Expanded Guide: Making Room for Other People

On Stoic Living Discussion Series · Guide 5 of 12 · May

For facilitators. Read before the meeting, after the Meeting Primer and the core reading (about 15 minutes).

The Meeting Primer provides the readings and terms. The meeting guide gives the flow. Use this guide to keep the conversation focused on the aim a person forms and the response they may begin to require.

What the discussion and application are for

Hear the practical reason for protected mornings and the colleagues' care responsibilities. Examine whose good the aim includes before proposing a schedule, then test any demand for gratitude or agreement. A wider aim can be understood while the schedule remains unresolved. Generous words and another person's gratitude do not establish that desire has changed.

May trains desire in the service of justice. We notice whose good is absent from what we want, form a wider aim, and examine whether we require agreement or recognition before our concern seems worthwhile.

The shared case comes from Week 19. Scheduling is familiar, and the conflict has room for more than one reasonable arrangement. Resist the temptation to spend the meeting choosing a time. Ask what the participants want that time to make possible and whose interests they include.

Week 18 brings an overlooked person's welfare closer in concern. Week 19 includes affected interests in a personal aim. Week 20 examines dependence on approval. Week 21 retains goodwill while another person's answer remains theirs. The three steps synthesize that progression into one exercise.

A concern can be sincere and still carry a demand. Someone may want colleagues to manage their care responsibilities while also expecting them to praise the effort made. Examine the expectation without denying the original concern.

Progress concerns what a person comes to want and how willingly they retain goodwill. A working schedule may be evidence about the situation, but agreement alone cannot show that desire changed. The shared aim can become more inclusive even while the practical decision remains open.

Leading it Socratically

- **Give the original want a fair hearing.** Ask what protected mornings make possible. The speaker is one of the people whose legitimate interests matter.
- **Bring an absent person into view.** Ask what the colleagues' obligations mean for an aim that could include them.
- **Ask for a wider aim before a solution.** "I want a workable meeting time that takes care responsibilities seriously" gives the group something to examine.
- **Test the expected return.** Ask what happens to goodwill if a proposal is declined or goes unrecognized.
- **Distinguish known interests from guesses.** A sincere wish can still rest on an inaccurate view of someone else's circumstances.
- **Keep the conclusion the speaker's.** Restate what they said, ask one question, and give them room to revise or retain it.

0–10 minutes — Open and encounter the case

Welcome everyone, explain the discussion agreements, and read the case aloud:

> You're choosing a time for your team's weekly meeting. Four o'clock protects your mornings for focused work. Two colleagues need to leave then to pick up their children.

Ask the opening question printed in the meeting guide. Hear two or three interpretations without settling them. Carry the differences straight into question 1. Prior weekly experience is welcome, but everyone has the facts needed here; no personal disclosure or practice report is required.

10–60 minutes — Discussion: five questions

Hear the practical reason for protected mornings and the colleagues' care responsibilities. Examine whose good the aim includes before proposing a schedule, then test any demand for gratitude or agreement. Hear competing reasons before introducing the full application method. The follow-ups are resources for inquiry, not a script that must all be completed.

Each question has a purpose, two follow-ups, and something to listen for. The first follow-up is printed as the probe.

1. Whose interests are easiest to leave out when a plan suits you?

Purpose: recognize where another person's good lies outside the aim.

- What makes the colleagues' needs easy to overlook here?
- If someone close to you had those constraints, what would you want considered?

Listen for a particular interest becoming visible. Someone's care obligation can matter before the group feels warmth or closeness toward them.

2. How could your aim include others without erasing your own needs?

Read Letters 48.1–3 here, when the group considers an aim that includes others. Ask how Seneca connects a friend's advantage with wider human fellowship. Test what that connection adds to the scheduling aim while retaining the person's own legitimate needs.

Purpose: form a wider aim that includes legitimate interests on each side.

- What would a wider aim sound like before choosing a time?
- What difference would tell you that your own preference still had too much weight?

Listen for an aim with substance. "I want everyone happy" may hide the claims that need attention. Ask whose interests it would preserve and what may remain unresolved.

3. What return might you expect for considering someone else?

Purpose: expose a demand for recognition attached to concern.

- If nobody thanked you, what would still make that concern worthwhile?
- How would you distinguish useful feedback from reassurance that you are a good colleague?

Listen for a private bargain such as "I considered you, so you should appreciate me." Fair credit and feedback may have practical value. Ask whether they have become what gives the concern its worth.

4. Can goodwill remain when someone rejects the help you offer?

Purpose: let the other person's answer remain theirs while retaining concern.

- What wish for their good could survive a different choice?
- What limit could you set that still left room for that wish?

Listen for care that allows disagreement. Agreement, gratitude, and compliance are different possible returns, each worth noticing if it starts to govern the aim.

5. What would show that you wanted the shared good differently?

Purpose: locate progress in the direction of desire.

- Could the time stay unresolved while your aim became more inclusive?
- What would you recall afterward to tell whether the colleagues' interests actually mattered to you?

Listen for a change in whose good is taken seriously or a demand that has loosened. Mere use of generous words does not settle whether the wish is sincere. Let a participant acknowledge mixed motives.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: When does “I know what is best for them” turn a wish for their good into a demand for their agreement? Ask what room remains to learn from the person.

60–80 minutes — Application: compare the aims

Compare “I want a time that protects my mornings” with an aim that also takes the colleagues’ care responsibilities seriously. Use Notice → Include → Loosen once. Introduce the refusal to test whether concern survives disagreement; the group need not choose the meeting time.

A wider aim can be understood while the schedule remains unresolved. Generous words and another person’s gratitude do not establish that desire has changed.

Keep sample responses in reserve until participants have offered and questioned their own accounts. Use the method once to test the discussion’s conclusions.

