NINE LEARNING CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS

Defining Social Justice

An orientation, a disposition, a set of commitments and a collection of practices that focus on

• promoting greater equity for all;
• eliminating all prejudices that diminish people by virtue of their group membership;
• supporting people in more fully realizing themselves as persons or in helping them to flourish as human beings;
• enhancing the ability of people to lead, learn and participate in creating a humane, caring and nurturing community.
Assumptions about Social Justice

Social Justice can be practiced by anyone, and must be, if social transformation is to occur.
Social Justice is less an individual endeavor and more a shared, relational process in which collaboration and shared understanding are paramount.
Those committed to Social Justice are supportive and facilitative toward others as least as much as they are highly directive toward them.
Social Justice is premised on everyone learning and having the opportunity to lead.
The key test of leadership for Social Justice is whether it spurs new people to assume leadership roles or actually undermines their desire to lead.
Movements for Social Justice must be joyful, appreciative, renewing and inspirational.
Social Justice must find ways as an orientation and a practice to be all-inclusive.
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The Nine Leaders Highlighted in the Book

Jane Addams  Myles Horton
Ella Baker  Aldo Leopold
Cesar Chavez
Septima Clark  Nelson Mandela
Mary Parker Follett  Paul Robeson
The Learning Tasks

Learning Openness
Learning Collective Leadership
Learning to Question
Learning Critical Reflection

Learning to Support the Growth of Others
Learning Democracy
Learning Hope
Learning to Analyze Experience
Building Community
Jane Addams – Learning Openness

Founder of Hull House, a turn of the century settlement house in Chicago, Addams worked directly with people in the community, wrote widely, and had a lasting impact on leading social issues until her death in 1935.
Ella Baker – Learning Collective Leadership

Worked to promote civil rights throughout most of the 20th century, first with the NAACP, then as Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and finally as founding “mother” of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). She died in 1986.
Aldo Leopold – Learning to Question

A pioneering environmentalist and advocate for conservation, Leopold wrote “A Sand County Almanac” and introduced the idea of the “Land Ethic.” He died fighting a brush fire on a neighbor’s farm in 1948.
Septima Clark – Learning to Support the Growth of Others

A public school teacher for 40 years and a fearless advocate for the NAACP, Clark created the Citizenship Schools that allowed thousands of disenfranchised Blacks to be able to vote. She remained an activist for civil rights well into her 70s. She died in 1987.
Mary Parker Follett – Learning Democracy

One of the great theorists and practitioners of democracy and deliberative dialogue in the 20th century. Follett believed that important decisions must reflect the thinking and voices of the entire community and that ways must be found to honor and include those voices. She died in 1933.
Cesar Chavez – Learning Community

Perhaps the greatest Chicano organizer and non-violent activist of the 20th century, Chavez sacrificed his health and well-being to bring new rights and opportunities to farm workers and migrant workers. He did in 1993.
Myles Horton – Learning to Analyze Experience

Founder of the Highlander Folk School in 1932, Horton led hundreds of community groups to take control over their own learning through shared storytelling and concerted action. He died in 1990.
Nelson Mandela and Learning Critical Reflection

Mandela’s autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* can be seen as a chronicle of critical reflection in practice in which an iconic political activist critiques and often revises core assumptions underlying the struggle he led to create a free South Africa. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.
Paul Robeson and Learning Hope

One of the great performers and intellectuals of the 20th century, Robeson gave up wealth and privilege to upend white supremacy in the United States. He was silenced and oppressed but never lost hope that he could help to bring about a more humane world. He died in 1976.
OPENNESS – What it is

• The willingness to entertain a wide variety of alternative perspectives;
• To be receptive to contributions from many participants;
• And to create dialogic spaces that invite diverse viewpoints.
OPENNESS – How leaders practice it

➢ By reading widely, listening closely, and interacting frequently with diverse others.
➢ By not bringing discussions to a close prematurely.
➢ By not imposing agendas and preferences on others.
➢ By remaining open to the possibility of having one’s mind changed.
OPENNESS – Why it matters

