Excerpted from C. Roland Christensen, David A. Garvin, and Ann Sweet. 1991. Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School.

The following observations from selected chapters are to be used as we attempt to fashion a " tool" for using the discussion approach effectively.

Chapter 1.   David Garvin, "Barriers and Gateways to Learning"

"Skilled teachers are commonly identified by their ability to deliver pithy summaries or to untangle complex truths. Students are seldom factored into the equation, and for the simplest of reasons: learning is assumed to have little relationship to their contributions or level of involvement" (5).

"Only if teachers and students work as partners will be true ends of education – the ability to use knowledge, to think creatively, and to continue learning on one's own –be achieved. Such goals are unlikely to be met in a process dominated by teachers, because true education requires students to be personally invested in the learning process "(5).

"What, then, or the core assumptions of the teacher-centered and active learning models? The teacher-centered model sees information transfer as the primary goal of education; active learning focuses on skill development, the integration and use of knowledge, and the cultivation of lifelong learning. The teacher-centered model assumes that facts and concepts can be learned without experiencing or directly applying them; the active learning model is wary . . . of 'inert ideas . . . that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations.' The teacher-centered model insists on the primacy of content and subject matter; active learning gives equal weight to process and classroom climate. The teacher-centered model regards the classroom as the instructor's private preserve; active learning sees teaching is important enough to be subject to the same standards of oversight, assistance, and review as scholarly research. And the teacher-centered model believes that instructors are the hub around which the classroom revolves, while active learning grants students are more authority and autonomy" (8).

". . . the instructor speaks about different things. He or she turns from definitive summaries to questions that open up discussion, from preplanned speeches to transitional and bridging comments that link together students' observations, and from establishing a party line to open-ended responses that stimulate and provoke thinking. Yet the instructor's responsibility for what happens in the classroom is in no way diminished. Indeed, teachers are now responsible for both process – the who, how, and when of discussion – and content . . . To that end, proper preparation is essential. But preparation now means exploring multiple paths of inquiry, rather than mapping out a singular linear flow" (11).

"Genuine discussions are thus quite different from the Socratic method, in which conclusions are preordained and the instructor's goal is to lead students to a particular answer or through an established line of reasoning" (11).

"Skillful discussion leaders therefore try to assist students in the process of discovery. Their initial aim is to move the entire class forward, using a combination of probing questions, sensitive listening, and encouraging responses; their long-term goal is to build the group's capacity for self- discovery and self-management" (12-13).

Chapter 2. C. Roland Christensen. "Premises and Practices of Discussion Teaching."

"Lecturing, which emphasizes the instructor's power over the student, is a master-apprentice relationship of great power when the transfer of knowledge is the primary academic objective. But when the objective is critical thinking (in the liberal arts setting, for example) or problem-solving (in the professional school milieu), and the development of qualities such as sensitivity, cooperation, and zest for discovery, discussion pedagogy offers substantial advantages. To achieve these complex, value-laden educational goals, both teachers and students must modify their traditional roles and responsibilities" (16).

"In discussion teaching, partnership – a collegial sharing of power, accountability, and tasks – supplants hierarchy and asymmetry in the teacher-student relationship. The discussion process itself requires students to become profoundly and actively involved in their own learning, to discover for themselves rather than accept verbal or written pronouncements. They must explore the intellectual terrain without maps, step by step, and blazing trails, struggling past obstacles, dealing with disappointments. How different from simply following others' itineraries!
        Such creative activity cannot be ordered or imposed upon the unwilling. Teachers can police attendance and monitor the memorization of theory and fact by tests. But we cannot order are students to be committed to learning and willing to risk experimentation, error, and the uncertainty of explorations. Such attitudes are gifts from one partner to another" (17).

Chapter 6. C. Roland Christensen. "Every Student Teaches and Every Teacher Learns: The Reciprocal Gift of Discussion Teaching."

"Much of what we teachers do in the classroom seems intuitive. My task was to examine this apparently automatic behavior, show its workings, and identify areas in which judgment might play a part. 'Process,' whatever it might be, was clearly going to be the major focus of my attention" (103).

