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INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

For Transforming Communities by Embracing Diversity

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Take a moment to imagine cycling, walking, driving, or taking a bus through your neighbourhood one morning. Perhaps you are on your way to school, work, or a meeting. Maybe you are going shopping, doing errands, or on your way to to meet a friend at a park or recreation centre. Now imagine that, along the way and even after you arrive at your destination, everything is the same as it has always been except for one thing. That one change is this. People are no longer reacting to differences as problems to fight against, avoid or even solve. Instead, everyone is welcoming differences in other people and in nature as gifts to value and treasure.

This is the vision of the Inclusive Leadership Co-operative. We are a non-profit community service co-operative that cultivates and nurtures Inclusive Leadership development as a life-enriching, community-building practice. By embracing the diversity in all living beings as gifts that enrich the world, people of all ages and backgrounds can become more and more connected, compassionate, and courageous in caring for each other and all living beings on Earth.

The Inclusive Leadership Co-operative guides adults, youth and children to develop and cultivate four sets of Inclusive Leadership skills through experiential participatory action research and education for social change.

- Skills for connecting with differences
- Compassionate communication skills
- Anti-discrimination First Aid skills for responding to situations of discrimination
- Skills for Building Bridges within and between groups

Our global framework is the International Earth Charter (www.earthcharter.org). The Earth Charter says, *“To move forward, we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny... Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.”*

Wedlidi Speck, Director of Aboriginal Service Change for the government of BC writes, *“Inclusive Leadership is the levelling of hierarchy, inclusion of all parties, players, members of family, community and organizations. Inclusive Leadership is a strength-based focus where there is appreciative inquiry into group or community strengths. Inclusive Leadership focuses on what gives life to community-building, communicating needs and solutions. It gives a community a positive, solution-focused way of problem-solving. It brings people of all ages to the table, circle or forum. It celebrates what works, and gives room for dreaming, designing and celebrating.”*

Community Volunteer, Lewis Beck describes Inclusive Leadership as, “*World peace in action.*”

The Earth Charter also says, “*Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership.*” By developing Inclusive Leadership skills and by and putting Inclusive Leadership skills into practice within ourselves, our families, organizations, and communities Inclusive Leaders indeed play a vital role in building communities based on the Earth Charter pillars of:

- respect and care for the community of life
- ecological integrity
- social and economic justice
- democracy, non-violence and peace

Skills for Connecting with Differences

1. Relaxing About Differences

The skill of being calm and curious instead of rigid and furious is the key to disarming instinctive fight/flight reactions to differences. The way to relax is to consciously and intentionally take long deep breaths. You can do this by meditating, laughing, exercising, playing with children, and losing yourself in music, art or other creative activities. By relaxing, you are disarming your unthinking instincts to react negatively to differences, and you are keeping your parasympathetic nervous system open to learning. With a relaxed body and an open-mind, you become receptive to considering new information, exploring new ideas, and learning new things about tending and befriending diversity.

2. Daring to be Different

Daring to be different means valuing differences as gifts that enrich our communities instead of seeing differences as problems. Instead of trying to make everyone conform to and fit in with the mainstream majority, the skill of daring to be different encourages everyone to stand out and be proud of who we each are. This is a courageous skill because standing up for diversity and inclusion challenges the dominant world-view that there are certain groups or individuals who are superior to other living beings. You are daring to be different when you speak out about ways others could understand and accommodate differences in your culture, traditions, religion, race, age, family background, ability differences, life-style, gender or sexual orientation, life circumstances, or other aspects of your background. You are daring to be different when you are curious, appreciative and informed about your own and others differences.