✓ Because leadership is more about facilitating the emergence of multiple viewpoints than imposing a particular view;
✓ Because leadership is more about relationship building than a single leader’s vision;
✓ And because leadership is more about creating the conditions for ongoing leading and learning than anything else.
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP – What it is

• All group members are committing to creating and implementing a shared vision.
• All assume some leadership responsibility.
• All are willing to subordinate themselves to the group’s goals and interests.
• No one person is indispensable.
• All lead interdependently – sometimes episodically and sometimes simultaneously.
• Each abandons her or his own individual ambition in favor of the group’s jointly arrived at aspirations.
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP – How leaders practice it

- By subordinating recognition for self to producing positive change.
- By elevating others over themselves and giving credit to others first.
- By keeping the focus on the group much more than individuals – Emphasizing the group’s power, energy, potential for great accomplishment.
- By seeing themselves as “instruments,” “conduits,” or “vessels” for positive change.
- By creating reward and incentive structures that were more group-oriented.
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP – Why it matters

✓ Puts the emphasis on leadership as a shared and collaborative process, not leaders as individuals.

✓ Because the evidence is mounting that leaders get more done when the point is positive change, not individual recognition.

✓ Collective Leadership is extremely challenging but also extremely rewarding and effective – We need more leaders who see it as their primary way to get things done.

✓ Humility and deep confidence and faith in the group as a collection of leaders seem to be qualities associated with the most effective groups.
LEARNING TO QUESTION –
What it is

- Derived from the word “quest,” to question is to journey into the unknown;
- to try out new ideas, to dare to wonder, to challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions;
- to search out the unknown and unfamiliar, and to re-examine with new interest the known and familiar.
- It is part of the quest to live more fully and adventurously.
LEARNING TO QUESTION – How leaders practice it

- By staying curious about the world and other people.
- By using a variety of questions – questions for evidence, for clarification, for making connections, and for synthesizing.
- By asking the right question at the right time and thus to envision a different tomorrow - Hagstrom: What do you want for your children in this school? How can we make it a school for adventurers and discoverers?
- Leopold: What would it mean if we valued all parts of the environment equally? What would it look like to adopt a land ethic?
LEARNING TO QUESTION –
Why it matters

✓ Sometimes questioning is the only way to imagine and make progress toward a different tomorrow.
✓ Because we need strategies to wonder collectively.
✓ Because questions, as much as anything, when posed thoughtfully and creatively give us the boost we need to go on leading and learning.
✓ Because questions are one of our best ways to show curiosity and to take risks that can help us break through the ice of the status quo.
✓ Because questions even without answers can change the world: Why ruin a perfectly good question with an answer?
SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF OTHERS – What it is

Helping to create that humane and caring environment that allows people to go on learning, leading, and being actively involved in building a better tomorrow. Doing whatever is necessary for people to reach their full self-realization as human beings.
SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF OTHERS – How leaders practice it

- Listening actively and attentively and responding appropriately
- Asking constructive questions
- Staying curious about others
- Learning people’s stories
- Championing other people’s goals
- Helping people to see their lives and their interests reflected in the positive change you are trying to bring about
- Affirming others often with specificity and honesty
- Empowering People to be true Change Agents
SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF OTHERS – Why it matters

Because the point of leadership as we understand it is to give people the tools and the resources and the understandings and the support they need to:

- Go on growing,
- Go on leading,
- And learning as human beings.
- To help people become self-realized may be the most important thing that leaders do.
DEMOCRACY – What it is

- A continuous and ever-widening conversation about how to organize interpersonal and social affairs in which every person has the opportunity to be heard and to have an impact on decisions made.

- All the basic things that everyone needs to participate fully in making these decisions – from housing to health care to higher education.

