

S E S S I O N 4

How Should We Communicate?

Session Objectives

- To demonstrate the importance of communication for effective leadership.
- To consider how to be persuasive when motivating, educating, or negotiating with others.
- To discuss the nature of compromise—or finding common ground—including its benefits and drawbacks.
- To analyze participants' personal styles of communication.

Suggestions for Facilitation

Read aloud the following piece written by Marian Wright Edelman. Consider the strategies she uses to persuade her readers to join efforts to protect children in the United States. The questions that come after may help guide the group discussion. Following the questions is an exercise designed to examine individual communication strategies.

You may wish to break the group into smaller teams in order to encourage more in-depth discussions of the topic (see Appendix B for more information on this facilitation method).

I Care and Am Willing to Serve

Marian Wright Edelman: Children's Rights Advocate

Movement building is very, very hard. Discouraging. Unpredictable. Requires great perseverance. Deep inner reserves. Unwavering commitment to a heartfelt vision. A sense of call worth fighting and risking all for. It requires discipline, focus, and long range planning, yet a willingness to turn on the dime¹³ and seize the moment, and an ability to live with ambiguity and complexity.

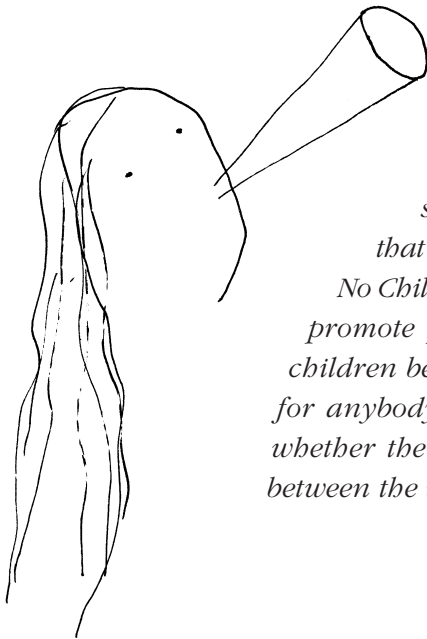
Movement building for children requires openness to many different kinds of people with different needs, approaches, interests, and talents without losing sight of the overarching goal: to Leave No Child Behind®. It requires zeal and iron will to keep moving ahead when others yell stop and throw up roadblock after roadblock, drag their feet, or repeatedly pronounce us politically unrealistic.

Movements are not built in a day. They are a long time coming. They burst forth from many seeds planted in many places by many people over time and from many grievances that simmer, steam, and boil over after being ignored or inadequately addressed.

Building a children's movement will require a critical mass of effective servant leaders of all ages, faiths, races, and disciplines playing their role—each of us trying to complement not duplicate or reinvent

the wheel; to collaborate not compete; to serve children and not just ourselves, our organizations, or our political interests.

We must hold ourselves and others accountable. We must not let words be a substitute for action or a fig leaf¹⁴ for policies that hurt children. People who promise to "Leave No Child Behind" but who don't do the work, or who promote policies and budgets which leave many children behind must be challenged. The litmus test¹⁵ for anybody promising to Leave No Child Behind is whether the gap between the rich and the poor and between the vulnerable and the powerful will be closed

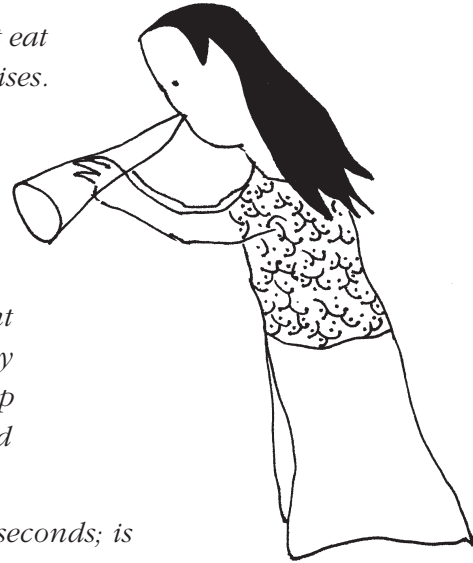


¹³ Phrase that means "act quickly."

¹⁴ A fig leaf has come to represent a covering for something shameful.

¹⁵ A litmus test is one in which a single factor (a certain situation or reality) is decisive.

rather than widened. Children cannot eat or be housed or educated by promises. Children who are hungry, homeless, trying to learn in crumbling schools, and in need of child care and health care should be protected. We must speak truth to power in all political parties and at all levels of government and in every sector of American society until all of our young are able to grow up healthy, nonviolent, respectful, educated and safe.