3. Connecting with Circles

The skill of connecting with circles builds inclusive and welcoming a communities because it is the skill of making it easy for everyone to travel safely, respectfully, peacefully and enjoyably from group to group. Connecting with circles involves a strong and balanced combination of culturally-appreciative participation and personally-responsive self care to manage the stresses and strains of culture shock as you

- join new groups and adapt to different cultures and sub-cultures within new groups.
- welcome visitors and newcomers to groups that you belong to.
- bring members of different groups together in inclusive and welcoming ways

4. Leaving Out Losing

Leaving out losing involves intentionally shifting away from exclusion and oppression based on race, ethnicity, faith, culture, ability, gender, sexual orientation and other differences by replacing competition and hierarchies with cooperation at every opportunity. In diverse groups, cooperation leads to more equal and more creative sharing of skills, resources, power and influence. Although it is true that the people on top of a competitive system tend to use their power and influence to stay on top, it is amazingly easy for people who are skilled at leaving out losing to create cooperative groups within competitive systems. One way is to suggest co-operative alternatives such as a festival instead of a tournament. Another way is to invite people to co-operatively and collaboratively listen to and consider hopes and dreams for win-win ideals from groups and individuals from throughout a community.

5. Refocusing and Reframing

Refocusing and reframing is the skill of exploring multiple perspectives and alternative points of view instead of getting tricked into polarized either/or thinking or “my way or the highway” arguments. You are practicing this skill when you ask open questions and make suggestions that encourage people to consider the middle ground and the full range of ideas that are in between opposing positions. You are practicing this skill when you shift from focusing on problems to more appreciative points of view: *Let's share our different perspectives on the situation. I wonder if there are some more possibilities to consider? Let's open up the floor to everyone's input. What are some positive aspects of the situation?*

6. Following the Leaders Behind Us

Following the leaders behind us is the skill of inviting and valuing contributions of people who are in the background. The skill of inviting background leaders to come forward is powerful because leaders in the background can see the big picture and so they often share observations and make suggestions that shift everyone to see things from new angles, look at multiple ideas, and discover more tools for moving toward new ideas for solutions to our interconnected challenges. Following the leaders behind us also means learning from history and supporting the voices of people on the margins to be heard: children, elders, and people living below the poverty line. Instead of putting background leaders on the spot, be careful to ask permission and develop a plan for sharing leadership first. Remember – in an inclusive group everyone has the right to pass.

Compassionate Communication Skills

1. Listening with Intention, Attention and Balance

The skill of listening with intention, attention, and balance involves the conscious intention to be present, focused, and balanced in your interactions with an individual or a group of people. Be caring and careful in listening to each person's stories, feelings, values and needs and in sharing your perspectives. Do the math: In a balanced discussion with 2 people it is fine to spend about half the time listening and half the time talking. In a balanced discussion with 10 people, each person spends about 90% of the time listening and 10% of the time talking.

2. Tuning in with Empathy

Tuning in with empathy means joining in harmony with another person's feelings, values and needs. Tuning in with empathy means listening without judgement to what other people communicate with their hearts, minds, actions and words. There is no need to ask questions, give advice, tell your story.

Just listen, listen, listen with all your heart.

3. Facts, Feelings and Values

Both compassionate listening and compassionate talking focus on facts, feelings and values:

- observe and share facts without analyzing or judging
- share feelings and check into how others are feeling about what is going on
- consider and share what may be important to others (their needs and their values) and share what is important to you (your needs and your values)

4. Compassionately Asking Questions and Making Requests

Compassionately asking questions and making requests involves inviting people to choose how they want to answer and how they want to respond instead of making demands. When you listen and connect with compassion as part of asking questions or making requests you open doors to choice and mutual consideration. Remember that too many questions and too many requests put people on the spot – so one or two thoughtful questions or requests are enough. Also remember that open questions and requests give much more choice than yes/no questions.

5. Understanding in Any Language

Understanding in any language involves reaching across differences in language, vocabulary, facial expressions, body language and other ways of communicating. Understanding in any language involves giving extra time, being creative in listening, and trusting that we don't need to understand every single word. When people speak different languages, support from fluent communicators such as interpreters is often helpful to bridge the communication gaps and deepen understanding. However, when interpreters are not present, use all your senses, your heart and your creativity to understand and to be understood.