"I began to appreciate that these activities – questioning, listening, and responses – were the basic 'stuff' of process. I also realized that every discussion produced rehearsals of data, analysis, questions, challenges, and syntheses, but not necessarily in a predictable sequence. This insight suggested that one of the instructor's most crucial tasks is linking – explicitly relating, and helping students to relate, current points of argument to others that may have

appeared earlier that day or in the previous discussion. This point, I realized, had important implications for teaching preparation as well as discussion management" (104).

"And what is our work? To create a favorable learning climate, to set a teaching/learning contract, to ask and respond to questions, listening to contributions, and promote the formation of groups in which students can teach themselves and one another. All these are practical approaches to a process that cannot be abstracted without substantial loss of identity, for the discussion process is a true slice of life. Guiding it takes skill, patience, and the basic faith that one may learn, with time and effort, to preside over disorder without disorientation" (104-105).

The word process is vital to understanding the meaning of discussion. The teacher makes an error when confusing process with procedure. Procedure turns up discussion into a rigid enterprise. "Discussions are liquid. They do not moving straight lines; they undulate" (106).

"I have found it helpful to consider students' contribution to the leadership of the discussion process under 6 broad categories" (107ff)
        1. Students play a part in setting the agenda for the session.
        2. Student input affects the pacing of the session. The teacher's "learning logic may not match the student's learning logic."
        3. The degree of the students' intensity of interest in the topic can affect the pace of the discussion.
        4. The sorts of questions students ask of one another and the teacher affect the flow of the dialogue.
        5. Students can often communicate more effectively to one another because of their "ready emotional profiles of one another."
        6. Class culture affects the nature of discussion.

"The true learning space is psychological, not physical, and the teacher bears the primary responsibility for creating it" (112).

"Gradually I have abandoned my interest in final outcomes – whatever they may be –and begun to derive satisfaction from the act of teaching itself. When I consider the innumerable gradations that intervene between success and failure, the complex natures of the parties involved, and the magnitude of the daily efforts that go unevaluated, I marvel at the imponderability of long-term effects. I have learned that wisdom and effectiveness lie in a constant struggle for improvement, rather than a quest for final results. Like virtue, teaching is its own reward. For me this means that if I practice and hone my skills, welcome observation and constructive criticism, and experiment and grow, my efforts may very well have an impact. Minor miracles do happen – often enough, in fact, to justify this hope" (114).

"Discussion leaders who fail to appreciate the constructiveness of inefficiency make a serious error. Efficient teaching does not always equate with effect of learning. On the contrary, students often discover valuable lessons at the end of blind alleys –lessons that we teachers cannot anticipate before they unfold in the discussion. What seems like a digression may link the challenge of the moment to prior explorations. Apparent tangents examine questions of the

students' creation, not because of any obvious link to the assignment of the day, but because they hold high, continuing intellectual interest for the students.

The syllabi we develop contribute to our impatience. There is always more to be taught than time to teach. A rigid, daily roster of material to cover pressures us to ignore crucial elements of context . . The cost of such rigidity can be high, even cruel" (115).

There are three essential elements for discussion teaching: knowledge of pedagogical concepts, mastery of process skills, and faith. Christensen identifies faith as the most influential elements. His articles of a in include the following statements (116-118):

"I believe that the profession of teaching is crucial to the maintenance and advancement of civilization. . . . To me, teaching carries an awesome responsibility to encourage students to want to know, to show them how to know, and to insist that they ask and answer the question 'For what purpose do *I* need to know?'"

"I believe in the teacher ability of teaching . . . Good teachers are made, not born."

"I believe that active involvement is critical to enduring learning."

"I believe that discussion leaders need to master both process skills as well as the substantive knowledge of their course."

"I believe that teaching is a moral act."

"I believe that what my students become is as important as what they learn."

"I believe that. . .' teachers must also learn.'"

"I believe that fund has a critical place in teaching."

"I believe that the teacher's challenge in evaluating students is less to separate the gifted from the ordinary than to find the gifts of the ordinary. And I believe that we must communicate our evaluations in a manner that helps students understand their competence, or lack thereof, without destroying their confidence. . . . At best, grades are imprecise measures even of academic achievement."

"I believe in the unlimited potential of every student."

"To give up on students is to give up on ourselves, and that I have never done."

