

Resource: *Weekly Leadership Contemplations* by Amanda Ridings

This is a hybrid of a book club/action learning set and offers a framework for contemplating leadership in a small self-directed group. The approach is to use my book, *Weekly Leadership Contemplations*, to stimulate collective reflection on leadership. The book is structured under four themes and each section has 13 pieces accompanied by questions to support contemplation.

How it might work...

A group of 4-6 people agrees to meet for 90 minutes every month for six months. You can choose how you 'meet' – I prefer conference calls to video interfaces, as this seems to support deeper listening. You can also meet in-person, where circumstances allow. The six sessions allow for a 'getting started' session, a session for each section of the book and a closing session.

For sessions 2 to 5, each participant chooses a piece from the relevant section of the book as a foundation for sharing their reflections with others.

Before session one - preparation

Ask everyone to read the preface to get a sense of the spirit of the book. In addition, read the paragraphs on leadership on page 130, and gather your own thoughts on how you see leadership: what does it represent for you?

Finally, reflect on the words of the poet Rilke at the beginning of the book:

'... have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them... Live the questions now. Perhaps... you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.'


Using the concept of 'loving the questions', ask everyone to reflect on:

- What are you curious about in terms of your own leadership practice and development that might seem a bit vague or unfathomable?
- What might you not yet know or understand, that will make a difference to your leadership in the future? What question does this bring to light?

If you can identify a question to love, it will provide a personal 'theme' for your reading and contemplations and for the group conversations.

Session one - getting started

In the first session, the focus is on introductions, scene-setting and agreeing how you will hold the space for your conversations. Spend the first 30 minutes checking in individually, sharing your reasons for joining the group and any thoughts about what leadership represents for you.



In the next 30 minutes, explore what you will put in place to support you to listen well and speak freely – it might be helpful to include qualities like being respectful, paying attention, being curious about different views and being candid. Also consider practical things such as how to handle interruptions and unreliable tech and how you will make sure the sessions happen and that everyone arrives ready to participate.

It can be helpful to capture a few key words about the qualities of the holding space and share them as a reminder before each of the remaining sessions.

In the final 30 minutes, you might each share the question you've chosen to love as you read the book and talk with each other.

Preparation for sessions two to five – contemplating leadership

In preparation for session 2, read (at least) one piece from the section entitled 'Self-leadership' and spend some time reflecting on the contemplation questions. For each subsequent session repeat this process for the next section of the book (session 3, Leadership in conversations; session 4, Leadership perspectives; session 5, Leading and learning).

Sessions two to five

You might start with a short mindfulness practice to support you all to 'arrive' and settle. Then check-in briefly – how are you today? This dialogue practice supports you to tune into each other, before getting to work.

Briefly remind each other of the kind of space you've agreed to hold together. Then take time for each person to share which piece they read, and what it prompted in them. Don't interrupt or comment, simply allow space to speak. Allow about 30 seconds of silence after each person speaks.

Spend most of the remaining time exploring any themes that arise, saving 10 minutes or so for 'checking out', where each person briefly outlines what they're taking from the conversation.

Preparation for session six

Ahead of the final session, read the final piece, Coda: rejoicing, and reflect on how it feels to bring this series of conversations to a close. In addition, revisit the question you chose to 'love' – how are you living your way to an answer?

Session six – harvesting

In the final session, spend time checking in then take time for each person to outline where they're at with the question they've chosen to love: what is changing? It might be the question itself that has changed! Then explore what you've learned through the group conversations, and then say your farewells.