

What Level Are Your Discussions On?

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Level 1 – Chewing Gum

A handful of dominating contributors. Most hear, but few listen. A topic is mentioned & there's a series of thinly related anecdotes or monologues about it ("topic netball"). By the third contribution, people have stopped paying attention secretly or overtly, and break into separate discussions. No questioning, no reasoning, no common exploration of ideas, no reciprocity. Nothing is learned or advanced in terms of ideas or relationships. Like eating chewing gum... the flavour quickly runs out, it's un nourishing, and you can't wait to bin it.

Level 2 – Grey Food

Around half of the group participate. There's a vague & implicit sense of a question or idea that's being investigated. A few previous contributions are used or built upon. There are the beginnings of reciprocity through questioning, agreeing & disagreeing with each other. A few opinions are justified or exemplified. Most people listen to some of what's said. Some people still dominate the air time unfairly. Like the grey food at a cheap conference buffet... a few edible nibbles on offer, but it's well short of a decent meal.

Level 3 – Supermarket Picnic

Most people contribute, and their opinions are generally engaged with. There's a basic awareness of inclusion, and the topic of discussion (question / theme / concept) has been explicitly shared. Opposing views are respectfully expressed. A line of enquiry is roughly maintained. Some reasons and examples are offered. Like a supermarket picnic... most of the fare is tasty, shared fairly, and satisfying (despite moments of discomfort and the occasional distraction from insects).

Level 4 – Home Cooking

There's a warmth, trust, and inclusivity to the discussion. It's collaborative, caring, and creative at times. People aim to clarify a common purpose, their terminology, ideas, and they create meaning. As a result, everyone's perspectives are enriched. There's a shared sense of a forward movement to the discussion, but no need for consensus. Like home cooking... this is nourishing and fulfilling. Each course might not be your favourite, but the care and conviviality carry the day.

Level 5 – Fine Dining

This is Home Cooking with more critical thinking and welcome challenge to ideas. Participants are open-minded and modify their thinking willingly as interest lies in the search for better understanding, not debating for victory. People are fully engaged in the artful play of critical, creative, collaborative and caring thinking. Everyone feels – as well as thinks – in refreshed ways at the end, and leave reluctantly. Like fine dining... this is an occasion to be treasured and remembered. Indeed, immediately planned for again...