

A CONCEIVIAN BRIEFING · VI

On the Art of *Opening a Relationship*

How possibility opens, not through the pitch, but through care and the willingness to listen.

SAQIB RASOOL · DECEMBER 3, 2025

PREPARED FOR LEADERS, MISSION CAPTAINS, AND MOBILIZERS

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“All real living is meeting.”

MARTIN BUBER

ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

For the leader who walks into rooms with the deck already prepared and walks out wondering why nothing landed. Read this if the partnerships you most needed, the deals you most wanted, the hires you most courted have all slipped through what felt like good conversations. You will leave understanding why every real relationship opens through care and listening, not through the pitch you brought into the room.

When I was nineteen years old, I had no money, no connections, and no clear path forward. But I had something that would prove more valuable than any of these. I had learned, without knowing I had learned it, how to open a relationship.

My father and his cousins had recently started a small business. They had set up a printing press, the kind that makes banners and flags and promotional materials. It was modest. It was new. And I saw in it a possibility that no one else in my family had seen.

There was a young man in my hardware engineering class. His name is not important. What is important is that his uncle was Nawaz Sharif, who at that time was the sitting Prime Minister of Pakistan and was running for re-election. This young man sat next to me in class. We were not friends. We barely knew each other.

I approached him. And here is what I did not do. I did not pitch him. I did not ask him for a favor. I did not tell him about my family's printing business. Not yet.

Instead, I asked him what it felt like to be part of such a family. I asked him about the legacy his uncles had built. I asked him about his own ambitions and how he saw himself contributing to what his family had created.

He began to talk. And I listened.

What emerged from that conversation was not a transaction. It was a relationship. And from within that relationship, a possibility became visible that had not existed before. His family needed high-quality banners and flags for the campaign. My family had just entered the business of making exactly that. The connection was obvious, but only after the relationship had been opened. He offered himself and then willingly made the introduction to Shahbaz Sharif (who is presently the sitting prime minister of Pakistan.)

Within weeks, I had secured contracts worth millions of rupees. I met his uncle. I went to their offices. I showed samples. The rest, as they say, is history.

But here is the lesson I want you to understand. The business came from the relationship. The relationship did not come from the business. If I had led with the pitch, if I had approached this young man as a target rather than as a human being, nothing would have happened. He would have seen me as just another person trying to extract something from his family's power. And he would have been right to ignore me.

What I Brought to the Table

Two years later, I arrived in America with less than two thousand dollars in my pocket. I did not know a single soul in this country. Not one.

Today, I have friends across industries and even party lines. Democrats. Republicans. I have been welcomed into networks that would have seemed impossible to that young man stepping off the plane with nothing but a small amount of cash and a very large ambition.

How did this happen?

It happened because of a principle my father taught me. He said: It does not matter how you are feeling inside. What matters is what you are bringing to people.

And what I have always aimed to bring to people is this: a new interpretation of their situation and a better future.

This is not flattery. Let me be clear about that. There is advice out there that says you should praise people lavishly, validate them constantly, make them feel good about themselves. And this advice is not wrong exactly. Our nervous systems are designed to feel safe when we are validated. We open up when we feel appreciated.

But this approach is incomplete. It is superficial. If you do not learn what really matters in relationships, if you fail to bring genuine care to the table, the initial praise will only get you so far. And then you will experience withdrawal. Breakdown. Regression. The relationship will degrade. And you will not understand why.

The Science I Did Not Know I Knew

It was only much later in my life that I met Fernando Flores and Chauncey Bell. These were serious thinkers who had developed what I can only call a science of human coordination. They had rigorous frameworks for understanding how relationships work, how possibilities get opened and closed, how human beings make commitments to each other and build futures together.

When I encountered their work, I realized something startling. I had been practicing this science my entire life. I had learned it not from books or seminars, but from watching my father, from navigating difficult situations, from paying attention to what actually worked when human beings tried to build something together.

What I learned from Flores and Bell gave me language for what I already knew. And the language allowed me to teach it to others.

The Heart of the Matter

Here is what I have come to understand. The heart of opening a relationship is not technique. It is not strategy. It is not even skill, though skill matters.

The heart of the matter is care.

When you listen to someone so deeply that even their mother may not have listened to them that way, something happens. A space opens. You begin to make sense of their world from the inside. You begin to see possibilities that neither of you could have seen alone.

Your job is to listen so hard that the room shakes.

This requires that you hold back on problem solving. And this is challenging. When someone shares a difficulty with us, our instinct is to jump in with solutions. We think we understand their problem. We bring our experience to the table. We want to be helpful. And when they do not take our advice, we feel disappointed. We feel unappreciated.

But in all this business of solving and advising, we miss something crucial. We miss the nuance. We miss what is actually happening. We miss the opportunity to participate in the invention of a new world, because we are too busy trying to impose the old one.

