

Dear Bridging Leadership Introductory Seminar Participant:

Thank you for all your good work these last few days. It is a pleasure and a privilege indeed to be in community with people who care deeply about bridging divides. We hope this seminar has reinforced skills to help you increase your understanding of collaboration and strengthen your capacity to bridge social divides.

In a little while, many of you will return to environments that may not be receptive to the practices we have encouraged in this training. Some of our participants have reported that the post-Bridging Leadership Introduction Seminar world can be unforgiving. While there is real enthusiasm for a more skillful way of working together, the routine day-to-day interactions at times hinder the use of the important skill set acquired. Having caught a glimpse of this seminar and what it might be like to think and work in this way, you may be a little more sensitized to, or perhaps more intolerant of, “business-as-usual” in your social change organizations.

We have given some thought to this phenomenon, and want to share a few things. First, it may be best to go slow. Coming back to colleagues and friends fired up and ready to make big changes may be a good thing, but it can also backfire. We recommend that you take time to digest the insights and energies that have been generated by our time together, and then with the benefit of a few weeks time to look carefully at the issues, implement the changes you want to make concerning the divides you want to bridge and form sustainable partnerships.

Secondly, the condition outside this seminar may conspire to make the skills and insights gained these last few days seem unreal, as if the work we did is only applicable “in here” – not in the so-called real world. This is a common and understandable reaction, particularly as time goes by. In fact, the work done here has far reaching implications in particular given the collaboration and partnership focus on leadership. We believe that what we accomplished in this seminar is as real as you want it to be, and the most effective thing to do is to keep practicing the skills learned here – not in order to convince, change or prove something to other people, but to “be the change” that you wish to see in the world, and through that influence, inspire others to develop their own leadership skills.

The first challenge we all face is to stay alert in the face of the sometimes difficult environments in which we find ourselves. As a counterbalance, we offer the following practice. As with all things we offer, this is entirely optional. However, we have found that for those that have used it, it can be quite powerful and effective.

A First Practice: Individual Leadership Reflection/ The Path to Collaboration

1) Write a simple statement that expresses your purpose, what you are about as a leader, your vision, what matters and what your challenges are.

- Keep the statement short
- It should always be phrased in the positive

- It should spark a feeling of connection, of power in you. Work with the words until they evoke what it is you want to remember.
- The phrase may evolve over time. This is fine. What is important is that the phrase really connects for you.

2) Pause before each significant act of leadership and:

- Take several, deep, relaxing breaths
- Speak your phrase one or more times, silently or out loud
- Use this moment to actually connect. Remember what is most important to you...why you do what you do. Make some connection between this deeper purpose and vision, and the action you are about to take. Reflect on your role on impacting change to occur.

Acts of leadership may include:

- A face-to-face meeting with an individual or group
- Any significant telephone call
- Significant writing: important memos, documents, etc.

Presumably there will be 5-20 such actions per workday.

3) As with any practice, if you find yourself slipping, simply begin again. Indulging in frustration, self-criticism, and analysis of why you didn't do it... all these take you further from the practice. Even if you should forget for days at a time, simply start anew as soon as you remember.

Getting good at this will require practice. Don't be too hard on yourself at first. It is like a muscle which, when you first flex it, feels totally unusable. But if you keep doing it, probably in a year or so you will notice that people respond to you much better, and you are more persuasive, more effective, less frustrated and more content. And it gets easier the 400th time around.

If you have any ideas or requests in the coming weeks and months, we are more than happy to help you. We will always strive to be a resource for you as you continue your growth as an effective collaborator and leader for social change.

All the best,

Steve Pierce, Sayyeda Mirza, (please insert the names of the facilitators here)