Anti-Discrimination First Aid Skills for Responding to Situations of Discrimination

Diversity education is similar to driver education. Both are highly effective in raising awareness, building skills, improving safety and preventing people from getting hurt. However, no amount of preventative education can reduce the risk of a traffic accident or an incident of discrimination to zero. Even seemingly minor 'fender-benders' such as racist jokes, homophobic remarks, put-downs or insults may cause much more damage on the inside than can be seen on the outside.

Therefore, just as many people take Emergency First Aid training in case they are on the scene of an accident, many inclusive leaders take Anti-Discrimination First Aid training in case they are on the scene of an incident of discrimination. Anti-discrimination First Aid is a set of skills you hope you won't have to use very often. But – like all First Aid – it is important to practice these skills so that you are ready and able to respond if needed.

A. Assess the Situation

The skill of assessing the situation is the skill of observing and deciding what to do when you witness someone being mistreated, excluded or discriminated against in other ways. Ask yourself:

1. Is it safe for me to help or do I go and get help?
2. What is the best way for me to help?
3. Which of the A, B C's of Anti-Discrimination First Aid should I do next?

A. Is also for Assert Access Rights and Advocacy

Although everyone has the right to participate fully and freely in all aspects of community life, many people get left out of places and activities that others take for granted. Asserting Access Rights helps shift situations of exclusion toward inclusion. This skill involves offering your support to the individual or group who is being left out. Two or more heads are often much better than one lone voice for identifying the barriers, finding allies, making a plan and then taking action to shift to inclusion.

B. Take a Break

Taking a break is the skill of inviting and supporting at least one person take time-out from a situation of discrimination or any kind of conflict. When people take a break, then everyone can cool down and start thinking instead of being in defensive fight/flight mode. The steps are to go somewhere safe, talk the situation over, consider who might be able to help, think about what to do next, and develop a thoughtful plan for what to do and who else to involve.

C. Communicate Your Concerns With Care

Communicating your concerns with care involves thoughtfully choosing what to say that will do at least one of these things:

- put a stop to an incident of discrimination
- communicate support to those who have been hurt
- open up opportunities for talking about what is going on.

You can say what you have to say to everyone, the person who may have caused the hurt, those who may have been hurt or other witnesses. You can communicate your concerns by interrupting the incident, or expressing your values and feelings, or asking an open question, or pointing out the discrimination, or making a request.

D. Debrief and Defuse

Debriefing and defusing is a follow up skill with two parts. Debriefing is talking with someone you trust who has the skills and authority to do something about a discriminatory situation. Defusing is co-operating with this person in authority to bring the people involved together to discuss the impact of what happened and come up with plans for restoring safety, respect, and fairness.

