

Balancing Personal Reflection and Community Action

For individuals, groups, and communities, leadership is fundamentally a balancing act between reflection and action. Sometimes it is challenging, especially as a group, to strike the right balance between personal reflection and group action on issues of concern to the community.

LeadershipPlenty provides us with several techniques we can practice. They are detailed below. Many of these techniques are explored in other modules in the *LeadershipPlenty* series. They include personal reflection, active listening, managing conflict, building consensus, partnering, and evaluation.

1 Structure meetings to include time for participants to share personal growth activities, such as journaling, and for reporting out on specific community-focused work, such as information about the issue the group is addressing. This will foster a creative dynamic between personal growth and community engagement.

2 Realize that some people have a stronger need than others to share personal experiences as part of their own reflection. Supporting other team members in this process is an important part of team building.

3 Brainstorm about issues of importance to the community that the team would like to address. Team members can gather information about some of these issues to present at the next meeting. However, at the early stages of a team effort, refrain from making hasty decisions about group work.

4 Take a deep breath. It is normal for tensions to rise as individuals in a group begin to work together. If the going gets rough, refocus on what you, as individuals and a group, care deeply about in the community.

Building an Action Sandwich

Build your Action Sandwich from the following ingredients:

Card 1 HOPE Write a specific hope for the community on your top card, even if it sounds very ambitious. Example: "I hope that every child in our city can have access to an excellent education and the support of caring adults."

Card 2 FEAR Write your worst fear about the situation. Example: "I am afraid that children waiting for the school bus could be caught in the crossfire of a drive-by shooting."

Card 3 PASSION Write what moves you deeply about the situation. Example: "I am furious when I hear that high schools are graduating young people without basic skills."

Card 4 ROLE Write how you see yourself participating in this effort.

Card 5 TIME Write how long you think it will take.

Card 6 MONEY Write anything you know about the need for, or availability of, funding.

Card 7 FACT Write one thing you know to be true about the situation that has a bearing on the outcome: "I read that only 20 percent of parents actually attend parent-student conferences at the local elementary school, yet parental participation is a key factor in children's success."

Card 8 REALITY Write your version of a realistic goal statement. Example: "If employers in the community would let parents leave work for parent-teacher conferences and make up the time on the job later, parents would be more engaged in their children's educational experience at school."

Adapted from Nan Booth, *Meeting Room Games: Getting Things Done in Committees*

(Saint Paul, MN: Brighton Publications, 1996).