

# Picture Collaboration



**An Illustrated Guide for  
Working Together to Solve Problems**

**Ben Ziegler**  
**With illustrations by Tanya Gadsby**

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By Ben Ziegler

Illustrations by Tanya Gadsby

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Contact Ben Ziegler:

website: [www.collaborativejourneys.com](http://www.collaborativejourneys.com)

ben@collaborativejourneys.com

Contact Tanya Gadsby:

website: [www.drawingoutideas.ca](http://www.drawingoutideas.ca)

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# Introduction

People work together, collaborate, to solve problems.

When the collaboration is good, ideas and solutions flow.

Unfortunately, there is a flipside to that positive scenario. The collaborative habit may not come easy to us. And, even when we think we have that collaboration thing down, it's easy to regress, from we to me. A roomful of high capacity individuals does not guarantee team success.

We get better at collaboration, or anything else for that matter, through daily practice. Make it a habit and success seems to follow. One way I've been working on my collaborative habit over the last few years is to visualize the collaborative process. That journey brings me to this Guide book.

In our attention-deficit world, words alone never seem to cut it. We revel in images, photographs, sketches, videos... Our brain is a visual processing dynamo. We draw meaning through the visual; whether it's the face of a potential mate, or the marketing of a product.

The core idea of this e-book is that we can habituate ourselves to good collaboration through visual literacy. This e-book gives you 23 collaborative signs for the journey ahead.

Imagine driving along a winding, mountain highway. There are road signs everywhere. They signal what's ahead; a curvy road, a steep descent, falling rocks... Sometimes, the road sign is only a picture. No words. We get the message, though. Driver, beware! We've learned and internalized the message. It's a habit, second nature. We see the sign. We act accordingly.

The genesis of this guide is my work as a mediator and facilitator. In those roles, I help people and organizations work together, to bridge differences. I wanted a quick visual reference guide of the techniques I

use. So, I started to build a list of icons; adapting others, and creating some from scratch.

This Guide contains 23 collaborative practices; grouped by collaborative relationships, spaces, and problem-solving techniques. Each practice is described through: 1) an icon, 2) an illustration, and 3) explanatory text. The illustrations serve as a bridge between the icons and text. Given my illustrative skills are rudimentary, that led me to Tanya Gadsby.

In addition to her talents as a graphic recorder, Tanya knows collaboration, and is a facilitator in her own right. Her illustrations are unique, emotive and connective. They have influenced my thoughts and truly capture the collaborative spirit. Pictures are worth a lot of words.

The target audience for this Guide is facilitators, both those who facilitate full-time, and those for whom facilitation is just part of what they do; project managers, coaches, trainers, mediators, consultants, leaders, teachers...

We hope the visuals and explanations in this Guide act as a catalyst for you; to creatively learn and apply, your way. Please. The world needs more people fluent in the art and practice of collaboration.

Tanya and I enjoyed collaborating on this Guide. If you liked this Guide, spread the word, and visual. :)

Ben

November 2013

# On Using This Guide

This guide looks at collaborative practices from three perspectives:

- Relationships - how we, as individuals, interact with others
- Spaces - creating a healthy environment for collaboration
- Problem-solving techniques - specific practices, how-to's, for getting it done

Pick and choose what you need.

The relationship practices apply to everyone.

Spaces will be of particular interest to leaders, responsible for collective, collaborative action.

The problem-solving techniques, in this guide, are not unique to collaboration. However, they are viewed from a collaboration mindset.

A few words about the icons...

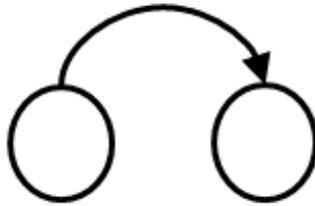
What if collaborative practices were core to every primary school curriculum? With that goal in mind, the icons are intentionally designed to be easy to draw, without sacrificing the concept behind them. Drawing the icons should be as easy as child's play.

