

Triggers and Methods Exercise



Teaching Note

Materials Needed:

- Anywhere from 3-6 people per group

Exercise Overview:

This exercise is designed to help people *have* their emotions rather than *be* them. We all have our emotions and knowing how to manage them productively is a large part of dealing with conflict and in taking the Third Side. In this exercise we begin to help people make a distinction between emotions, the triggers for those emotions, physical clues, and methods for handling them. This is done so people have a process for dealing with this element of conflict.

Purpose of the Exercise:

The purpose of this exercise is to give people an opportunity to think about the things that trigger their emotions in conflict. In addition, they are also asked to reflect on the physical clues that tell them their emotions are taking over and discuss with the other participants how to manage these emotions productively. The goal is to give them a process to work through so they can best manage their emotions in conflicts and to help others do so as Thirdsiders.

Exercise Time required (based on tables of 6 people – add or subtract 4 minutes per person to total):

- 3 minutes to explain the exercise
- 25 minutes to run the exercise
- 10-15 minutes to debrief it

Total time: 35-40 minutes

Detailed instructions for running the exercise:

- Ideally participants will be at round tables of 6. If they are in such a configuration have them work on this together. If not you can have them get into groups of 6 for the exercise.
- Tell the group that they are going to think about and discuss the things that trigger their emotions in conflict and why. In other words, what are their hot button issues that set off their emotions and what physical clues tell them their buttons are being

pushed. You should tell them to take a few minutes each and go around the table sharing these.

- Then explain that once everyone has shared their triggers and clues the respective tables should brainstorm a list of possible ways to manage these triggers. What strategies do they have – or can they think of with the help of others -- for controlling these triggers and emotional reactions?

General Debrief:

- In the debrief you want to focus on these two areas:
 - Begin by asking the different tables to report out on the different triggers and physical clues they experience. Also asking them why can be helpful here.
 - Then ask them to report out to the larger group the different strategies they came up for managing these triggers and physical reactions.

Questions:

The following questions may be used to elicit responses to this exercise:

- Before we get into the specifics, why do you think it is important to examine triggers and physical clues? How about as a Thirdsider?
- Let's start with the triggers and how you know those are happening to you (the physical clues). Any one want to share what transpired in their group?
- Did you discuss why those triggers are difficult for you? Could you trace them back to a specific incident?
- Do you see anyway to change these triggers so they don't bother you?
- What strategies did you come up to manage these triggers and physical reactions?
- Did you take anything else away from this exercise? What might that be?

Optional element to exercise:

Find a video where people are being very offensive or rude and show it to people as a way to get them started on noticing these triggers. Any video that is provocative will do.