

Purposeful Conversations: Lessons from Tanenbaum Peacemakers for the Workplace

The 2021 Religious Diversity Leadership Summit, with the theme of Do the Work: Build a Bigger Table, featured a session on Purposeful Conversations: Lessons from Tanenbaum *Peacemakers* for the Workplace. This session recording can be [viewed here](#). This resource is a compilation of the key takeaways from that presentation that can be implemented in workplaces across industry, region, and regardless of employee position.

Tanenbaum's Peacebuilding team works to highlight the incredible efforts of faith-inspired peacebuilders. The ***Peacemakers in Action Network*** is currently comprised of 30 people from conflict and post-conflict zones around the world. Listen to firsthand experiences and explore examples of how peacebuilding techniques can be applied in the workplace to support purposeful and authentic discussions and relationship building across differences.

Reframing from “Difficult” Conversations to “Purposeful” Conversations

We're reframing the conversation from difficult to purposeful because we believe the term “purposeful” more closely aligns with the intended outcomes of holding space for these types of conversations in the workplace. ***What is purposeful?*** Oxford Dictionary defines it as “having or showing determination or resolve; intentional.”

Purposeful conversations can be *more* than aspirational; they can also be intentional, actionable, and accessible. They give us a foundation from which to build, underscoring that the intent behind these types of conversations matters.

Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action

Tanenbaum *Peacemakers* are grassroots, religiously motivated peacemakers located in 23 countries, many from conflict or post-conflict environments. Every few years, new *Peacemakers* are added to the network, joining folks in supporting one another in their local peacebuilding efforts.

Purposeful conversations are an inherent part of the work *Peacemakers* do, both in their local work as well as their collaborative interventions with other *Peacemakers* – [examples can be explored here](#). This shows up in different ways across a variety of scenarios.

Key Characteristics of Religious Peace Actors

Through Tanenbaum's case studies on the work of the *Peacemakers*, we identified key peacebuilding characteristics that are also applicable to workplaces. These characteristics tie in *action* and *skills*. They are things we can learn to do and practice.

1. **Emotional intelligence:** ability to perceive, manage and regulate emotions – psychology often notes it as including: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills
2. **Recognizing the humanity in the “other”:** intentional emphasis on similarities over differences, acknowledge innate struggle of being human
3. **Communicating across cultural and societal boundaries:** navigate within and across cultures, understanding local context
4. **Internalizing – and seeking to alleviate – the human costs of conflict**
5. **Creative problem solvers:** respond with innovation, resourceful, open to alternative solutions
6. **Faith-based freedom from fear:** fear does not dictate action, but acknowledge reality and avoid overly dangerous courses of action

Peacemaker Common Techniques

Tanenbaum also identified common techniques *Peacemakers* use in their work. Some translate more smoothly than others to the workplace; all of the techniques are listed below for your consideration; however, we recognize they may not be applicable in all situations.

1. Use of religious texts
2. Use of religious & cultural rituals & traditions
3. Religious peacemaking through the written word
4. The power of the pulpit
5. Adapting secular and/or western practices for religious peacemaking
6. Interfaith mobilization as a tool in peacebuilding
7. Philosophies of nonviolence and zones of peace
8. Use of religion in debate and finding common ground
9. Peace education as foundation for ending conflict and sustaining peace
10. Awakening the global community

In their own analysis, Tanenbaum’s Workplace team highlighted technique number six: **interfaith mobilization as a tool in peacebuilding**. Though some others might also have some direct or indirect application in professional settings, interfaith mobilization held some of the broadest applications and implications for workplace settings (potential examples noted below in *Purposeful Conversations: Workplaces*).

Takeaways & Applications: Imam Ashafa & Pastor Wuye

Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye are religious leaders from Kaduna, northern Nigeria. They work together to teach peaceful ways to resolve conflict - but didn't start out as peacemakers. A documentary, [The Imam and the Pastor](#), was created about their work and can be viewed online.

Lessons from Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye's work, many of which are applicable in the workplace, are outlined below:

- Model transformed relationships
- Train people in conflict resolution
- Local application
- Intentionally diversify and include
- Communicate across boundaries
- Accommodation and respect

Takeaways & Applications: Rev. Jacky Manuputty

Indonesia based Reverend Jacklevyn "Jacky" Frits Manuputty responded to the killings and displacement of thousands with peace campaigns and advocacy, both nationally and internationally. In the last two decades Reverend Manuputty co-founded the Maluku Interfaith Institution for Humanitarian Action, a peacebuilding community development organization, and formed groups of youth "Peace Provocateurs" to limit the scope of conflicts and spread of violence.

Lessons from Reverend Manuputty's work. Also applicable to workplaces, is highlighted below:

- Positive peace vs negative peace: contributing to peace vs the absence of conflict
- Change attitudes, behaviors, & norms
- Peacebuilding is multilevel *and* multi-stakeholder
- A long term, collaborative process

Purposeful Conversations: Workplaces

1. **One-on-one conversations:** foster relationships, help educate and learn about others, and exercise emotional intelligence.
2. **Host collaborative or internal ERG discussions:** a natural environment for hosting some of these purposeful conversations, or preparing for them. An ERG could host a conflict resolution training, an interfaith panel, or an upcoming holiday lunch and learn.
3. **Reach out to new (to you) colleagues:** build relationships, creating a foundation to build on with purposeful conversations
4. **Move beyond your comfort zone:** being aware of our blind spots and challenging ourselves to do the work, to branch out and learn something new, will only make us better equipped to use our emotional intelligence and communicate across differences.
5. **Explore intersectionality:** race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, abilities, & more
6. **Remember that purposeful conversations (and peacebuilding) take time**

For more useful information on world religions, subscribe to Tanenbaum's online resource, [Religion at Work: A \(Human\) Resource](#). Visit the [Tanenbaum Workplace Resources page](#) for additional Tanenbaum fact sheets and contact Tanenbaum at membership@tanenbaum.org.