We understand things by putting words to them; that's why keeping a journal is so powerful. The new language of collaboration has a visual component. Learning to collaborate through visual communication should start early in life. The paradox of that is not lost on us. After all, it's young people, assisted by social technologies, who are becoming tomorrow's collaboration superheroes.

I encourage you to make sense of, and adapt, the icons in your contexts. The ones presented in this Guide are a start. Carry on!

# Collaborative Relationships

## Bid for connection



Each of our daily interactions with another person is what relationship expert [John Gottman](#) calls a “bid for connection”.



By choosing to turn toward, to turn away, or turn against each other’s bid for connection – no matter how ordinary or small – we establish a foundation that could determine the future success or failure of our relationship.

Good relationships usually develop slowly over time, growing out of the many mundane interactions we share each day. Building trust in a relationship doesn’t require gut-wrenching conversations that plumb the depths of our souls.

“Daily life is foreplay for relationships.” (Kate Feldman)

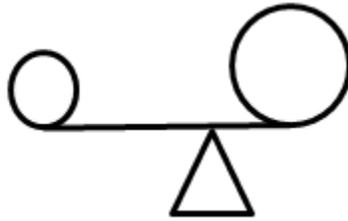
What is the optimal ratio of positive bids versus negative bids?

Gottman says 5:1 is the “magic relationship ratio” to sustain a marriage. Social media pundits advocate for more, closer to 10:1, when it comes to promoting others, versus self-promotion. As a parent, I recall 3:1 as the suggested ratio for praising versus disciplining young children.

The bottom line is that negative has more power. It takes many positive interactions to make up for a roll of the eyes, an ignored email, a customer bent out of shape...

Pay it forward. Bid positively and strengthen your relationships.

# Me and We



In every conversation and negotiation we participate, there exists the opportunity to think of what I want and need, and what they want and need.



Balancing advocacy with inquiry is entering into collaborative conversation. I assertively let the other party know my interests and needs, and I appreciatively inquire into their interests and needs. Our shared interests and needs lead us to common ground.

The collaborative way is to be “unconditionally constructive” (a term coined by Roger Fisher & William Ury in *Getting to Yes*); to do only those things that both are good for me, and the relationship, whether or not the other party reciprocates. Reciprocity is voluntary.

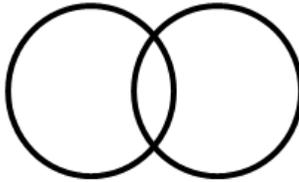
Asserting our own interests is facilitated through self-awareness and fluency with “I” language.

Discovering the underlying interests of others flows from our curiosity, open questions, probing, appreciation, empathy, clarifying, paraphrasing... Negotiating common ground calls on skills in reframing, fractionalizing, summarizing, creative problem-solving, power dynamics, solutions definition...

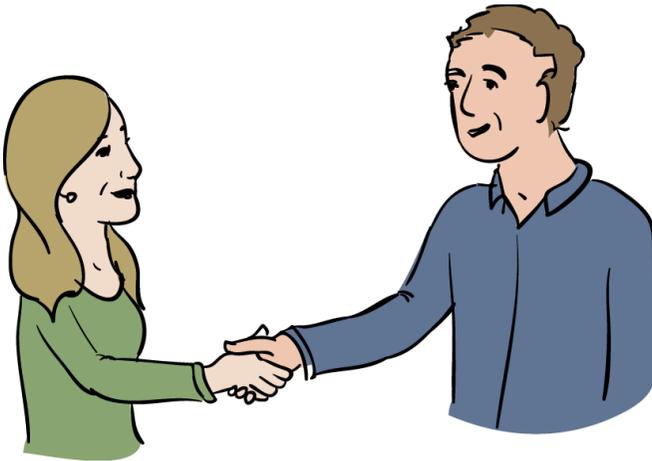
True collaboration is more than compromise. Through our work together, we create something more than we could create alone.  $1 + 1 > 2$ .

Being both me and we is the collaborative way.

# Link sustainability to long-term relationships



The essence of sustainability is long-term relationships.



A long-term view makes it easier to deal with the ebb and flow common to relationships, knowing we'll each be here tomorrow, for each other!

