

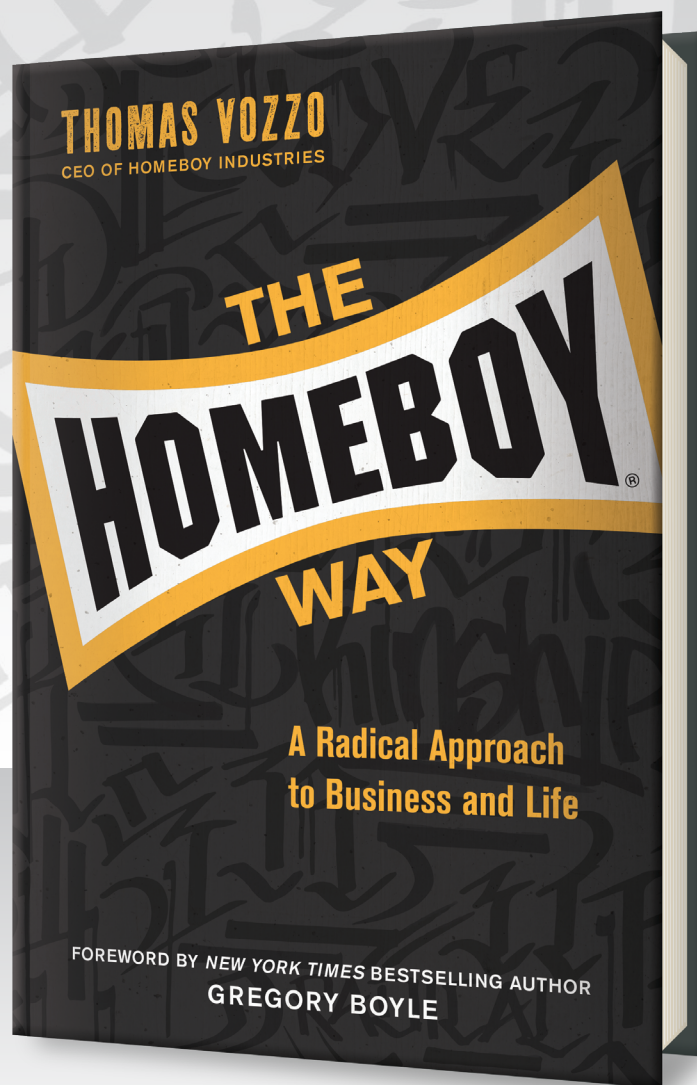
DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Homeboy Way

A Radical Approach to Business and Life

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INTRODUCTION

After attaining success, and recognition as a corporate executive, Thomas Vozzo comes to redefine what these terms mean when he takes the position as CEO for Homeboy Industries. Through his experience with Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy, and his work with the homies who find support and employment through the organization, Vozzo is challenged to question and revise presumptions that had served as foundations for his approach to both life and business. Reflecting on his first days at Homeboys, he writes: “As it turns out, the best professional part of my life was just about to happen, and I was soon to learn how one dimensional my life had been” (11).

The Homeboy Way invites readers to join Vozzo to reflect on and re-evaluate the business principles, fundamental commitments, and core values that shape their approach to leadership, business, and ultimately life. Vozzo presents alternative perspectives. Rather than the corporate measures of success: profit, margin, bottom line, the Homeboy Way focuses on relationships rooted in “mutuality, compassion, and kinship, leading to a better society” (xi).

This guide can be used for personal reflection and group discussion around the themes Vozzo explores. Two or three questions are included for each chapter to encourage participants to attend to the ideas Vozzo discovered at Homeboy and apply them to their own approach to leadership and the ways faith can shape their passion and purpose.

Ten suggestions for facilitating effective conversations around challenging questions

1. Taking care of logistics.

For a rich, dynamic, and critical conversation, it is best to designate a facilitator for the group. The role of the facilitator is to serve as host for the conversation: inviting people into discussion, being sure that everyone has a chance to speak, asking follow-up questions to individuals or the group, and, at the end of the time, naming some of the shared insights and differences that surfaced in the discussion. A second logistic: group size. While no specific number is perfect, between 6 and 8 participants (including the facilitator) provides an optimum number for diversity of ideas and cohesion of the group.