A child is born into poverty every 44 seconds; is born without health insurance every minute; is neglected or abused every 11 minutes; and is killed by gunfire every two hours and 20 minutes. These facts are not acts of God. They are our moral and political choices as a nation and as citizens. We must change these facts with a sense of great urgency and a willingness to persist.

Every day we delay is another day guns kill 10 children, 186 children get arrested for violent crimes, and 2,911 children drop out of school.

Dr. King and Gandhi are not coming back to build a movement for our children. You and I have to do it. We can and we will. And if we do our very best, God will do the rest.¹⁶

Marian Wright Edelman, the first African-American woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar, began her career in the 1960s as a civil rights leader in the United States working in collaboration with Dr. Martin Luther King and others. She is the founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, an organization dedicated to ensuring that every child has a healthy, safe, fair, and moral start in life with the support of caring parents and communities.

¹⁶ Marian Wright Edelman, "Hold My Hand: Prayers for Building a Movement to Leave No Child Behind®." Reprinted by permission.

Questions for Discussion

- What do you think Marian Wright Edelman's objective is in writing the piece?
- Do you think she is an effective communicator? Why or why not?
- What is the effect of the statistics she quotes?
- What strategies would you use to communicate the same message to others?
- Can you think of a phrase, slogan, or speech that you find powerful and inspiring?
- Can modern technology, such as fax machines, email or websites, help distribute the message to a wider audience? If so, what would be your outreach plan?

Exercise: Communicating Across Difference

Allow approximately forty-five minutes for this exercise.

Governor's Decree in Sudan Bars Women from Working in Public Places

In September 2000, Khartoum State Governor Majzoub al-Khalifa issued a decree barring women from working in many public places, saying the ban would uphold Islamic shari'a law and maintain the honor of women. The decree was particularly aimed at women who work in gas stations, hotels, and restaurants.¹⁷

Scenario: A women's rights activist living in Khartoum is outraged at the decree and decides that she must speak out against it. Through a friend, she makes an appointment with a high-level deputy of the Minister for Labor and Administrative Reform. She decides to try to persuade him to join her in speaking out against the decree. The deputy is a middle-aged man, married, with two teenage daughters. He, too, is concerned about women's rights and the protection and safety of his daughters when they enter the workforce. He wants his daughters to have the option of education and a career, but only in a society with regulations to support his daughters' strict observance of Islam.

1. The workshop group breaks into teams of three. Team members choose who will take on the role of deputy and who will be the activist. The third team member will observe the conversation between her team-mates and record her observations.
2. Taking on their respective roles, the deputy and the activist meet and have a five to ten minute conversation during which the activist presents her concerns and tries to persuade the deputy to speak out against the decree.
3. During the conversation, the observer takes notes on her teammates' conversation. Her observations may include:
 - What are their styles of communication?
 - What argumentation strategies are they using?
 - How well is each listening to the other?

¹⁷ This is a true event. See <http://www.cnn.com/2000/WORLD/africa/09/05/sudan.women.ap/>

- How well is each responding to the arguments of the other?
 - Are they able to find common ground?
4. The whole workshop group reconvenes in a circle. The observer from each group briefly shares her observations.
 5. If time permits, ask a few pairs to repeat their role play before the whole group, changing their role in light of what they have learned from the exercise and discussion.

Questions for Discussion

- For the activists and the deputies: Was it difficult to support your position? Why or why not?
- On your team, did the activist and the deputy really listen to/hear what the other was saying?
- What assumptions or stereotypes about each other might have affected the way the deputy and the activist responded to each other?
- Did either the activist or the deputy on your team attempt to teach or educate the other about the merits of her/his position? Is “educating” any different than argumentation? Why or why not?
- What kind of factual information would help to make the activist’s communication more effective?
- When would a leader want to “educate” others? Are there examples you can think of where leaders have used this strategy constructively?
- Were the deputy and the activist very far apart in their goals? What goals did they share if any?
- Were there issues upon which the activist and the deputy could compromise? If so, what were they? If not, why not?
- Was it reasonable to expect the deputy and the activist to find common ground? Why or why not?
- Should finding common ground be a goal of a good leader? Is it always possible to reach common ground? Is it always laudable? Why or why not?
- Regardless of your role during the exercise, what might you say or do now in either role to be persuasive?

Observations

- How did it feel to “role play” a character? What were you able to learn from a “role play” exercise?
- How did it feel to be an “observer” taking notes during the exercise?
- Were you surprised by something you heard?

Horizontal leadership places a premium on conversing individuals who respect one another and one another's opinions— even when they differ.

[W]e need to overcome our prejudices and antipathies, avoid harsh judgments, learn not to impose our ideas on others, accept diversity, control our anger, weigh the positive in others, recognize talent, and forgive.

“The Building Blocks of Leadership”