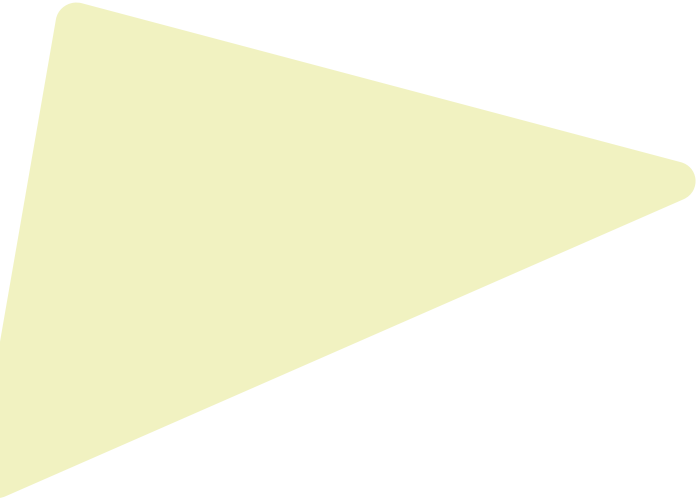


**MAKE WORK MATTER**  
CONVERSATION GUIDE

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**FULLER**  
DE PREE CENTER



**Project Lead**

Meryl Herr

**Project Support**

Chelsea Logan

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# MAKE WORK MATTER

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

Max De Pree Center for Leadership  
Fuller Theological Seminary

### OVERVIEW

*Make Work Matter: Your Guide to Meaningful Work in a Changing World* was written by Michaela O'Donnell, executive director of the Max De Pree Center for Leadership. This Conversation Guide is designed for those facilitating conversations on the book. The suggested discussion prompts and questions will work best for those who have read the assigned chapter and completed the exercise at the end of the chapter. However, you can frame some of the prompts and questions by giving a quick recap of the chapter and highlighting key ideas.



## SAMPLE SCHEDULES

Here are four sample schedules for reading and discussing the book.

### 4 WEEKS

Week	Activity
1	Introductions, Icebreaker, and Discuss chapter 1
2	Discuss chapters 2-4
3	Discuss chapters 5-7
4	Discuss chapters 8-10*

\*For the 4-week schedule, we recommend asking participants to read and think about chapter 11 on their own.

### 6 WEEKS

Week	Activity
1	Introductions, Icebreaker, and Discuss chapter 1
2	Discuss chapters 2-3
3	Discuss chapters 4-5
4	Discuss chapters 6-7
5	Discuss chapters 8-9
6	Discuss chapters 10-11



## 8 WEEKS

Week	Activity
1	Introductions, Icebreaker, and Discuss chapter 1
2	Discuss chapter 2
3	Discuss chapter 3
4	Discuss chapter 4
5	Discuss chapter 5
6	Discuss chapters 6-7
7	Discuss chapters 8-9
8	Discuss chapters 10-11

## INTRODUCTIONS

It's helpful to begin a group study by creating an environment that feels safe enough for people to be vulnerable with one another. One way to create such an environment is to begin with introductions. The following questions can be helpful in a variety of small group settings.

- Who are you? (Tell us a little bit about yourself, as if you were introducing yourself on a plane or in an elevator.)
- What brings you here today?



## ICEBREAKERS

These icebreakers will help participants begin to think about work that matters. Consider printing the questions on table tents for table discussions, or you could split participants into in-person or virtual small groups to discuss one group of questions at a time.

- Reflect back on all the work you've ever done (paid and unpaid). What stands out to you as "work that matters"?
- Who do you know that does "meaningful work"? Why do you see their work as meaningful? Do you see your work as meaningful? Why or why not?
- What kind of work do you think is meaningful to God? What has shaped your beliefs about work that you think is meaningful to God?



# NAME WHERE YOU'RE STUCK

Michaela describes the changing world of work and identifies three symptoms we can experience if this change is taking a toll on us. Those three symptoms are (1) feeling overwhelmed, (2) feeling anxious, and (3) feeling lonely.