Chapter 8. Herman Leonard. "With Open Ears: Listening and the Art of Discussion Teaching"

"A true discussion is not a question-and-answer session but a connected series of spoken ideas. Listening is the glue that holds together the whole process of questions, answers, and comments.

Developing good listening skills –both your own and your students' – will release a tremendous potential for creativity and idea development. In the more common one-on-one sequential discussion format, much of the mental energy of the group is unfocused. Good listening directs the power of the participant intellects to the same problem . Just as mental discipline allows an individual to focus energy on thinking through problem alone, effective listening and concentration enable a group to wield its mental energy collectively. Group concentration is difficult to attain, but can be enormously powerful" (145- 146).

The Leonard asserts that we should talk with our classes about the importance of listening before we began discussion process and throughout. Students seem to believe "that their main tasks are to *think* and to *speak*. When students are graded on classroom performance, it is almost always on the basis of what they say. But, if there is to be a true discussion, students will spend most of their time listening actively while others speak, then building on their classmates' contributions. Explaining the students' responsibility in this way can help them to understand the importance of listening carefully." (147).

Leonard suggests using listening exercises:
1. Ask students to rephrase the question after it has been asked.
2. Ask each student to recapitulate the previous speaker's comment.
3. Require the last speaker to ascertain and agree that the point has been understood before moving on.
4. Ask each speaker to demonstrate understanding of what was said by giving one or more implications.
5. Ask for a short analysis of the point made by the last speaker.
6. In some discussion sessions, require note-taking. Discuss what sort of note taking will be most effective. Ask students to hand in their notes after a discussion.

Chapter 9. C. Roland Christensen. "The Discussion Teacher in Action: Questioning, Listening, and Response."

"It would be hard to name the more valuable pedagogical accomplishment then the mastery of questioning, listening, and response . . ." (153).

"Mastery of questioning does not begin and end with framing incisive queries about the day's material. It requires asking the right question of the right student at the right time. By the same token, true listening involves more than close attention to words: it means trying to grasp the overtones and implications of each participant's contribution with empathy and respect. Response, probably the least understood of the three skills, means taking constructive action – action that benefits each student in the group – based on the understanding that one's listening has produced" (154).

Mastery of Questioning Technique

"On a very fundamental level, questions permit the lecturer or discussion leader to stimulate students to think about and analyze the day's assignment. They also provide means for testing and exploring the validity of students' comments. In discussion classes, however, they have other special properties. They make it possible for the teacher to guide the discussion process along paths that balance the instructor's desire for rigor and thorough coverage of material to the students' need to explore course content freely, in ways meaningful to them" (157).

"To integrate the diverse and sometimes contradictory contributions of the classes of whole, discussion teachers need to move beyond thinking in terms of individual questions. How? By

considering patterns of questioning –and this means taking the mental step back to link the question of the instant to upcoming, as well as prior, questions. I have found that patterns do usually emerge when I, as instructor, listen for them. Often, the questions I ponder silently in the heat of discussion give me valuable perspective on the class in progress. I ask myself what the questions of the past few minutes have in common. Are they predominantly informational, analytical, speculative, or something else? What is the emotional tone? As instructors begin to see questions in clusters, we can build a broad frame of inquiry that provides context for contributions to subsequent discussions as well as today's assignment" (157-158).

Questions can influence the intellectual and emotional tone of the dialogue. "For example, the teacher may ask a respondent to refer his or her question to another student in the room – perhaps one who has previously made a point relevant to the question of the moment. Or one might ask to students to give their reactions to a colleague's comment in sequence. The instructor can guide the discussion by specifically asking a speaker to build on the previous comment, by calling for role-playing, or by asking for a devil's advocate rebuttal" (158).

Christensen offers a typology of questions. Refer to pp. 159-160 for examples he gives related to each element of the typology. Develop questions examples more pertinent to your work and context.

<u>The Typology</u>
Open-ended questions
Diagnostic questions
Information-seeking questions
Challenge (testing) questions
Action questions
Questions on priority and sequence
Prediction questions
Hypothetical questions
Questions of extension
Questions of generalization

"I tend to lower the abstraction level of questions –work with specifics – to increase the personal involvement of participants or emphasize an applied 'this needs to be done' line of discussion. Conversely, I tend to raise the abstraction level of questions to encourage students to broaden their perspectives, summarize, generalize, or redirect focus to important areas as yet untouched in this particular discussion" (161).

