

Walking Across the Room

Goals

- To increase awareness of difference in the room
- To increase awareness in individuals of their own issues around difference

Procedure

1. Explain that groups sometimes present themselves as more homogeneous than they really are. That underneath there is usually a world of differences, and a group can benefit from recognizing those differences. This exercise helps us recognize some of the differences here in the group. We go about it in a special way because in the trainer's view the larger culture sometimes makes it difficult to acknowledge differences. By creating a structure for this exercise we support the objective.

2. (If there is no buddy system.) Create buddy pairs. Ask the buddies to share briefly when they first became aware of differences among people. Encourage them to remember an early time if they can, in childhood. Usually 6-10 minutes is enough for this. When calling the buddies back to the circle, tell them they will meet again later in the exercise.

3. Explain that the next step will be that the whole group will stand on one end of the room, together. The facilitator will name identities, like, for example, "women." When an identity is named, all those who identify that way will walk across the room to the far wall, turn, and silently walk back. The whole exercise will be done in silence. It is OK to feel whatever feelings there may be there, because this is an awareness exercise. If you feel proud or embarrassed or whatever, just go ahead and feel it. But you won't talk about your feelings until later. Maybe at some point the facilitator will name an identity which is ambiguous for you, like "elder" or "youth." Each person simply decides for her or himself how to respond.

4. Move everyone to one end of the room, and one at a time call out identities. Use a clear and formal voice for each one, as if you are announcing it. Be very attentive; stay present; support the process. The following is a list of possible identities. (This list was created for Russian trainings.) You must choose those which are appropriate. Notice that those which usually have less emotional charge are early in the list, and more emotional ones are later in the list. t and wrong" answers; this is to support your own awareness.

"Remember, this exercise is to be done in silence so you can experience your own feelings and reactions."

- woman

- man
- elder
- youth
- middle age
- brought up in a city
- brought up in the country
- Christian
- Muslim
- Jewish
- not religious
- Russian
- not-Russian
- Georgian
- Armenian
- Tadjik
- Roma
- Chechen
- etc.
- highly educated
- not highly educated
- brought up in a family with more money than most in your area
- brought up in a family with less money than most in your area
- brought up in a family with the average amount of money in your area
- lost one or more relatives in war
- your family touched by alcoholism
- at some point a member of the Communist Party
- someone in your family repressed by the state
- is a part of any of the LGBTQI communities
- and you can add others depending on the group you're working with.

5. Ask them to go back to their buddies to share how that was for them. This may be ten minutes or longer. Observe the buddies, see if anyone is crying, listen to the volume, watch the body posture, and you will finally observe the energy shifting and people becoming ready to rejoin the circle.

6. Ask them to rejoin the circle. It's OK if they take a little time to do that -- there's no rush. Don't break the mood with your own anxiety or any mood of yours. When they are together,

conduct the debrief. Ask those who want to to share what it was like for them. Sometimes when someone describes a feeling you suspect is more broadly shared ask, "How many others felt that?" and raise your hand. (Reduce any sense of isolation people may feel. Give lots of permission for each person to be exactly where they are at that time.) When it is appropriate, ask them what they learn about difference. Be sure to focus it before the close on what they learn about difference in groups. In that way the debrief ends up with the objectives of the exercise.

Where this Tool Comes from

This is a well-established exercise and I don't know who invented it. - George Lakey