- Which of those three symptoms resonates most with you?
- In what ways could the changing world of work be contributing to your symptom(s)?
- What are some of the other effects of this changing world of work?
- What's your biggest pain point in your work right now?
- What could that pain point reveal about what you're ultimately longing for in your work?



## LEAN IN AND LET GO

Michaela describes what it's like to live in a state of overwhelm because of our work. She gives a helpful framework for thinking about what's contributing to our sense of overwhelm and what can help relieve some of the stress. She talks about what's causing us to take on water in our boat and what helps us take water off our boat.

- What's causing you to take on water in your work right now?
- What helps you take water off the boat?
- As you listen to other people share, where are you feeling a sense of solidarity?
- What are you learning from others in the group?





# BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE CALLED

Michaela helps us explore our beliefs about work and calling. She believes we can have three dysfunctional beliefs about work: (1) that passion is the holy grail of work, (2) that we are what we do, and (3) that it all happens right away.

- Have you latched onto any of those dysfunctional beliefs? If so, what do you think contributed to the formation and nurture of those beliefs?
- In what ways does a theologically-informed understanding of work counter those dysfunctional beliefs?

Michaela also talks about the concept of calling, which has gone through numerous transformations over the centuries and across different theological traditions. She presents a new framework for thinking about calling: the *Nesting Dolls of Calling*. The four dolls are (1) the call to belong to Christ, (2) the call to work toward redemption, (3) the call to create, and (4) the call to particulars.

- In what ways do the *Nesting Dolls of Calling* help you think about your calling and work differently?



## WALK THE ENTREPRENEURIAL WAY

Michaela describes how entrepreneurial practices can help us get unstuck when we're feeling a bit paralyzed by feelings of overwhelm. She encourages us to adopt a mantra: *Seize opportunity. Create value. Face risk.*

*Seize opportunity* – Michaela says, “It takes a willingness to simultaneously grieve what was and hope for what might be. It takes both a posture of reflection and a bias toward action” (p. 101).

- When it comes to grief and hope, do you default toward one or the other? Why do you think that is? What would it take for you to pursue both and hold them in tension?
- When it comes to reflection and action, do you default toward one or the other? Why do you think that is? What would it take for you to pursue both and hold them in tension?



*Create value* – Michaela writes, “[O]ur work is an invitation to express our value to the world—to reflect that we bear the image of God and therefore all that we put our hearts and minds to are calibrated toward God’s north star of redemption” (p. 103).

- What might it look like to be calibrated toward the north star of redemption in your everyday work?
- What tends to pull you off course?

*Face risk* – Michaela adds, “Facing risk requires a steadiness and a confidence that come from within us and also from a sense that it’s not all about us” (p. 108).

- Are you risk-averse or a risk-taker?
- What’s one risk you’ve taken lately?
- What did you learn as a result of taking that risk?



## BE ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIPS

Michaela describes the value of relationships for walking the entrepreneurial way. They *help us close the gap* and *catalyze creativity*.

*Help us close the gap* - “Relationships help us close the gap between who we are and who we’re called to be. They help us listen in such a way that we see the manna God provides. The best relationships help us embody our faith in action and encourage us to continually move toward others as a central part of who we are becoming” (p. 119).

- Who in your life helps you close the gap between who you are and who God has called you to be?
- Can you share a story of a time when someone helped you close the gap?

*Catalyze creativity* – Michaela draws on the organizational culture at Disney to describe the power of a Braintrust.

- Describe a project or dilemma you’re currently facing at work. Then name 3-4 people you could invite to be part of your Braintrust.



# TRUST YOUR CREATIVITY

In this chapter, Michaela describes creativity from a theological perspective.

- Prior to reading this chapter, how would you have defined creativity?
- Do you consider yourself a creative person? Why or why not?

Michaela links our creativity with God’s cultural, or creative, mandate in Genesis 1:28. She describes creativity as (1) participation, or co-laboring with God; (2) anticipation, or creating in line with a redeemed, restored existence; and (3) collaboration, or building on the work of others and working with others. She also discusses creative confidence and says, “The fact that we *are* creative does not mean we are always able to access or trust our own creative capacity” (p. 138).