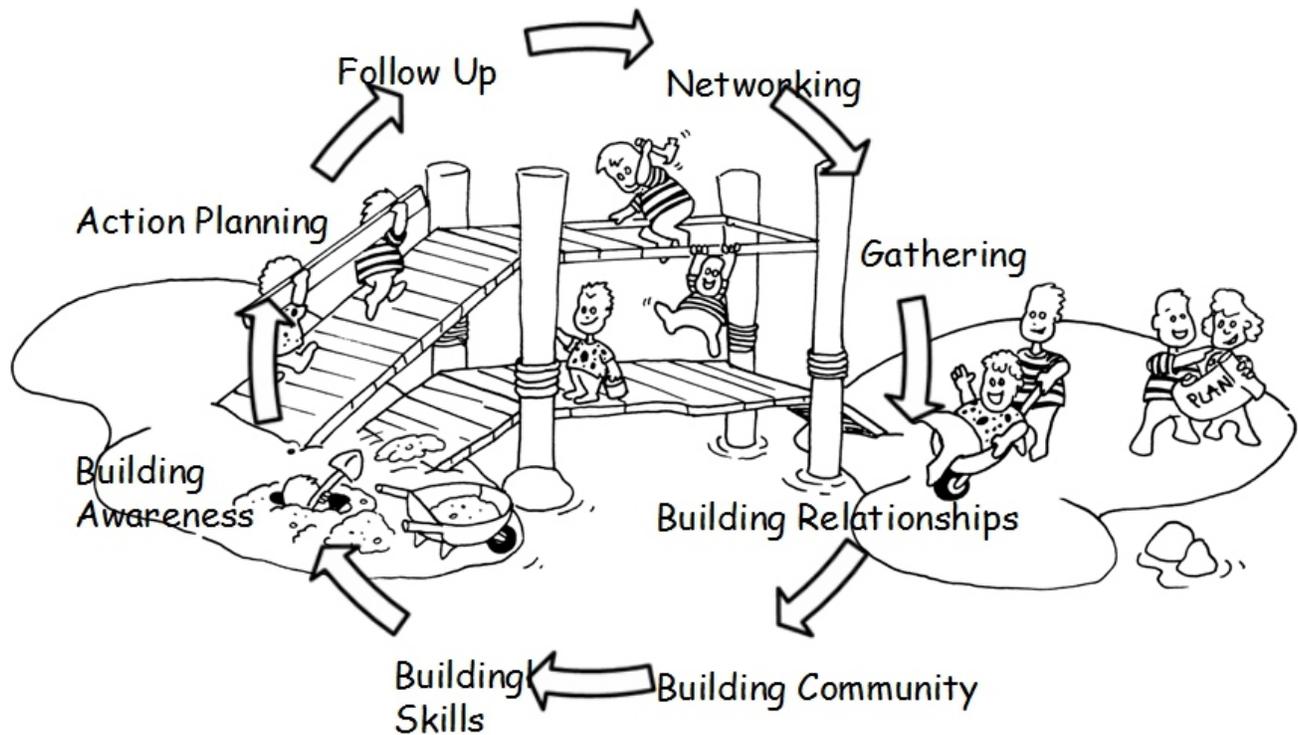
E. Ethical Witnessing

Ethical Witnessing means taking responsible social action to challenge and try to change unfair practices and systems. Some methods are: speaking out about what you are observing, letter writing, presentations, petitions, drama, music, art, workshops, clubs, support groups, alliances. By being an ethical and active witness, we can lead the way toward the changes we want to see in the world.

F. Forming Circles of Support

Forming Circles of Support is the skill of inviting others to help you create sanctuaries of safety, respect, choice and fun for people and other living beings that are experiencing discrimination. Within these safe places individuals are valued, protected, and have opportunities to relax, thrive and plan how to address discrimination. Some examples of supportive circles are support groups, art, music and theatre groups, clubs, alliances, collaboratives, buddy-groups and circles of friends.

Building Bridges Within Groups and Building Bridges Between Groups



In inclusive and welcoming communities, Inclusive Leaders are applying the steps of networking, gathering, building, action planning and follow-up over and over again. The Building Bridges steps can be applied to build bridges between individuals and between groups (such as different families, organizations, classrooms, schools, or government departments) in order to support any event, program, project or other initiative to be more welcoming and inclusive.

Step 1: Networking

Networking is the skill of personally inviting people to get involved. Perhaps you are supporting people in a group to get to know each other. Perhaps you are forming a new group, planning an event, organizing a project, or reaching out to include more people. Whatever your goals, networking is most effective when you meet with formal and informal leaders, invite people within your circles of influence and interest, and help people get across barriers such as time, money, anxiety, and uncertainty. When we work together we can find ways of supporting everyone to get involved by providing supports such as child care, interpreting, alternate text formats, wheelchair access, and culturally-comfortable venues).

Step 2: Gathering

Gathering is the skill of creating a relaxed, welcoming and 'disarming' atmosphere that feels satisfying and beneficial for everyone involved. Gathering people together as equals involves acknowledging and valuing everyone's identities (including the place you are meeting). The goal of gathering is to relax people, disarm fight/flight reactions and open up people's minds. When everyone is gathered, it becomes easier to share leadership and to learn with and from each other.

