

# A COMPANION'S FIRE-STARTER GUIDE



## Gifts from the Mountain: Simple Truths for Life's Complexities

Fuel-starter Questions for Generating Ideas, Holding Deeper  
Conversations, and Getting Back to What Matters Most.

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# A Companion's Fire-Starter Guide

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## Fuel-starter Questions for Generating Ideas, Holding Deeper Conversations, and Getting Back to What Matters Most

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### **Context:**

While *Gifts from the Mountain* looks, at face value, like a personal book, it can really be so much more. When we want to build community—whether it's a community of book lovers gathered around a table or a community to support each other in dealing with a challenge— deep conversations offer soul-filled connections. Use it as you see fit. Here are some general directions.

### **Directions:**

Whoever convenes the gathering is the first one to begin the thoughtful questions. Encourage all to become very comfortable. Everyone should have his own copy of the book and have read it in advance.

You may either go through the book in sequential order or ask for people to bring up a passage that resonates with them. The questions that follow are meant to begin your thought process. Let the conversation be free form, staying in the moment with whatever comes up. There are no right answers. You seek to understand yourself and each other better. This is NOT a counseling or therapy session. It is merely to get people talking about things that matter for them.

Only one “rule”: No judgments. Everyone has their own truth and their own experience.

Now, breathe deeply.

Look around the room.

Smile at each other. Let's begin.

### Steady strides beat hasty starts.

- Where are you moving so quickly that you're getting into trouble?
  - What keeps you back from slowing down?
  - Think of something that currently captures your attention and energy.  
What are some steady strides that might help you see gradual progress?
  - What will you do to mark that progress?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
- 



### Acclimate at a higher level before you begin the next part of the climb.

- What is something that seems like a distant goal or dream and how could you sample it now?
  - What's stopping you?
  - Recall an event that resulted in thinking, "If I only knew then what I know now!" Could you have gotten a sneak preview? What are the lessons you learned from that event that could help you right now?
  - If applicable, where are you currently "acclimating"?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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### Switchbacks are necessary to reach the top.

- What shortcuts are you taking?
  - Are they working or are you in for some surprises?
  - Where do you feel you are trudging ahead and not seeing any progress to "the top?"
  - What are the pros and cons of shortcuts?
  - What are the benefits of effort and "earning" results?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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### Pack out your garbage.

- What are you holding on to that just feels like "garbage"? What would you like to clean up?
- What fence might you need to mend?
- What rumor do you need to dispel so truth can become clear?



Is there anything that this group needs to clean up?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Watch for “ducks” and leave some behind.

Who has been down this road before?

Who can teach you some of the tricks of the trade?

What are you discovering about your work or life that could save a bunch of us from falling off a cliff or losing our way?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Sometimes it's easier without a pack.

What do you need to simplify to move into a new — whatever?

What are the fears that you need to ditch in order to venture forth?

What new opportunities could a “lighter load” open up?

What are your “no matter whats” that MUST be in the pack of your life?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Alpine flowers bloom where you least expect them.

What was the “good” news you discovered in what looked like “bad” news?

Is there something you can do to put a positive brush stroke on what seems negative?  
Can we help you find the positive?

Where have you been surprised by “goodness” when you least expected it?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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### You can't tell how far it is until you begin.

In what areas have you been procrastinating and why?

What would you like to start right now?

Who or what could help you begin?

What requests do you have of us that can kick-start you into gear?



Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Turn around. Celebrate how far you've come.**

- What gets in the way of cultivating this as a habit?
  - What do you want to acknowledge /celebrate about yourself?
  - Who helped you get to where you are and have you thanked them?
  - What happened yesterday that you didn't celebrate?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Pause and rest but don't stop.**

- Where do you need a time out?
  - What does our culture say about resting and is it useful?
  - Can you be too driven and what are the consequences?
  - What is your best way of resting?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
- 



**Get your bearings or else you might end up someplace you don't want to be.**

- How would you assess your current life pattern and where you are headed?
  - How can you tell if you are headed in the right direction?
  - What should you use as compass points?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Solitude lets you see more.**

- When was the last time you were alone with space to think?
- What is keeping you back from taking yourself away?
- Are you saying to yourself, "Everything and everyone needs me". Is this true? How do you know it's true?
- What are some ways of taking yourself away without going too far?



How might you create work/life balance in your world?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Every ounce counts.**

What's the non-essential "stuff" that weights you down?

What might you simplify in your life?

What stops you from doing it?

What can we do to help each other lighten the load?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Little things trip you up.**

What small thing have you done that became a major headache?

Is there a detail that you might be missing?

Where has "habit" tripped you up?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**The flexible survive. The yielding win the day.**

Where are you being too rigid?

Where do you need to bend in order to win?

What feedback can we offer each other on behaviors that seem inflexible?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Walk too fast and you'll miss the beauty.**

What have you failed to notice in our environment?

Whom have you failed to notice in your crazy/busy life?

Is there "beauty" in your work? If not, why not?