Ask the group to imagine one person forming the aim. The person need not be unusually selfish or generous. An ordinary preference is enough.

1. Notice. What do I want, and whose good is missing? Ask what the person wants four o’clock to provide. Then include what is already known about the colleagues. Avoid deciding what would be best for their families beyond the facts provided.

> **Sample response:** “I want uninterrupted mornings. I haven’t included the colleagues who need to leave for their children.”

A participant may say that everyone should manage their own schedule. Ask what that would mean for a shared meeting and whether the chosen time gives the colleagues a fair opportunity to take part.

2. Include. I want this, while taking their legitimate interests seriously. Have someone complete that sentence with a substantive aim. A general claim to care about everyone needs enough detail to show what entered the concern.

> **Sample response:** “I want protected time for focused work, while taking their care responsibilities and their participation in the meeting seriously.”

The group can identify conflicting interests without settling them. A wider aim may support retaining a preference if there are sound reasons. Ask whether the preference is still answerable to the claims that have entered the picture.

3. Loosen. If they respond differently, what goodwill can I keep? Ask what the person might expect for making room: gratitude, willingness to accommodate their own needs, or acknowledgment of their effort. The response they want may become a requirement.

> **Sample response:** "I would like my effort to be appreciated. If they still disagree, I can keep wanting a workable arrangement for them and for me."

A person might remain disappointed or need to state a limit. Ask what concern survives that limit and whether the limit can be justified apart from making the other person pay for refusing.

The reveal (if time allows). You offer another time, but a colleague says it will not work either and asks you to reconsider. What has changed in the aim?

> **Sample response:** "I feel I have already been accommodating. I am starting to want them to accept my effort as enough. I can question that demand and still care about finding a workable arrangement."

Invite a second response that recognizes limited capacity. The person could want the colleague's legitimate interests considered and still be unable to offer every possible time. This is a useful place to distinguish goodwill from an unlimited promise.

80–90 minutes — Close

Ask what became clearer or what question remains unsettled. Invite the reason for a changed view, and let a well-supported disagreement remain. End with the single take-home invitation and a brief transition to the next theme. The full method has already appeared during application; do not repeat its steps as an assignment.

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
"I should always give up what I want."	Wider concern removes one's own legitimate claims.	Ask what need the person's preferred time serves.
"If they reject it, I'm done caring."	An offer makes goodwill depend on acceptance.	Ask which wish for their welfare could remain.
"A good aim means everyone agrees."	Approval establishes just desire.	Ask what could improve in the aim while the decision remains open.
"They owe me thanks."	Concern becomes a private claim on the recipient.	Ask what made their interest worth considering in the first place.
"Their choices are theirs, so I needn't care."	The Fundamental Rule erases social concern.	Ask what the person's needs give us reason to want for them.

IF YOU HEAR...	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
“I know what they really need.”	Concern authorizes assumptions about another person’s life.	Ask what is known and what could be learned by listening.
“I shouldn’t be disappointed.”	Goodwill requires a pleasant response to refusal.	Ask what the disappointment leads the person to require.

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The accommodating member	Treats everyone’s needs as more important than their own.	Invite a fair statement of their legitimate interest.
The efficient planner	Wants to solve the schedule immediately.	Ask what aim their solution is serving and whom it leaves out.
The unrecognized helper	Waits for thanks before valuing concern.	Ask what reason for concern remains without recognition.
The protective adviser	Insists their plan is best for another person.	Ask what the person’s refusal might give them reason to learn.
The reluctant participant	Is unsure whether they mean a generous wish.	Welcome the honest uncertainty and keep the case available.
The expert	Explains social nature at length.	Ask what it would change about a sentence beginning “I want...”
The talker	Answers on behalf of the whole team.	Invite another willing member’s perspective without assigning a personal story.
The newcomer	Equates concern with unlimited help.	Use a justified limit and ask what goodwill could remain.

When an example is painful. Caring relationships can involve loss or a history of disagreement. Thank the speaker, let them pass, and return to the scheduling case if preferred. Members can examine a wish without having the group assess their relationship.

Questions you may be asked

“Does concern require the same feeling for everyone?” The lessons ask for genuine consideration of people whose good is easy to overlook. Particular relationships still carry different responsibilities. Willingness may grow before warmth does.

“Is this the circles exercise?” The month begins with Hierocles’s circles as a way to widen concern. This meeting follows the broader development through a shared aim, approval, and another person’s response. The three steps are a teaching synthesis of that development.

“Can I refuse to help?” Yes. A fitting limit can reflect real capacity and other responsibilities. Ask whether goodwill remains and whether the limit has a reason beyond punishing the person’s refusal.

“What if their choice seems unwise?” You may have reason to offer information or state a limit. Their agreement remains theirs. Examine whether concern for their welfare has become a requirement that they take your preferred route.

“Does accepting their choice rule out intervening?” Roles involving protection or safety may require action. This exercise examines the desire to determine another person’s agreement or guarantee an outcome. It leaves practical responsibilities available for judgment.

Adapting the practice and discussion

- **Mostly newcomers.** Stay with the scheduling case and ask for one overlooked interest and one expected return.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Use the reveal to test whether a wider aim survives a refusal. Invite a distinction between approval and compliance.
- **Online.** Read each step aloud, allow a pause, and invite short spoken responses. Passing is welcome.
- **A large group.** Let pairs form one wider aim for the same case. Hear what differs in the interests they included.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal or shorten question 2. Keep room to ask what concern survives a different answer.

After the meeting, send a short recap through your group’s usual channel with one or two insights or open questions and the single take-home invitation. Experiences and fresh questions are equally welcome at the next meeting.

Source lessons: On Stoic Living, Weeks 18–21.