Step 3: Building Relationships

Building meaningful relationships means replacing assumptions, stereotypes and judgements with understanding of each others truths, feelings and values. Building relationships involves being open to interacting, mutual learning, and co-operation. Building relationships means spending time sharing: stories, traditions, information, feelings, ideas, challenges, struggles, passions, concerns, teachings, and successes.

Step 4: Building Community

Building community means sharing leadership in building a culture based on safety, respect, equality, choice and fun. Usually sharing leadership involves listening, being friendly, building each other up, and co-operating. Cooking and sharing food together is a simple example of a community-building project that will benefit everyone involved.

Step 5: Building Skills

Building skills within groups and between groups involves learning and applying all the skills that are in this protocol: Skills for connecting with differences, skills for communicating with compassion, skills for responding with Anti-discrimination First Aid, and skills for Building Bridges. When you put these skills into practice over and over again, you are playing a strong leadership role in building a welcoming and inclusive community that is free of racism and other forms of discrimination.

Step 6: Building Awareness

Building awareness means learning to listen locally and think globally about our interconnected environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges. Listening is the key to building awareness about each others passions, concerns, histories, hopes, fears and dreams for the future.

Step 7: Action Planning

Individuals and groups can create plans and commitments for what we want to do to build a more welcoming and inclusive world. The most sustainable action plans involve doing something about our concerns by doing what we love.

Step 8: Follow Up

Every journey begins with a single step, and step by step Inclusive Leaders go forward in a spiral of networking, gathering, building, action planning and more follow up. By bringing our differences together and by applying these skills over and over again we will succeed in building welcoming and inclusive communities where everyone belongs and everyone is valued.

The Story of Developing Inclusive Leadership

Psychologist, Dr. Linda Hill, researched and developed the Inclusive Leadership skills for Connecting With Differences and the steps for Building Bridges in the 1980s. Her goal was to help build more inclusive organizations and communities. Linda applied the Building Bridges steps over and over again to bring together groups of adults, youth, children and intergenerational groups. She found the Building Bridges steps were highly effective in helping groups address a wide variety of diversity issues. The inclusive solutions they forged together helped everyone shift from individualism, competition, and exclusion toward inclusive and welcoming ways of living, learning, working, and playing together.

In 2002, Linda teamed up with Raj Gill and several other community leaders in BC, Canada to guide youth and adults from diverse backgrounds to develop leadership skills for exploring, sharing and celebrating diversity. We called these experiential weekends of participatory action research and education "Inclusive Leadership Adventures." Within these adventures in diversity education, Raj Gill began guiding everyone to also learn and practice Compassionate Communication skills. John Scull helped us learn to create Action Plans based on the Stages of Change Model. John and Kix Citton helped the international Earth Charter become our global framework. Our main message was that differences in all living beings are gifts that enrich the world.

Most of our Inclusive Leadership Adventures took place in the Cowichan Region, Vancouver Island, BC where Linda and John lived. In 2005, Cowichan Intercultural Society contracted with Linda and Linda McDaniels to develop Inclusive Leadership into a regional protocol for preventing and responding to "critical incidents" of racism and other forms of discrimination. This three year process funded by the Government of BC involved several thousand adults and youth from non-profit organizations, schools, government departments. We took training in Dr. Ishu Ishiyama's Anti-Discrimination Response Training and developed several of the Anti-Discrimination First Aid skills from his work.

From 2007 to 2011, the Government of BC funded Cowichan Intercultural Society to provide Inclusive Leadership education to rural communities throughout the Province of BC. We realized we were becoming a world-wide community of Inclusive Leaders. "*We are part of a world-wide movement made up of individuals and groups who care about people and the planet in ways that are life-enriching and life-sustaining.*" (Kix Citton).

In 2013, the Inclusive Leadership Co-operative was incorporated a non-profit, community service association with a vision of engaging adults and youth from around the world in Inclusive Leadership. Each year hundreds more adults, youth and children from many different communities become involved in learning and implementing Inclusive Leadership skills. We invite you to:

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