



THE COMPROMISE TRAP

Clearness Committee Activity

The “Clearness Committee” is a method developed by the Quakers in the 1660’s to help individuals discern their path when they face an important choice or opportunity.

Whether we are choosing among career options, facing a painful situation, or wanting to step up to a new opportunity, it is immensely helpful to have a committed group of allies helping us sense our best path through new territory. One of the tricks with groups, though, is the risk of receiving advice that just doesn’t fit for us. To avoid this pitfall, the Clearness Committee is designed to *help you discern your own best path forward*.

The idea is simple: By listening closely and asking open and honest questions, your allies draw out your own best thinking, intuition and wisdom, your “inner teacher” if you will. Parker Palmer explains that this authentic, wise part of ourselves is like a shy wild animal, more likely to show up when the group waits quietly than when it crashes through the woods demanding answers and action.

Here is a simplified outline, based on Parker Palmer’s excellent book, *A Hidden Wholeness**:

Clearness Committee Activity

Personal Foundation: Find your real team

Purpose: To help an individual discern their path or next steps related to a decision or opportunity

Timing: 30 min to 3 hours (allow more time depending on the seriousness of the decision or opportunity)

Number: 4-6 people the focus person trusts, as diverse as possible

Location: Quiet comfortable setting with privacy and no distractions

Agenda:

Step	Details	Notes for Your Session
Set Up (5-15 min)	Review purpose and ground rules Silence until focus person is ready to begin Focus person describes issue	
Inquiry (20 min to 2:30 hours)	Members ask open & honest questions Focus person answers, but may pass any time Time for reflection between questions. Silence is fine; brevity is useful. Focus person or other members speak up if ground rules are broken.	

Step	Details	Notes for Your Session
Optional Mirroring (5-10 min)	If desired, focus person can request group members to mirror back the focus person's comments for the last 5-10 min. Otherwise, questions continue	
Ending (5 min)	Affirmations and celebrations of the focus person, each other, and the shared experience.	

Ground Rules

- Only open and honest questions; no advice-giving. Questions with embedded suggestions are considered advice, as are explanations and making connections. If asked to change behavior: no defending, just adapt.
- Double-confidentiality: 1: Nothing said is ever repeated. Give your notes to the person before you leave if face to face. 2: Don't approach the focus person later and refer to the session. They can seek group members but not vice versa. This gives the most confidence to speak freely.

Focus Person's Task:

Identify the problem as best as one is able. Offer background information that bears directly on the problem. Name whatever clues there may be about where you are headed with the problem.

Group Members' Task:

Our intent is to create and protect a space to be occupied only by the focus person. For the duration, we act as if we have no reason to exist except to hold them in a safe space, giving them our undivided attention, guarding the borders of that space against anything that might distract. The rules are designed to keep us from invading that space, drawing attention to ourselves. Our questions come from a desire to help the person's inner journey. We adopt an attitude of curiosity and interest, asking questions to which we cannot possibly anticipate the answer.

Other Roles

The facilitator opens the meeting and reviews the rules, monitors to ensure the rules are followed and closes the meeting on time. One member takes notes and gives them to the focus person, or a tape recorder may be used.

Variation

The focus person may write up a 2-5 page summary or tape record a short description of the issue prior to the session and distributes it to members. (The focus person will still need to describe the core of the issue at the session itself.)

* *A Hidden Wholeness (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), pp 134-149*