- What threatens your creative confidence?
- In what ways does rest help us develop our creative capacities?



# BUILD RESILIENCE

Michaela defines resilience this way: “Resilience is the ability not only to endure setbacks and stress but also to learn and perform well in light of them” (p. 151).

- Describe a setback or stressful situation you’ve experienced lately in your work.
- How did you respond at first?

*Fight* – Double down and press in

*Flight* – Withdraw or retreat

*Freeze* – Become paralyzed or stuck

- In what ways does lament provide a fourth way to respond?



# PRACTICE EMPATHY ALONG THE WAY

Michaela presents Daniel Goleman's framework for empathy which includes (1) cognitive empathy, (2) social empathy, and (3) empathetic concern. She helps us discover the role of empathy in the Parable of the Good Samaritan and then challenges us to move toward others in empathy.

- To what extent is empathy valued in your work context? What, if anything, makes it difficult to practice empathy in your work relationships?
- Where do you see empathy in the Parable of the Good Samaritan? As you reflect on this familiar biblical story from the perspective of empathy, what new insights do you have?
- Who do you sense God calling you to move toward in empathy? What are the risks in doing so? What could be the opportunities?
- Why is it important to show empathy to ourselves? What gets in the way and makes it so difficult?
- What is one way you can show empathy to yourself today?



# CONVERT EMPATHY INTO IMAGINATION

All of our lives are shaped by our vision of the good life, Michaela argues in the beginning of this chapter.

- What has shaped your vision of the good life?
- In what ways does your vision shape your actions in your life, work, and leadership?

Michaela also suggests that we can imagine alternatives to our insufficient or incomplete visions of the good life. “Whenever we let ourselves picture possibility, we are engaged in a holy act,” she writes (p. 195). In this chapter, Michaela challenges us to ask *What if...?* questions as a means to think creatively about what it could look like for us to follow Jesus by engaging in God’s mission of redemption in the world. But we have to begin by letting God reshape our imagination.

- What are some of the practices or habits that God could use to reshape your imagination?





# TAKE THE NEXT DOABLE RISKS

As we convert imagination into empathy, we may find an invitation to step into something new, to take a risk. In this chapter, Michaela draws on the entrepreneurial activity of risk-taking to help us develop courage for taking our next doable risks.

- What are some types of risks that you take on a daily basis?
- What is the value of prototyping or testing an idea prior to committing fully to it?
- Let's say that you sense that one of your next doable risks is having a conversation with someone who's an expert in their field. What might prototyping look like in this situation?
- How do you feel about the possibility of failing when taking a risk? Or the possibility of needing to tweak your prototype and reiterate, like an inventor?
- In what ways could failure be a place of growth?



# REFLECT ON WHERE YOU'VE BEEN

In this chapter, Michaela reminds us that taking our next doable risk isn't the final step in the entrepreneurial way; reflection is. She presents an important cycle of action-reflection-action and encourages us to (1) ask *What happened?* and (2) give thanks.

- Do you carve out time for reflection? Why or why not?
- What gets in the way of making space for reflection?
- What sorts of tools or frameworks do you use to help you reflect well?
- What tools or resources could help you reflect better?



## NEXT STEPS - JOIN A ROAD AHEAD COHORT!

Road Ahead is our six-week cohort originally designed by Michaela O'Donnell. It incorporates many of the entrepreneurial themes and some of the exercises presented in *Make Work Matter*.

If you find yourself stuck at a crossroads, not knowing which way to take, Road Ahead helps you get unstuck and discern your next steps. Rooted in research and refined over time, our process is designed to help you address your work-related pain points so that you can walk with confidence into the work God is calling you to do.

Road Ahead is a group experience that helps you take meaningful steps in your career by attending to the inner work God has for you during seasons of transition or disruption. It begins with listening to your STORY, that will then explore how your current pain points reveal the LONGINGS of your heart. From there we connect your longings with EMPATHY for the world around you, opening up new possibilities to IMAGINE what your next steps might be so that you can take that next doable RISK.

Learn more at <https://depre.org/cohorts/roadahead/>.