- A struggle against ideologies that exclude people by virtue of their economic status, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Democracy is learning to find ways to articulate the need to be inclusive, ethical, and empowering for all and then to create the structures to make such a fully inclusive society possible.
DEMOCRACY – How leaders practice it

- By insisting on inclusivity even when it was illegal.
- By prizing dialogue, hearing all voices, and creating interactive processes that allow all to feel they have had a chance to shape the outcome.
- By having faith in ordinary people’s intelligence even when some were skeptical of this intelligence.
- By being leaders who worked for rights for people at many levels and in many ways.
- By being “power-with” leaders, never “power-over” leaders
- By modeling the idea that freedom and responsibility are interrelated but by never withholding freedom on the unfounded belief that people are not ready to “handle” the responsibilities associated with freedom.
DEMOCRACY – Why it matters

Because people cannot grow as persons unless the conditions of democracy are present:
1) Voice and Decision-Making Authority;
2) Decent Standard of Living;
3) Inclusivity and Equality.

When these things are in place, the leader’s most important goal – guiding full self-realization for all – is within reach.
HOPE – What it is

- Hope is not the same as optimism.
- It is a sober and deeply informed expectation that despite the tragedies of the past things will get better with effort, critical thought, and a fierce commitment to positive change.
- It is a striving to include as many people as possible in the process of bringing about a more humane and caring society.
HOPE – How leaders practice it

- By avoiding violence and maintaining faith in the power of non-violence.
- By immersing oneself shoulder to shoulder and day in, day out in communities where people are struggling to make change for the better.
- By identifying an overriding purpose for the work being done, sometimes rooted in religion or a spiritual goal and sometimes in a set of simple beliefs about the value of upholding each person’s dignity and humanity. HAVING A MORAL PURPOSE.
- By being a persevering leader who can see that progress continues to be made, however incrementally, over the long haul.
HOPE – Why it matters

✓ Without hope, the struggle for social justice cannot be sustained.
✓ Critical, sober, clear-eyed hope is one of the markers of leaders of integrity.
✓ When we learn hope in this thoughtful, profound way there is nothing that can stop us over the long haul.
✓ Hope is the conviction that by joining with others anything can be accomplished despite the huge challenges. Any restriction can be overcome, any limit can be eliminated.
✓ Leading and learning hope includes a honest assessment of how far we have to go and a deep faith that in time communities of persistent, courageous people can develop the capacity to get us there.
✓ Because all leaders must have a clear and compelling moral purpose.
ANALYZING EXPERIENCE – What it is

It is a process of looking closely at our personal (and shared) experiences, taking time to dwell in and value that experience, pulling out lessons from those experiences about the factors that may have impeded or obstructed us, examining the commonalities among people sharing those experiences, and developing plans to take action based on what was learned from our analyses.
ANALYZING EXPERIENCE – How leaders practice it

• Through storytelling about critical incidents
• Through metaphor and analogy
• Through questioning and genuine curiosity
• Through making connections and seeing commonalities
• Through insitence that such analysis must lead to action
ANALYZING EXPERIENCE – Why it matters

- Builds self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Aids in the process of learning how to learn
- Gives people a sense of shared purpose
- Helps people to see that thought, action, and reflection are all invaluable
CRITICAL REFLECTION – What it is

Focusing thinking on mission, purpose and service by constantly asking questions about how our ideas, decisions, and actions are tied to our desire to create a more humane, equal, and just society.

Holding ourselves and others accountable to the idea that our most important purpose is contributing to the public or common good.
CRITICAL REFLECTION – How leaders practice it

By noting the gap between principles and practice

By paying attention to what is NOT happening to promote the common good

By asking questions constantly about the connections between actions and principles, institutional mission, and larger purpose
CRITICAL REFLECTION – Why it matters

To hold leaders accountable to what is most important

To hold all of us accountable to what is most important
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP – What it is

The roots of the word are the key to what it is: common, commune, and communication. It is that environment in which everyone believes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that ongoing communication, identification with the whole, and commitment to the community’s purpose are all essential. One indicator of community is when everyone can tell a story of some kind about everyone else’s growth and development as a community member.
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP – How leaders practice it

By practicing all the other learning tasks:

- Staying open
- Questioning curiously
- Supporting others’ growth
- Focusing on the collective
- Practicing democracy
- Being hopeful
- Cheerfully analyzing experience
- Reflecting critically and constructively
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP – Why it matters

Because as Hillel said:

• If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?
• And if I am only for myself, then what am I?
• And if not now, when?