

Step With Me

Goals

- explore differences and diversity within a group;
- challenge the group to understand how those differences impact team dynamics.

Time

45 minutes

How it's Done

Get the group standing in a circle.

Explain this tool: someone - whenever they feel called - will step into the center of the circle and say, "Step with me if you..." and then finish the sentence with something true about themselves. So, for example, "Step with me if you are male" or "are Asian" or "speak Spanish fluently" or "were scared by the last exercise."

Then, for whoever else it is also true (by their own understanding), they join the person in the center. People take a moment to look around (who is in the circle, who is not). And then everyone returns to the circle and the exercise continues. To allow it to go deeper, this exercise is done in complete silence. Make sure to point out that people may not be sure if they want to step forward and it's entirely a personal decision.

Demonstrate with something true for you to give an example. Ask for questions. Then explain this exercise is done in silence (so no talking or side-chatting). Tell participants: "If you aren't sure if you should step into the center or not, notice that and what you decide. Throughout the whole exercise, notice and try to keep track of your reactions." And begin.

(A facilitator note: I have used this tool where it's not in silence. That can also work depending on the group. The silence sometimes helps groups go more deeply and notice their own internal process, as opposed to other people's reactions or perceived judgments.)

Let the exercise run itself. If you think the group is staying too superficial, you can step in with something that may take the group to a deeper level.

After the exercise seems to have wound itself down - after people have had a chance for some good vulnerability - stop and have participants sit down/return to chairs. Begin debriefing:

What was it like? What was hard? What was easy?
How did you find it when you stepped in? When you did not?
How might that reflect on how you felt in relation to the group?

This tool can be used to help a group that's unconscious of its margins. It can also help margins that are struggling in the group to find a space to express themselves. While the debrief is happening, then, carefully watch how margins are expressing themselves. What comes up may be a great time to do a diversity interview or otherwise support the margins to express themselves more powerfully to the margins.

An Adaptation

Rather than standing in a circle, you can also do this where everyone is sitting in their chairs. Someone says, "Stand up if..." and others in the group stand up if they share that identity/characteristic. This adaptation is less risky and thus may emerge less deep learning, but can be done with large groups (I've used it successfully with over 150).

Where this Tool Comes from

Written up by Daniel Hunter. (This tool is out there in numerous formats/versions, I do not know where it came from)