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**Building the Beloved Community: Theory and Practice
Developed by Puanani Burgess**

Things to think about:

Often, we find ourselves amongst “strangers” even if we’ve lived next door to them, or gone to temple or church with their families, or worked with them for years, or lived in the same household with them.. Or, as professionals, we’ve been asked to facilitate discussions among groups, or do planning with communities. In these situations, people usually speak about themselves through their titles, their professions or jobs, or through venues that have brought them status in the society. In working with groups and communities, you will be a part of a “mixed plate” of humanity of diverse cultures, education, class, spirituality, . . . How can we get people to relate to each other “below the piko?” The exercises described below can help people relate to each other as deeply as possible in a relatively short period of time.

1. The fundamental principle when asking people to do these or any exercises is: “Never ask someone to do something if you have never done it before or are not willing to do it first.” Facilitators need to model willingness to take risks.
2. These exercises were created for the following purposes:
 - a. To create a window of doubt: to get people to think, “Hmm. Maybe I don’t know everything about him/her or about this situation.” Doubt allows people to re-think, re-experience and be open to other possibilities.

In either situation: 1) when you are working with a group who are strangers to each other, even if they live in the same geographical community, or 2) when you are working with a group whose members are very familiar with each other, you have to prepare the group for CHANGE. Piercing their assumptions about each other or about how they see the situation is a primary function of these exercises.

- b. If you’ve created that window of doubt, then the next step is to create a space for curiosity and a way to respond to that curiosity. “Hmm. I wonder what he/she is really like? I wonder what this situation is really about?”
 - c. If you’ve created and responded to curiosity, you may have created surprise, which can be positive or negative. “Oh, I didn’t know he/she had those beliefs. I’d like to know more and would like to work with him/her,” or, “I don’t want to work with him/her now that I know his/her

beliefs,” or, “I need to know more.”

- d. To create a willingness to work with each other or to explore a working developing a working relationship with open mind and heart.
 - e. To create an environment of intimacy, trust and reciprocity in an intense, time-limited and safe process. In this fast-paced time we live, there is so much mobility in our society, that the kind of time that our grandparents had for developing relationships is not our reality.
3. Facilitators have to be the most aware and have 180 degree vision. In each of the exercises, you, as facilitator, have to be willing and able to go DEEP, if you are to lead others into deeper waters.

Warm-up Exercise: The Weather Ball

Notes:

1. I usually use this as a warm-up exercise, even before people have introduced themselves.
2. I like to use a cloth ball, that has texture, shape and flexibility. You can use something else that may be more appropriate for the group. People in Kona like to use a husked coconut. You could use a shell or something handy or symbolically important to the group or community.
3. I usually explain that I like to find out how people are feeling and like to do it without being so direct. I also use this technique in order to get people comfortable with talking about themselves through metaphors. This seems to give people the needed distance from their life in order to talk public ally about themselves. Some people have no problem with talking in a group, most people have to acclimate themselves to the process.
4. Beginning with yourself, hold the weather _____, and tell what the weather is like inside of you today. When you are done, hand thè ball to the next person and ask him/her to give their weather report, “What is the weather like in you today?”
5. When each person has given their weather report, ask the group what they felt about the exercise; what they learned about themselves and each other; did it help to be holding the object? Why or why not?

Guts on the Table Exercise

This exercise was designed to help people get deeper, faster. It is a storytelling technique in which participants are asked to tell stories about:

1. Tell the story of your names, all of your names. Usually, we just introduce ourselves with our first names and leave out all of the other names which contain much of our personal histories. People can tell how they were named or who named them; the meaning of their names or how they feel about their names.
2. Tell the story of your community, however, each participant defines "community." Resist the temptation to define the term for them.
3. Tell the story of your gift(s). The emphasis is for people to tell what their gift(s) is/are, rather than their skills. The importance of this story is to enable them to wonder what their family, organization or community would be like if it was gift-based and not just skill-based. (Most of us, when applying for a job, have only been asked to detail our skills and experiences, not our gifts. My theory is that gift-based organizations do work that is more spiritual and satisfying and long-term.

The conditions/recommendations for doing this exercise are the following:

1. Try do this in a circle of chairs or people can sit on the floor in a circle, if they want and are able. Try not to conduct this exercise with people sitting around a table; tables put distance between people, which you are trying to diminish.
2. There are no observers in this process. Whoever is in the room has to sit in the circle, even people who may be videotaping the session for the group. Full participation is necessary to the process of creating a level playing field.
3. Once the circle begins, it should go completely around in that session. If people need to go to the bathroom or get a glass of water, they should raise their hand and the circle pauses. That person should go to the bathroom and return quickly. The synergy created in the circle will be broken if you have a break or let people eat a meal before completing the circle. Make sure that people turn off their cellular phones and pagers. They should tend to their business before the circle begins or not participate.
4. There should be no asking of questions for clarification or any other reason during a person's turn, not even to ask someone to speak louder. Sometimes, the volume of voice is part of the story. We are here to hear their story as they wish to tell it.

5. In this process, people cry. To honor their story, we should avoid assuming that they need to be comforted. Sometimes, those acts of comfort, distract the storyteller from the telling. Instead, we should remain attentive and wait until they are ready to continue.
6. Time is always an issue in these sessions. I divide the number of minutes, by the number of participants and that is the number of minutes each person will have to tell their story. For example, 60 minutes divided by 12 participants = 5 minutes per participant. The smallest amount of time I usually allot is 3 minutes per storyteller. It seems short, but a lot can be told in that period of time. The important thing is that the time be evenly distributed.
7. In order to assure that each person has their time, I usually ask the person to the right of me to hold my watch or a clock I brought for the timekeeping, and to hand me the watch or clock when I have only one minute left in my storytelling time. Once I am given the watch/clock, I know I have one more minute to complete my story, no matter where I am in that story.
8. At times, people become so filled with emotion, that they cannot speak. The group should accept that Silence as a gift. At the end of the circle, if there's time, you may want to ask that person(s) if they would like to tell their story now.
9. Confidentiality: 1) Participants need to agree that all the stories told in the circle remain in the circle. 2) Sometimes, people will tell a story in the circle they have never told before and may never tell again. They do not want to be questioned or discuss the story; therefore, if you have a comment you would like to make or a question to ask of someone later, please, ask the storyteller for permission (and wait to receive the permission) to make the comment or ask the question.
10. Last, but most important. As the facilitator, you will have to go as deep as you can go to set an example for the group. If your story is shallow, chances are, most of the participants will remain in the shallows. And, as the person facilitating or calling for "guts on the table," you have to go first and to deep.

Accept each gift with gratitude, humility and joy.

Culture in a Bag Exercise

Things to think about:

1. Culture can bring people together; culture can keep them apart. How do we respect the culture of others if we don't really know what their culture(s) is/are?
2. This exercise was created to allow people to talk about how they were brought up and how they now live, in a way that others can visualize and hopefully, appreciate.

Ahead of time, ask people to prepare in the following way. This exercise clues people into the environment or context they will be part of; it also allows them to prepare for exploration, by having them reflect on their lives and to select symbols and stories from their life that they will share with themselves and others.

Instructions for Participants (to be given them to them at least one week before the date of the gathering/event):

Culture in a Bag: Participants should come prepared with a bag of their choice which is symbolic of how they think of their life. In that bag, each person should bring two objects: one object will represent the culture they grew up in, and the other object will represent the culture to which they now perceive they belong. (Culture is defined by each individual.)

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand Still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

—“Lost” by David Wagoner