A Lesson I Had to Learn Again

I have a friend named Will Poole. Over the years, Will has sent lots of business my way. We have a real relationship built on mutual respect and genuine care.

Recently, I found myself in a period of urgency. I needed things to happen. And so I approached Will with offers. One offer after another. Opportunities. Ideas. Proposals.

Will, in his kindness, kept declining. Gently. Respectfully. But declining.

And I began to feel something shift. I began to sense that I was putting our relationship at risk. If you asked Will about this, he would probably say no, that is not the case, we are fine. But I know what I felt. I felt the space between us beginning to close.

So I stopped. I shifted. I began to really pay attention.

And what I discovered was that Will was dealing with enormous challenges. He had lost a partner. His business was going through a difficult restructuring. He was facing serious problems with no easy solutions. He did not need my offers. He did not need my ideas.

What he needed was a friend. An observer. Someone who would listen.

So that is what I brought to the table. I brought listening. I brought presence. I brought care.

I did not solve a single one of his problems. I did not give him any advice he found useful. And yet I have the assessment that I not only saved our relationship but deepened it.

This is the lesson I keep learning again and again. This is what really matters.

The Skill That Universities Do Not Teach

We are entering a time when artificial intelligence will do more and more of what we used to do. AI can analyze. AI can optimize. AI can even, in a certain superficial way, pretend to care.

But AI does not actually care. The care that shows up in AI tools comes from the humans who build them. This is why I have poured so much of myself into the AI that my team has created. I want the care to be visible. I want people who use it to feel that they are being genuinely helped.

But here is what I want you to understand. As a human being, your capacity to bring care to the table is a million times greater than any AI. Your capacity to listen. Your capacity to be present. Your capacity to make another human being feel truly seen.

This is the skill that universities do not teach. They teach problem solving. They teach analysis. They teach technique. But they do not teach this.

And this is the skill that will matter most in the years ahead.

What Happens When You Do Not Learn This

If you do not learn how to open relationships, you are doomed to stay only in environments where you are already familiar. Your family. Your school friends. Your colleagues. The people who already know you and accept you.

These environments may be comfortable. But they are often limited in possibility. The real opportunities, the ones that can transform your life, are usually in spaces you have never entered. Spaces where no one knows you. Spaces where you must build from nothing.

When you arrive in such a space, everything depends on your ability to open relationships. Can you listen deeply enough to understand what people actually care about? Can you bring genuine concern for their future? Can you hold back your solutions long enough to really see their situation?

If you can do these things, doors will open that you did not even know existed. If you cannot, you will remain locked out, wondering why the world seems so closed to you.

The Principles

Let me be specific about what I have learned. These are the principles I teach to the people I train.

Listen before you offer.

The longer you listen, the more precisely you will understand what is actually needed. And the more precisely you understand, the more powerful your eventual offer will be.

Bring care, not flattery.

Flattery feels good for a moment. Care builds something that lasts. People can tell the difference, even if they cannot articulate it.

Speak to possibility.

When you open a relationship, you are not just connecting two people. You are opening a future that did not exist before. Speak in a way that makes that future visible.

Do not rush to solve.

Problem solving feels productive. But premature problem solving closes more doors than it opens. Hold back. Stay curious. Let the other person's world reveal itself to you.

Stay in the relationship even when there is no transaction.

The best opportunities come from relationships that have been cultivated over time, not from cold approaches. Stay in touch with people even when you have nothing to sell and nothing to ask for.

Bring the same quality of attention to everyone.

You never know which relationship will prove crucial. The young man sitting next to you in class might be the nephew of the Prime Minister. The person you meet at a conference might become a lifelong friend and collaborator. Treat every relationship as if it matters, because it does.

An Invitation

Over the years, I have helped senior leaders in companies and enterprises navigate their most important relationships. Board relationships. Partnership relationships. Sometimes even the difficult relationships in their personal lives.

This work is not about technique. It is about developing a way of being that opens the space for a relationship. It is about learning to care in a way that opens futures.

If there is an opportunity for me to help you with this, I would be glad to talk. My time is limited, and the scope of my engagement is sometimes constrained. But if we are able to work together, I will bring to you everything I have learned in a lifetime of opening relationships.

And if we do not get that chance, I have built something that can help. I have trained an AI on these principles. It carries my thinking. It carries, I hope, some of my care. It is available to you when you need it.

But the most important thing is not whether you work with me or use the AI. The most important thing is that you learn this skill. Because the world is full of possibility. And the door to that possibility is always the same.

It is a relationship waiting to be opened.

“Listen so hard that the room shakes.”

SAQIB RASOOL

This Briefing draws on the tradition of Fernando Flores, and the work of Heidegger, Maturana and Varela, Austin and Searle, and our teacher Chauncey Bell. We offer it in their debt.

For conversations and correspondence, write to care@conceivian.com.

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