What could you do to put it there?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Sometimes it's better not to know how hard the trail or how far you have to go.**

- What have you done that, in retrospect, was much harder than you thought?
  - What did you gain by NOT knowing how hard it was?
  - What lessons can you take for the next time?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Stop when you are tired.**

- How would you assess your energy level and what would help it?
  - Do we support each other's need to rest?
  - What is exhausting you right now?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Mosquitoes are only a nuisance.**

- What is annoying right now, but you can live with it?
  - When have you made something into a huge issue instead of just tolerating or ignoring it?
  - On the flipside, what are you tolerating right now that should be addressed?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
- 



**Feel the fear and do it anyway.**

- What is your greatest fear if you continue as you are?
  - What is your greatest fear if you change?
  - What are the odds and what is your game plan?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Observe nature's patterns. Different trees grow at different elevations.**

- How are we different?
- How does this difference help us?
- What might we do to further respect the diversity of this gathering?
- Whose shoes might we need to walk in?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Look for ways to make the trip enjoyable.**

- What might make your work or life more fun?
  - How can you increase the enjoyment of the people around you?
  - What part of your life do you enjoy the most and are you doing it enough?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Encourage those on the way up.**

- How can we mentor one another more?
  - Have we created a culture that encourages personal growth?
  - Who are new people in our gathering and how can we bring them “into the fold?”
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Downhill is more dangerous than uphill.**

- What has become so easy that you no longer think about it?
  - Where might you be too cocky with what you think you know and what you do?
  - Have you stopped learning new skills?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**If the sky falls, there's another one behind it.**

- Where are you discouraged right now?
  - What have you learned from coming through the last tough time?
  - What are some clues that tell you “this too shall pass”?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Watch for wild onions.**

- What's a wild idea that bears exploring?
  - Where do you need to add spice to your life?
  - Who would add spice to this gathering?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**If you keep your head inside a tent, you'll miss the stars.**

- What is keeping you "inside your tent"?
  - Where do you need to encourage risk-taking?
  - What opportunity might you be missing by staying inside your comfort zone?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Don't keep looking for the pass. Just go one step at a time.**

- Do you spend too much time looking for the end instead of doing what needs to be done right now? How could you help yourself?
  - How do you keep your focus daily?
  - How do you monitor signs of progress?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Expect the unexpected and deal with it.**

- What might get in the way of your next goal?
  - What is a backup plan to deal with these possibilities?
  - What are the unexpected opportunities that might arise?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Pain means the pack must be adjusted.**

- What is causing you pain right now?
  - What adjustments can you make?
  - How can we help each other more?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
- 



**Sometimes you have to get your feet wet.**

- Where do you need to take the plunge?
  - Who might need some encouragement to get their feet wet?
  - Who might not be ready for this venture?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**It always takes longer than expected.**

- What is taking longer than expected?
  - What can you do to speed it up or else just accept the fact?
  - When is impatience a vice? A virtue?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Protecting the environment is a nuisance. Not having the environment is a disaster.**

- Are there things we are doing that harm our community environment?
  - How would you assess your level of social responsibility?
  - If this level could be improved, what might you do?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Big winds don't always bring rain.**

- When have you over-reacted to someone who is just bluster?
- What event have you over-reacted to?
- What might these things teach you for future interactions?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Remember the night rainbow.**

Has there been a time in which you could not see the outcome but you had faith in the process?

When was it?

How did things turn out?

What worked for you? What might you do differently now if faced with “the night”?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **You have to get your hands dirty.**

What is the toughest part of your work?

What is the dirty task that you push off to others instead of doing it yourself?

When do you need to get in the trenches?

Where do we need to join you?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **You can do more than you think you can, particularly when someone believes in you and especially if you believe in yourself.**

How can we support each other?

Have we built a culture of encouragement?

When was the last time we talked about the strengths we see in each other?

What's stopping us from doing it right now?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**You can face your fear without going over the edge.**

- What scares you right now?
  - Where are our fears the same? Different?
  - How can we help each other through those fears?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Hum the moon up. Sing the sun down.**

- If this group had a theme song, what would it be?
  - If we don't like the song, what could be done to change it?
  - What would put a song in your heart and what action will you take?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Respect the territory of the other animals.**

- Where are we disrespectful of other people because we truly don't know them?
  - What is your territory that too often is invaded?
  - How can we learn to ask before entering?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Let people know where you are headed.**

- Who needs to know more about me and what I do?
  - Have I shared my plans with the people who support me?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Write on keeps you right on.**

- Are you recording what you have learned? Where and how often?
  - Where are you putting too many things in writing instead of talking?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Wind rises most when you are naked.**

- Where and when are you vulnerable?
  - How does acknowledging your vulnerability help you?
  - What protection can you plan in the event of “wind”?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Don't forget the Band-Aids.**

- To whom do you owe an apology?
  - Have we hurt anyone in our gathering?
  - What or who needs to be mended?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**If someone is struggling, share his load.**

- How do we let each other know when we need help?
  - Can you give help without expecting something in return?
  - Are there times when you are wiser to let someone struggle instead of intervening?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Travel with people willing to share the work.**

- How would you assess the “load” sharing in this group?
  - If there are inequities, how and when should we speak up?
  - Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_
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**Look for help when you need it. Any kind of help.**

- What keeps you from asking for help?
- What do you need right now from us?
- Are you clear in your request so people can help?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Cross the stream if you come to it — not before.**

When have you let your imagination envision the worst?

When has worry gotten the best of you?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Laughter lifts your feet and your heart.**

What's the funniest thing that has happened to this group?

How can we stop taking ourselves so seriously?

What keeps us back from laughing more?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**You don't need as much food as you think.**

What are excesses that cause you to overextend your efforts?

Where can you cut back?

What is the necessary "food" for me and am I on the right "diet"?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Celebrate. Celebrate. Dance to the music.**

What's the potential value of acknowledging and celebrating?

What's the cost of skipping over this?

What gets in the way of cultivating this as a habit?

What do you want to acknowledge/celebrate about yourself?

Where do you want to apply acknowledging and celebrating with others?

Your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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**There is no place like home!**



## **Hungry for More? A word from Eileen**

I trust you'll find yourself stimulated and thinking of what other questions might spring from using the metaphors from my mountain. This fire starter guide is intended to set your own voice into action.

Please let me know the results and what new questions you have created from *Gifts from the Mountain*. Write me at [eileen@eileenmcdargh.com](mailto:eileen@eileenmcdargh.com). Who knows, we might create a sequel from your contributions.