

Is our social justice leadership reproducing white supremacy culture?

Antidotes excerpted from "White Supremacy Culture" by Tema Okun. dRworks www.dismantlingracism.org

Antidotes for SENSE OF URGENCY:

- realistic workplans;
- leadership which understands that things take longer than anyone expects;
- discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time;
- learn from past experience how long things take;
- write realistic funding proposals with realistic time frames;
- be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency
- realize that rushing decisions takes more time in the long run because inevitably people who didn't get a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings will at best resent and at worst undermine the decision because they were left unheard

Antidotes for POWER IS BIGGER, MORE:

- create Seventh Generation thinking by asking how the actions of the group now will affect people seven generations from now;
- make sure that any cost/benefit analysis includes all the costs, not just the financial ones, for example the cost in morale, the cost in credibility, the cost in the use of resources;
- include process goals in your planning, for example make sure that your goals speak to how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do;
- ask those you work with and for to evaluate your performance

Antidotes for OBJECTIVITY:

- realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody's world view affects the way they understand things;
- realize this means you too;
- push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you;
- assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is

Antidotes for WORSHIP OF THE WRITTEN WORD:

- take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information;
- figure out which things need to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening;
- work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization (for example, the ability to build relationships with those who are important to the organization's mission);
- make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, 'buzz' words, etc.)

Antidotes for I'M THE ONLY ONE:

- evaluate people based on their ability to delegate to others;
- evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals

Antidotes for PERFECTIONISM

- develop a culture of appreciation[...]to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated;
- develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning;
- create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results;
- separate the person from the mistake;
- when offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism;
- ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism
- realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes

Antidotes for ONLY ONE RIGHT WAY:

- accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal;
- once the group has made a decision about which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the organization will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen;
- work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach;
- look for the tendency for a group or a person to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it;
- when working with communities from a different culture than yours or your organization's, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities' ways of doing;
- never assume that you or your organization know what's best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community

Antidotes for EITHER/OR THINKING:

- notice when people use "either/or" language and push to come up with more than two alternatives;
- notice when people are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made;
- slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis;
- when people are faced with an urgent decision, take a break and give people some breathing room to think creatively;
- avoid making decisions under extreme pressure

Antidotes for RIGHT TO COMFORT:

- understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning;
- welcome it as much as you can;
- deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture;
- don't take everything personally

Antidotes for QUANTITY OVER QUALITY

- Include process or quality goals in your planning;
- make sure your organization has a values statement which expresses the ways in which you want to do your work;
- make sure this is a living document and that people are using it in their day to day work;
- look for ways to measure process goals (for example if you have a goal of inclusivity, think about ways you can measure whether or not you have achieved that goal);
- learn to recognize those times when you need to get off the agenda in order to address people's underlying concerns

Antidotes for PATERNALISM:

- make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization;
- make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization;
- include people who are affected by decisions in the decision-making

Antidotes for DEFENSIVENESS

- understand that structure cannot in and of itself facilitate or prevent abuse of power;
- understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege);
- work on your own defensiveness;
- name defensiveness as a problem when it is one;
- give people credit for being able to handle more than you think;
- discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission

Antidotes for POWER HOARDING:

- include power sharing in your organization's values statement;
- discuss what good leadership looks like and make sure people understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others;

- understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive;
- make sure the organization is focused on the mission

Antidotes for FEAR OF OPEN CONFLICT:

- role play ways to handle conflict before conflict happens;
- distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues;
- don't require those who raise hard issues to raise them in "acceptable" ways, especially if you are using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse not to address the issues being raised;
- once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently

Antidotes for INDIVIDUALISM:

- include teamwork as an important value in your values statement;
- make sure the organization is working towards shared goals and people understand how working together will improve performance;
- evaluate people's ability to work in a team as well as their ability to get the job done;
- make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or most public person;
- make people accountable as a group rather than as individuals;
- create a culture where people bring problems to the group;
- use staff meetings as a place to solve problems, not just a place to report activities