Knowing we are in a long-term relationship gives us a measure of security. It frees us to interact in sustainable ways; no need to grab and run!

Building long-term relationships requires up-front due diligence, asking difficult questions; e.g., Do we share the same values? Is there business market demand for our product? Are we committed to this partnership?

Fair Trade partnerships build on the 'long-term relationships for sustainability' model. Stacey Toews of [Level Ground Trading](#) summarized that business' model smartly for me, in this [\(2 min\) video interview](#).

Long-term relationships are built on trust, and flow from consensus building processes: participants are involved in the process design, all interests are represented and respected, direct interactions are possible, and each participant has an effective voice.

Long-term relationships work across communication channels. The medium may change. The message stays relationship.

The long-term speaks to sustainable communities, communities that aim for generosity, a well-distributed and safeguarded abundance.

“Long-term is the only perspective for judging innovation.”

# Collaborative Spaces

## Structure for behaviour



If we want people to collaborate better, then create workspaces that say “yes” to collaboration.



Put yourself in the shoes of a parent-to-be. In anticipation of your new baby, you’ve readied the baby's room; brightly painted the walls, purchased a comfy crib, and set-up an appealing mobile. You want your baby to feel welcome.

The concept remains the same, for work. Design spaces that make you feel “you are welcome here and that you came to the right place” ([Peter Block](#) in *Community: The Structure of Belonging*); hospitable reception areas, meeting rooms designed with person-to-person interaction in mind, communal spaces that have an intimate feel, walls that have life, lots of light and windows...

Design offices that encourage connectedness; people in close proximity, tables that allow people to sit in circles, chairs that promote mobility and relatedness with others in the room... Design offices that accommodates different work styles and meeting needs; visitor stations, teaming rooms, “mixer” coffee stations, situation rooms, all-hands meetings, cubicles...

Design influences our ability to connect and engage with others, to manage projects, to retain and transfer knowledge, and to solve problems.

Fit the design to the context; e.g., virtual spaces that normalize the challenges of online communications, and make it easy to collaborate, from a distance. Find the right level of technology; one that facilitates warmth, sensitivity, and personal connection.

Less is more, online. Illustrative of the less is more approach, in user experience design, is [37 Signals](#), a web-based collaboration apps company for small business. 37 Signals co-founder Jason Fried’s excellent book, *ReWork*, communicates the 37 Signals work culture.

Design for people. On a recent stay in Manhattan, NYC, I purposely routed my walks to take me through [Bryant Park](#), a place that makes superb use of the edges as a social magnet, inviting and inclusive, a reason to enter, in the most culturally diverse city in the world. Local to me, Lorne Daniel of [Rethink Urban](#) conducted a series of urban walks, and conversations, highlighting what makes shared public paces work, or not.

When your culture and spaces enable people to create, innovation flourishes.

# Transform through conversations



Conversations are the building blocks of change.



Conversations bring us together. And when we are together, we are much more comfortable with change – personal change, community and organizational change. We can handle anything, as long as we are together.

Conversations help us get from here to there. Conversations help us see what was, help us reflect on where we are now and what might be, and help us embody the new.

Conversations help us build trust. And, when we trust the group we're in, something special happens. We are freed to be ourselves, to act, knowing that if we falter, the group will pull us through. Count on it!

It doesn't surprise me when participants arrive for mediation without having discussed their dispute with the other party. And, it comes as no surprise to me, too, when after conversation, their issues get resolved.

Through conversation we discover shared meaning, and when that meaning changes, we are changed. Nowhere is this more important than community conversations, where the big challenges of our day hit home, as Paul Born and the Canadian-leading [Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement](#) know all too well.

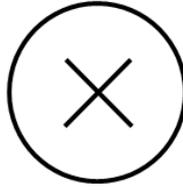
Conversations connect the organization to more of itself, a sign of a healthy living system.

There are so many ways to have a conversation; peer to peer meetings, with consensus building techniques such as conversation cafés or Open Space Technology, over food, through photo sharing, while watching a movie at someone's home...

