potential
- Bonding with others while pursuing a common Purpose
- Understanding Reality while we making an Impact together

Once you've used your favorite group method to produce a "What"—such as a decision, a plan, a schedule, or a set of working agreements, move on to the "So what?" conversation. Do so by asking group members to connect what they've accomplished to any of the six Group Needs. In that way, you will give meaning a chance to surface.

Based on Bellman & Ryan's *Extraordinary Groups: How Ordinary Teams Achieve Amazing Results* (Jossey-Bass, 2009)  
For more information, go to [www.extraordinarygroups.com](http://www.extraordinarygroups.com)

Here's a list of meaning-seeking questions you can ask. For each example, I've indicated the relevant Group Need in italics.

- What difference will this decision make to our ability to meet our customer's needs? What impact will it really have in their daily lives? (Impact)
- As we worked our way through to this decision, what did we learn about each other? What did we do that helped us to be effective? (Bond) Did anyone here change an opinion or gain some kind of insight? (Acceptance) If so, what was that?
- How does this new strategy connect with our mission? As we think about it, is there any new twist on why we come together? (Purpose)
- What patterns do you find in this list of barriers-to-success? What are the implications of those patterns? (Reality)
- Who here learned something today, something that you can use outside of this meeting? What are you taking away from this discussion? How do you plan to use it? (Potential)
- If we had this discussion to do over, would we do it any differently? Why would those changes be important? (Bond, Potential, Acceptance)
- What are the implications of what we've accomplished here today—on what we do or how we do it? (Bond, Purpose, Reality, Impact)

I find that people who lead or facilitate a group of busy people often avoid such questions because of worries that the discussion will take too much time or “get out of hand.” While it's clear that some of these sample questions could trigger longer conversations, if time is limited they can also be effective. It's remarkable how such questions can be asked with a light touch, with “Before we move on, let's take five minutes to reflect on the significance of what we've just done. What brief thoughts do you have about...” In a few minutes, an observation or view can be offered that makes a big difference in how people feel connected to the larger meaning of the work they do together. Even if not everyone has a chance to speak, when someone articulates why the group's work is important, all present have a chance to register that connection.