

## Book Review: Try to Love the Questions: From Debate to Dialogue in Classrooms and Life

Reviewed by:

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**Author:** Laura Hope Schwartz

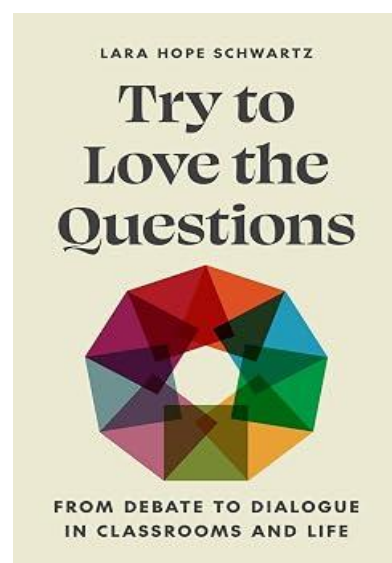
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### Introduction & Context:

What does it mean to engage productively with a question when there may be no universally accepted answer? The book *Try to Love the Questions: From Debate to Dialogue in Classrooms and Life* by Lara Schwartz presents how individuals can engage constructively with complex questions, competing viewpoints, and disagreement. Schwartz's work is particularly relevant at a time when disagreement can become adversarial and complex issues are may be reduced to binary positions. Rather than seeking to eliminate disagreement, Schwartz describes ways for individuals to engage with disagreement more thoughtfully and productively. Although written primarily within the context of higher education, the book addresses competencies that extend beyond the classroom. Schwartz's (2024) emphasis on asking better questions, listening generously, examining assumptions, and engaging productively across differences has relevance for students, educators, and practitioners across business disciplines.



Schwartz, a constitutional scholar and educator, draws on her experiences with campus discourse, law, politics, and higher education to offer a framework for reinventing the classroom. Rather than approaching controversial subjects as debates, where participants select and defend opposing positions, Schwartz (2024) encourages dialogue in which participants explore the reasoning, values, and assumptions underpinning those positions. In doing so, students, who are the next generation of business professionals, will become better at engaging with questions for which there are no simple answers. Schwartz encourages students to approach disagreement with curiosity rather than treating every difficult conversation as a debate to be won. Instead of immediately defending a position, individuals can examine their own assumptions, listen to opposing perspectives, and try to understand how someone else arrived at a different conclusion (Schwartz, 2024). This approach has wide applicability, from the classroom to the boardroom and beyond.

### Summary of Content:

Following a prologue, Schwartz organizes the 242-page book into six chapters that move from the broader challenges surrounding campus discourse toward practical and reflective approaches to dialogue. Chapter 1 establishes the context for productive discourse. Subsequent chapters encourage individuals to embrace questions while continuing to seek answers, understand the rules

and norms governing discourse, listen and read with informed generosity and grace, communicate to be understood, and engage in self-reflection (Schwartz, 2024). Throughout the book, Schwartz incorporates discussion questions and writing exercises that encourage application of the concepts presented.

Although all six chapters contribute to Schwartz's classroom framework, Chapters 4 and 5 are arguably the book's strongest and most broadly applicable to workplace practice. Together, they address the reciprocal responsibilities involved in effective communication: understanding others and making oneself understandable.

Chapter 4 makes the case for reading and listening with a mindset of informed generosity and grace (Schwartz, 2024). The concept moves beyond simply tolerating opposing perspectives or waiting politely for an opportunity to respond. Instead, Schwartz encourages people to make a good-faith effort to understand differing viewpoints before refuting them. This emphasis on listening is especially valuable in environments where disagreement can quickly lead individuals to categorize or dismiss opposing viewpoints rather than engage with the reasoning behind them.

Chapter 5 complements this principle by focusing on the responsibility to communicate to be understood. Effective dialogue, in Schwartz's framework, does not place the entire burden on the listener. Communicators also have a responsibility to express their ideas in ways that make understanding possible (Schwartz, 2024). Together, Chapters 4 and 5 conceptualize communication in the classroom, boardroom and beyond as a reciprocal process: individuals should engage generously with the ideas of others while also considering how their own communication will be received and understood.

### **Analytical Evaluation:**

Several of Schwartz's concepts translate readily to the kinds of communication challenges practitioners face and students may encounter in business careers. Exercises and reflection questions at the end of each chapter make it possible to practice the concepts presented rather than simply giving them theoretical consideration. Her examples also illustrate that productive disagreement does not require individuals to abandon strongly held beliefs. Instead, the audience is encouraged to question their assumptions, clarify their reasoning, and remain open to understanding competing perspectives (Schwartz, 2024).

Additionally, the book's cross-disciplinary orientation is both a strength and a potential limitation for business educators. Educators seeking direct instruction in business pedagogy will not find discipline-specific cases or applications throughout the text. Much of Schwartz's discussion originates in higher education, campus discourse, constitutional principles, and related contexts. Consequently, educators in business disciplines will need to make some of the connections to their own subject areas. However, that required translation may also be part of the book's value. Because Schwartz does not prescribe how the framework should operate within a particular business discipline, educators have considerable flexibility in adapting its principles to their own courses and students.

Some readers may also find the emphasis on dialogue difficult to reconcile with situations in which decisions must ultimately be made despite persistent disagreement. Dialogue does not eliminate

competing interests, power differences, institutional constraints, or the need for decisive action. The book is most useful, therefore, not as a prescription for achieving consensus but as a framework for improving the quality of inquiry that precedes decisions.

### **Interdisciplinary Contribution:**

The interdisciplinary value of *Try to Love the Questions* lies less in the specific contexts Schwartz examines than in the communication and reasoning skills her framework develops. Schwartz's framework positions the college classroom as a place where students can practice engaging across differences, asking questions that uncover underlying assumptions, and communicating productively when consensus may not be possible. These skills can prepare students not merely to navigate difficult classroom conversations, but to participate more effectively in the complex interpersonal and organizational environments they will encounter throughout their careers. For example, adding the phrase “under what circumstances (Schwartz, 2024, p. 26)” to questions that can be answered with yes or no can move business discussions or case analyses beyond simplistic determinations of right and wrong and toward analysis of context, competing responsibilities, and stakeholder interests. Turning positions into rules or interests (Schwartz, 2024, p. 28–29) can help students identify the principles underlying organizational decisions rather than focusing solely on outcomes. Likewise, the paired responsibilities of listening with informed generosity and communicating to be understood are applicable to collaboration, leadership, negotiation, conflict management, and organizational decision-making.

### **Conclusion:**

*Try to Love the Questions* is not a traditional business education text, yet its central themes have clear relevance to business education. The communication challenges Schwartz examines—disagreement, competing perspectives, strongly held beliefs, and questions without simple answers—are not confined to college campuses. They also characterize professional environments where graduates must communicate with colleagues, customers, clients, and stakeholders whose assumptions and priorities may differ from their own. Ultimately, *Try to Love the Questions* encourages readers to reconsider not only the answers they reach, but the process through which they reach them. Although business educators will need to make their own connections between Schwartz's higher education context and their individual disciplines, the book offers a thoughtful perspective on a challenge shared across classrooms and workplaces: how to engage productively when reasonable people disagree.

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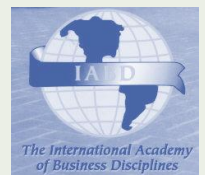
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