With the social web, the new "town squares", the conversation is everywhere.

Join the conversation. Lead the change. Solve the problem.

# Make it safe to fail



People are more willing give of themselves when their safety is assured.



Create workplace environments that are inviting, that allow people to take risk; to fully engage others in authentic conversation, “to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together”. (Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline*)

Collaborative leaders know that safety comes first. Safety is a basic human need. People with a sense of security and belonging are stabilized for difficult conversations, learning, creating, and innovating. “A group of wonderfully cared for, confident individuals will generate great ideas.” ([John Sweeney](#), author & creativity consultant)

Make it safe to talk. In mediation, confidentiality is always a concern. Up front, I get everyone to agree on the rules of engagement. It sets positive expectations for the difficult conversations that follow.

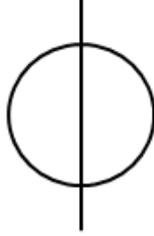
Safety respects time; the time it takes to master anything, using 10,000 hours; a benchmark popularized by [Malcolm Gladwell](#).

The roots of innovation typically involve experimentation, failure, and time. It takes 2 years for bamboo to build its' roots and break ground, and then it can grow 100 feet in the next 2 years! – treat people this way.

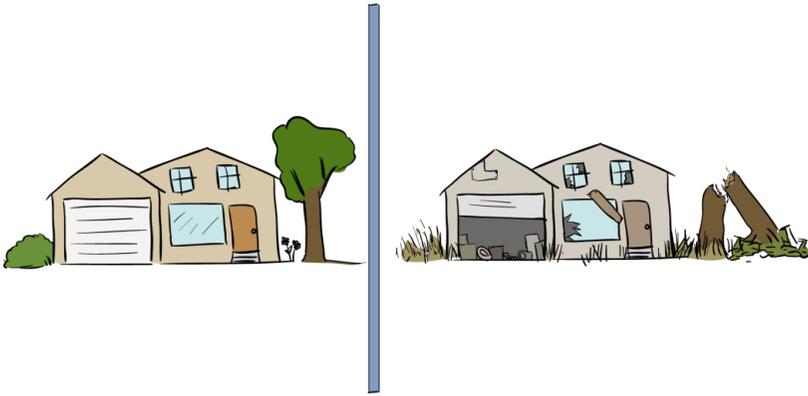
The virtual medium offers us new frontiers to navigate, and make safe for people, to be their best. Andrea Weckerle (founder of [CiviliNation](#)) authored *Civility in the Digital Age*, a highly accessible and practical guide, on that front.

Help people open up to discovery, and a way forward.

# Welcome paradox



Together, we work with positive intention and action. Yet, the future is uncertain.



We live in two worlds - order and chaos. In the world of order, we plan, reflect, and think about what to do next. In the world of chaos, things happen, we get things done, yet unpredictability persists.

In one world, we like to think we are in control. In the other, we mingle with increasing complexity, conflict, and uncertainty. One person: two worlds.

Social innovation leader Tonya Surman created the [Constellation Collaboration Model](#) as a way to reconcile those two worlds.

Great relationships, and collaborations, often arise from “the tension of the opposites”. We need collaborative workspaces; spaces where our views can be challenged, where different perspectives than our own are accessed, and our certitudes given a healthy reality test.

On the flipside, we gravitate to those like us, and those who like us, says [Kare Anderson](#), an expert on connective behaviors.

The 'open source' software development approach, pioneered by Brian Behlendorf and others, includes "the right to fork" rule. That rule allows each participant in the collaborative to divert, go their own way, and leave with a complete copy of the product design in their hands... a collaboration paradox!

As in the Chinese concept of yin-yang, opposites, complementary and interdependent, are welcomed in collaborative spaces.

# **Collaborative Problem-Solving Techniques**

To access the remainder of this ebook, including 16 problem-solving techniques, you will need to purchase a copy of *Picture Collaboration* from an ebook distributor.

*Picture Collaboration* will be available, in January 2014, from all major online bookstores.