2. Conversation is the goal.

Adults learn best in conversation with other adults about things that matter. Some suggestions for fostering conversation:

- Make clear in the beginning that conversation is the goal for this time together.
- Encourage people to talk with one another rather than just to the leader or facilitator, asking follow-up questions that invite people to respond to another's comment or point.
- If needed, to ensure that everyone has a voice, establish a policy like, "No one speaks twice until everyone has spoken once." This encourages those who are quieter to speak up and those who are more vocal to sit back for a bit.

3. Creating an atmosphere where active listening and thoughtful speaking are encouraged.

Spending time in the beginning of a discussion to establish or remind people of the meaning of those terms and the way they can be expressed in the conversation is key.

- Active listening requires that listeners:
 - » be attentive to the person speaking, attuned to what is being said and how it is being said;
 - » maintain body language that conveying attention, interest, and respect for the person speaking;
 - » ask questions both to clarify what is being said and to indicate that they are following the speaker's train of thought;
- Thoughtful speaking centers on persons asking themselves three questions:
 - » *Does what I am about to say need to be said?* Is it honest and helpful to the conversation?
 - » *Does it need to be said now?* Is it in keeping with the flow of the discussion? Does it respect, respond to, or link with the prior person's comments?
 - » *Does it need to be said by me?* Is it a topic or a question that flows from my own experience?



4. Providing an entry into the conversation.

It is helpful to open a time for discussion with a prompt to which each person is invited and encouraged to respond. For example, name one or two big ideas that struck you from today's readings OR name an idea that you found challenging. Remember that while everyone is invited to speak, anyone can choose to pass.

5. Being a good conversationalist.

Keep your comments as brief as possible and end your comments by raising a question. A helpful rule of thumb is to make one key point in each comment and then invite others to share their experience on the topic.

6. Speaking from experience.

The wisdom that people bring to a conversation is rooted more in their experience than in theoretical arguments or presentations. A personal story is more effective in bringing about conversation than a theoretical assertion. Invite one another to give examples or describe an incident is key to effective conversation and expresses active listening and thoughtful speaking.

7. Recognize that no one person, no group has a monopoly on the truth.

In business and in life, there is no one answer that addresses everyone's questions and reflects everyone's experience. In genuine conversation, we are most often speaking from experience rather than from data points. There are generally not right or wrong responses. Each person's reflections, interests, and commitments have validity from the perspective of the speaker and can be acknowledged, even if not agreed with.

8. Presuming in the other's favor.

Each person deserves respect and a good-faith effort to understand their point of view. It is helpful to suspend the tendency toward a critical posture and listening instead to each person with the presumption that their position is meaningful and reasonable from their perspective. Disagreements may well arise, but they should surface only after everyone has given full and open attention to their perspective.

9. Acknowledging conflict

Some level of conflict is almost inevitable in honest, open conversations about challenging questions. Prefacing a statement of disagreement with an observation of what was found positive in the person's comment effectively frames the conflict within an affirming context.

10. Bringing the discussion to conclusion.

As the time for discussion comes to an end, it is helpful to have the facilitator or a participant summarize the key insight and possible actions the discussion prompted.

chapter 1: Tyranny of the Pennies: From corporate America to a new calling

1. Talk about why you are reading this book. What are your hopes in reading and engaging in conversation around the themes Thomas Vozzo explores?
2. In what ways does the story of Vozzo's career portray the image of a successful corporate executive? What do you find appealing about his story? Are there aspects that you see in a less positive light?
3. As he concludes this first chapter Vozzo writes, "As it turns out, the best professional part of my life was just about to happen, and I was soon to learn how one dimensional my life had been" (11). How might this relate to your own life? What has been the best parts of your professional life?

chapter 2: The move to homeboy industries

1. Vozzo made the decision to leave the for-profit corporate world. What risks did that decision entail? Talk about a time in which you made a decision that involved personal risk.
2. In thinking about his decision to join Homeboy Industries, Vozzo was confident of his abilities and believed that he would "impart [his] knowledge, straighten out Homeboy's social enterprise, exit after a short period of time, and then figure out the rest of [his] professional life" (17). When told that he would "learn a lot from Homeboy" (20-21), he doubted that would be the case, which later turned out to be a false assumption. Talk about a time when you have had a similar experience of being surprised by what you learned and who you learned it from.
3. For Vozzo, faith was part of the decision to join Homeboy. He writes "It was faith, not in the spiritual sense, but the faith in taking a step in a direction that felt like taking a step in the dark, but feeling comforted that it would be okay" (18). How does this understanding of faith correspond with your experience? How has faith played a part in your significant decisions?

