

Leadership Topics

A Comparison of Dialogue & Debate

Real dialogue is a collaborative, non-competitive activity in which people seek both increased understanding & common ground. It embraces complexity and flexibility, finding space for diverse viewpoints. In contrast, debate may be contentious, high voltage; it often values the ability to prevail over an opponent.

Dialogue	Debate
Talking with others	Talking at others
Collaborative – 2 or more sides working together towards common understanding	Oppositional – 2 sides opposing each other in an attempt to prove each other wrong
Listening to other views in order to understand, find meaning, reach accommodation or agreement	Listening to the other side in order to find flaws and areas of difference & disagreement
Enlarges, broadens, influences (maybe towards change), participant point(s) of view	Affirms participant point(s) of view
Can complicate positions and issues	Aims to simplify positions and issues
Is flexible in nature	Is rigid in nature
Stresses the ability to synthesize	Stresses the ability to analyse
Strives for multiplicity of perspective	Strives for singularity in perspective
Calls for a temporary suspension of individual beliefs	Calls for investing wholeheartedly in individual beliefs
Everyone is part of the problem in dialogue	One person, position, solution or viewpoint, wins over the other
Affirms the idea of people learning from and with each other (in collaboration)	Affirms the idea of people individually (or a lobby) in competition with each other
Remains open-minded – an open 'system'	Insists on a final answer