
COMMUNITY BUILDING PROMPTS

Friendship Is Strategy

Episode 8: Reflection & Discussion Guide

How to Use These Prompts

These prompts invite honest conversation about the relational infrastructure that keeps movements from collapsing under pressure. Use them in leadership cohorts, coalition retrospectives, team debriefs, or any space where people can speak truthfully about what makes it possible — or impossible — to stay together when things get hard.

Ways to engage:

- Facilitation circles
- Leadership development programs
- Post-conflict team reflections
- Coalition sustainability planning
- Organizer peer support groups
- Written reflections after a breakdown or breakthrough

The Core Framework

The central claim of this episode:

Friendship is infrastructure, not extra.

It's what allows strategy to survive the reality of change that matters.

Friendship, in this context, is not about socializing or liking each other. It's about:

- Relational familiarity
- Emotional credibility
- A history of mutual regard
- The ability to assume good intent under stress

Discussion Prompts

What relationships in your work would not survive real conflict right now?

Be specific. Name the relationships — with colleagues, funders, coalition partners, board members — that feel fragile. What makes them fragile? Is it weak ties? Power imbalance? Lack of history? Surface niceness covering avoidance? If real disagreement surfaced tomorrow, which relationships would break — and what would that cost?

Where are you relying on goodwill instead of real relationship?

Think about the places where you're assuming people will "figure it out" or "work it out" without having built the relational foundation for that to actually happen. Are you counting on positivity to carry you through tension? Are you banking on shared mission to substitute for knowing each other? Where is your group running on fumes of niceness instead of the fuel of friendship?

Who would still stay in the room with you when things get uncomfortable — and why?

Name the people. Then ask yourself: what makes those relationships different? Is it time? Shared history? Mutual regard? Have you invested in them — or has it just been luck? What would it take to build that kind of relational strength with others on your team? And critically: have you invested in that relationship, or are you just hoping it will hold?

Guidelines for Dialogue

Be honest about fragility Most groups overestimate how much relational equity they have. Name the weakness without shame.	Distinguish niceness from friendship Surface harmony is not the same as deep safety. Don't confuse politeness with resilience.
Center the most exposed BIPOC leaders are more vulnerable without relational equity. Who needs protection — and are they getting it?	Commit to investment, not just awareness Naming the problem isn't enough. What will you actually do to build relational strength?

DEEPER REFLECTION

The Costs of Weak Relationships

The episode names what happens when friendship is missing. Consider:

“When has disagreement been interpreted as betrayal in your group?”

Think of a time someone disagreed and the group reacted as if they'd violated loyalty. What made the disagreement feel like betrayal? Was it because there wasn't enough relational foundation to hold difference? What was the cost — to the person, to the work, to trust?

“Where do mistakes get read as moral failures instead of learning moments?”

Who gets grace when they mess up — and who doesn't? Is there a racialized or power-based pattern? Without relational equity, mistakes become character indictments. With it, mistakes become growth opportunities. Which dynamic dominates your group?

“Who is over-functioning to compensate for weak relationships?”

In groups without strong relational ties, certain people become the glue — translating, smoothing, bridging, holding it together. Who's doing that in your group? What happens if they burn out or leave? Are you building collective relational strength, or relying on individual heroics?

BONUS

For Groups in Crisis

If your group is currently experiencing breakdown or fragmentation, try this reflection:

“Did we have enough relational equity to survive what just happened?”

Look back at the moment of crisis or conflict. Was the problem the disagreement itself — or was it that the relationship couldn't hold the disagreement? If you had stronger ties, would the outcome have been different? What relational investments should you have made earlier?

Follow-up question:

“Can we still repair — or is it too late?”

Be honest. If the relational damage is deep, acknowledge it. If repair is possible, what would it require? Time? Structured conversation? Accountability? A facilitator? Don't rush to “move forward” without doing the relational work. But also — don't assume it's too late if people are still willing to try.

PRACTICE TOOL

Creating Shared Language for Relational Health

The episode recommends building shared language so groups can name relational strain before it breaks. Try these phrases:

“We're low on relational capital”

“This feels fragile”

"We need to slow this down"

"We're asking too much of the relationship right now"

"We need time that isn't about deliverables"

"Let's invest in relationship before we tackle this"

"Do people still want to be here together?"

Group reflection:

Which of these phrases would help your group? What other phrases do you need? How would you normalize using them?

COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Commitment to Action

After engaging with these prompts, what will you actually do?

One relational ritual we will create:

Examples: monthly story rounds, shared meals, non-task check-ins, paired cross-difference conversations

One vulnerable relationship we will invest in:

Name the weak tie. What will you do to strengthen it?

One norm we will establish to protect relationships:

Examples: "We slow down when stakes rise," "We protect truth-tellers," "We pause before decisions when tensions are high"

Movements don't fail from lack of passion. They fail from lack of relational trust.

Friendship is what keeps the boat upright when the water gets rough.