chapter 3: "corporate guy" meets a different kind of environment

1. The chapter begins with a description of the environment that shapes Homeboy Industries (23-26). How does the climate that he describes correspond with or differ from your own work climate?
2. As described in this book, there is a distinctive environment at Homeboy. Vozzo writes that it "is the space where the line between the 'important people' and the 'forgotten' of our society begins to fade" (23). Where is that true in your business and in your life?
3. Vozzo highlights the challenges that exist for those unfamiliar with the work climate. For example, their lack of training and work experience can present a barrier to them. What barriers exist in your business or community that prevent people from succeeding? How might these be addressed?

chapter 4: “Margin and mission” versus “margin or mission”

4. In this chapter Vozzo draws the distinction between most corporate cultures and the culture of mission-driven organizations like Homeboy. Name some of the distinctions he points out. Which would you find most challenging to integrate into leadership in your work or community?
5. One of the tasks that runs through this chapter is the way in which Vozzo contributed to the building a team, particularly at the leadership level. What steps does he take in doing this? What are your best practices for building teams in your settings?
6. One of the surprises Vozzo experienced at Homeboy Industries is the presence of conversation about God and spirituality; that was not present in his prior experiences in the corporate context. What is your experience in this area? Where are you able to talk about God and spirituality?

chapter 5: A tale of two Americas

1. During his time at Homeboy, Vozzo was exposed to experiences that gave him new insights about the world around him, particularly the social and economic realities within the United States. What experiences in your professional life or in volunteering opened your eyes to aspects of life that you hadn't been aware of?
2. Vozzo points to several groups within society that are often overlooked – those without health care, those with mental illness, those experiencing domestic violence. In what ways have you made connections with people who are “unseen” and what are other actions you would imagine taking to make connections in the future?
3. Toward the end of the chapter writes of his early time at Homeboy, “I started to see and understand the notion and specialness of being in kinship with the poor. Of being in relationship with people who have great faith. I started to understand that I was no better than them – in fact in many ways, I was worse off, for I had pretenses and didn't know my true self. My faith was awakening” (71). Does any part of this quote resonate with your experience?

chapter 6: how generosity and gratitude make a way for grace

1. The call to generosity is not solved by money alone; money is useful as a tool. But, as Vozzo makes clear, to be real and effective, financial generosity is best paired with nonmaterial things, “such as real relationships with people who live in the Forgotten America” (78). In what way has that been true in your own actions of generosity? How might you strengthen the nonmaterial aspects of your generosity?
2. In this chapter, Vozzo invites us to see gratitude as more than simply appreciation or saying thanks. “True gratitude moves beyond appreciation. When we embrace gratitude, our hearts fill with thanksgiving, and we see the world as a gift” (85). Talk about an experience in which this broader view of gratitude helped you better see “the world as a gift.” How do you foster gratitude in your life?
3. “Grace is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow made from generosity and gratitude” (85). How would you explain this statement in your own words? Reflect on the past week: describe a moment of grace that you have experienced.

chapter 7: Meritocracy does not always work

4. Greg Boyle, the founder of Homeboy, describes the process by which they select applicants for acceptance into the Homeboy eighteen-month program as “reverse cherry-picking,” selecting those least likely to succeed. What is your reaction to that model? What are the strengths and positive aspects of this approach? What might be the drawbacks?
5. Meritocracy, a key presumption of the American Dream, is questioned and critiqued. Vozzo points out many flaws in our model of meritocracy that puts some people at disadvantage. (See pages 99-103.) He argues, however, “that meritocracy does exist for the many rungs of our society’s middle class but stops at the door of the poor” (102). Here Vozzo accounts for the impact of economic and class status; what other circumstances of birth or life situations put people at a disadvantage within a meritocracy?
6. In bringing to conclusion the discussion of meritocracy, Vozzo cites Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where he teaches that “the meek will inherit the earth.” (See Matthew 5:5.) A key element of Vozzo’s understanding of this verse is drawing a link between being meek and humility. How do you understand this verse? How is that expressed in your life?