"Questioning lies at the core of any academic activity, from mastery a field of study to planning a research project to organizing a semester course or a daily teaching plan or working out a relationship with one's students. . . . To promote a spirit of eager inquiry, the discussion leader should encourage students to question themselves, their peers, the instructor, the organization of the course, and presented facts in general. . . .
       A pervasive spirit of inquiry – something far more profound than a predilection for asking numerous questions –can turn the barrenness and 'endingness' of answers into the

richness and openness of exploring the yet-to-be-known. Answers often simply aren't! They are merely launching pads for further exploration, places to prepare for the creation of new and more insightful questions. Yet much of our education system reinforces getting the answer as the ultimate goal of learning. Students have so often been trained to memorize and feed answers back to teachers for approval (read 'grades'). Rarely does an examination ask students to list questions that the course has posed for them. We are, as Paolo Freire noted, working within a pedagogy of answers rather than questions" (163). [Review Rilke's wonderful comment on page 163 with regard to loving the questions themselves.]

Listening

"The discussion leader needs to listen to each comment with at least two objectives in mind: to gauge the individual student's command of substantive material and the logic of his or her argument, and to assess the potential contribution of the comment to the group's continuing dialogue" (164-165).

Christensen continues with further listening guidelines on page 164.

- "I listen for continuity: the relationship of the speaker's point of the moment to previous and expected dialogue."
- "I also attempt to gauge the speaker's involvement." Detached? Player in the drama?
- Another aspect of dialogue that disciplined listening can detect is certitude of judgment." Cast in stone? Best current position? "In this context, the instructor can listen for the student's sensitivity to the strengths and weaknesses of his own presentation."
- "The instructor can learn a great deal by watching the mechanics of presentation."
- "Listening to each student and to the whole class simultaneously is artistry of high order. Is the class listening en masse, or, as typically happens, are there pockets of attention and areas where subgroups appear to have to tuned out? What lies on the other side of their silence?"
- "As the dialogue unfolds, I listen not only for the content of students' comments but for their ability to listen to others and their sensitivity to their own filters. And I try, while listening to others, to listen to my own listening. Where are my barriers? Where do my own firmly held convictions interfere with my understanding?"

Response

"The deceptively simple act of responding to a student's just stated contribution completes our triad of core skills. . . .This instructor has found responding to be the most demanding of the trio."

"Many varieties of response are possible. For example, one might ask a further question, restate the speaker's points, request additional information, or offer a personal analysis."

To help with the process of response, Christensen offers a three step response regimen (see pp. 167-168).

1. He listens to the student's comment to "understand and evaluate its academic worth and simultaneously I prepare for what to say and do when the commentary has been complete." He uses a "decision tree" to help him decide what to say and do: he will either "continue the teacher-to-student discouse or shift to a student-to-student mode." In teacher-to-student discourse, he can explore the comment (clarifying assumptions, checking quality of analysis, or reasonableness of conclusions); he can extend breadth and depth of comments; he can challenge the comment.
In student-to-student discourse he can turn the question back to the class; re-ask the question or ask a related question; or ask two students to offer two contrasting perspectives.

2. He seeks to discern the effect of the dialogue on the student personally.

3. Christensen offers a number of practical guidelines to move the dialogue forward (see 169-170):
- "I correct, or call into public question, only major errors of fact or judgment, not minor misstatements of content or inconsequential flaws in the logic of an argument. It is an ineffective use of class time to seek perfection in every contribution."
- "When I do try to clarify a questionable conclusion, I offer the student an immediate opportunity to restate or reformulate his position or conclusion as well as an opportunity to question me."
- If the student offers, and presents well, a creative comment but one that is far wide of the discussion at hand, he acknowledges the response and says he will return to it later or discuss it after class.
- When the group has missed the importance of a comment he asks the student to restate the comment and suggests to the group that they may not have heard the full import or implications of what was said.
- He minimizes public praise of superior comments in favor of "having her peers recognize that accomplishment through their attentiveness, succeeding questions, and statements of approval."
- When confronted with an emotional comment, he responds to the affective component first.
- When a previously quiet individual enters the discussion, he most often offers a supportive response.