chapter 8: Joy is foundational to a thriving workplace

1. How do you define or describe joy? Talk about where you find joy in your personal life and in your work life. Greg Boyle makes clear that we need to be proactive in discovering joy. “Find the joy in the place, this is where I feel I need to be. It is hard but the call is to joy” (109). In what ways might you enhance your sense of joy?
2. In responding to Vozzo, Greg Boyle wrote, “the great discovery in life is to finally know that what I MOST DEEPLY WANT, IS God’s will for me” (109). How does this fit with your own understanding of finding God’s will in your life, in your work?
3. Vozzo cites Archbishop Desmond Tutu who said, “We have at home the concept of Ubuntu – a person is a person through other persons” (111). This way of being emphasizes that our humanity is rooted in our relationships with others, both those with whom we are familiar and the stranger. From your reading thus far, how do you see that being expressed in the approach of Homeboy? How might that be part of your understanding of your relationships in your personal life and in the work context?

chapter 9: spiritual journey

1. Father Greg Boyle has clearly been a major influence on Vozzo, both in helping him learn about “the Homeboy Way” and in his spiritual journey. Who has been an influence or mentor for how you think about who God is and the role God plays in your life? How has that made a difference in your personal and work life?
2. Vozzo refers to the experience with the ‘sweat,’ a Native American practice, as an opportunity for new understanding and new perspective. He proposes that the variety of spiritual perspectives reflected in Homeboy helped him “see God in a different way, through different eyes and different cultures” (119). Have you had the opportunity to experience other spiritual perspectives or faith traditions? How have they enhanced or challenged your own spirituality?
3. The examen, a key element of Ignatian spirituality, plays a significant role in Vozzo’s spiritual practice (125). In what ways might this five-step prayer experience be integrated into your own daily routine as a key spiritual practice? What other practices do you use to strengthen the spiritual aspect of your life?

chapter 10: Leadership development for racial equity

1. One of the elements that Vozzo sees as a necessity for long term sustainability is the establishment of an endowment (133). As you reflect on your own charitable giving, what values shape and influence your decisions? Would an organization like Homeboy be of interest to you? Why or why not?
2. Vozzo raises several issues related to the development of a leadership team, the second requirement for long term sustainability: challenge to “move the [management] team to joy” (134); process of fostering leaders from within; tension between insiders and outsiders; resistance on part of those coming from inside Homeboy to do necessary administrative work; homies’ unfamiliarity with business – both nonprofit and corporate – cultures. From your read of the book thus far, which do you think is the most significant and problematic issue? What actions might you take to address it?
3. At the close of this chapter, Vozzo writes, “I’ve now seen and experienced the two Americas up close and know that ‘people development’ needs to be done differently... By sheer necessity Homeboy has found a way to accomplish this from within” (140). What aspects of the stories Vozzo has told illustrate that Homeboy has found an alternative way? What can be done to further enhance it?

chapter 11: A NEW way Forward

1. Vozzo points out that, while the Homeboy Way “is a proven model” (141), leaders from other organization, communities, or cities consistently find reasons for why it won’t work in their setting. What aspect of the Homeboy Way do you find inviting? What aspects of the Homeboy Way would you tend to say won’t work in your setting?
2. “[Greg Boyle’s] innovation wasn’t starting businesses with homies; it was moving himself and many, many other people to the margins to be in kinship with the demonized and forgotten” (141). Give some examples of this from the book. In what ways have or might you lean toward this in your own personal or work life?

chapter 12: AS I write this Book, Part 1: Anger

1. Vozzo catalogs several experiences that have been sources of anger for him while working with Homeboy. These are directed primarily at systems or at individuals within systems who fail to act in support of the disenfranchised in order to avoid losing their own place within the social and economic status quo. To which of these experiences did you most strongly respond? Why? Were there any with which you disagreed, any about which you thought was a reasonable and valid way of acting?
2. To what extent do you think Vozzo’s critiques of capitalism, as it is expressed in this country, are justified? Why or why not?

chapter 13: AS I write This Book, Part 2: Racism

1. A distinction is made between being non-racist and being antiracist. How is the distinction helpful for your understanding of how to address racism and its expressions in society and the workplace?
2. In the Prologue, Vozzo writes that the three elements of the Homeboy Way are mutuality, compassion, and kinship (xi). How are those three elements present in the discussion of racism, and indeed across the whole book?

some Final questions

1. At the end of the book Vozzo lists “Break the Rules: 55 Beliefs, Practices, and Assumptions We All Need to Challenge” (177-190). Which ones do you strongly agree with? Which ones surprised you? And which ones would you hesitate to challenge?
2. What are the key take-aways from reading Vozzo’s book?
3. What other resource have you used to help shape the relationship between your approach to leadership and spirituality?