December WNC Dialogue

Check-In Themes

• Have a hard time holding my ground with family, recognizing I’m more feeling based and not as articulate when talking to folks across paradigms
• Need to study lists on how to not get derailed, know talking points
• Trauma history increases de-centering
• Getting emails about “what whites can do” is not hitting home – feeling confused, doesn’t feel like enough
• Listening to AG reveals hw the entire system/framework is broken, cannot be used to make decisions about how to care about each other
• Feeling pull to “friend” rather that “ally” in order to develop framework of community rather than war
• Difficult to engage with less overt racism/issues – hard to grasp at it, want to develop greater articulation
• Feels dire to know that friends and neighbors of color are always at risk
• Can’t wait until we look back on this and see with more clarity the insanity of it all – how to get to that eventualiy now
• Was on SURJ call and appreciated framework of reaching white people in motion, or who have the potential of motion – not wasting energy with people who won’t move
• What are the steps of engagement?
• Inspired by the organizing in Ferguson, the ways it is shaking the world
• Notice I can now stay more calm and curious in discussion with opposing views, asking questions, not making assumptions, have a harder time engaging with non-feeling liberal racism, esp after the bombing the Gaza
• These issues are salient for me right now – distracted by anger but need to practice skills to engage when I go home – how to engage with dismissive people/family
• Avoiding the conversations isn’t working for me, feel like goal is to be able to have skills to engage family
• Hard to hear a women deny she is affected by patriarchy, how to talk to friends about things that surprise you
• Interrupting moments – finding opportunities to have conversations, esp with well-intentioned liberal folks. How can I use my role to have tough conversations in the service industry without jeopardizing my job
• Seeing connections between Ferguson and Palestine is important to me, the ways Israel is tied to global repression and militarization, hard to engage with family who can discuss state repression but can’t make connection to Zionism as repression
• Pattern of whites of just talking and pushing back, important to organize conversations and also acknowledge what does it mean to organize on broad levels of changing public discourse
• Struggling with external conversations as well as internal conversations (not doing enough, etc)
• In process of “strategically diversifying” at my place of work, which is very white, shocked by their silence about structural racism, etc and want to have conversations, but how to have them with folks who are not ready to have the conversation and concerned about impact on coworkers of color
• Just need practice

Brainstorming conversation skills

• Read and discuss article: We Have to Talk - http://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-stepbystep-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php
• Inquiry/ curiosity – ask questions. What do they want, what do they value? What are my motivations? What do I want?
• Acknowledgment – understand their perspective so well you could state their argument
• Advocacy
• How to open conversations and create willingness? Ask: Can we talk about…? Ask for consent.
• Mirror – model respect, connect with humanity
• Sometimes also useful to get “smacked in the face” with truth – calling out
• How to meet people where they are at
• Grounding – doing personal work reduces defensiveness
• Let go of control and perfection, let it be messy
• Feel grief and urgency- overwhelmed by what the other person represents
• Be prepared with checklist of comebacks
• Understand effects of trauma – we are all holding it - how to acknowledge, heal, know that we think what we think because of trauma. How can we not just prove them wrong but help them heal their trauma?
• Practicing somatic techniques of getting attacked and then noticing those patterns and how we recenter – retraining body to recenter
• Seeking to connect and build trust – I love you and totally disagree. More space there. More room for anger, fear.
• Understand our messaging and conditioning around being effective (whether it’s around niceness, don’t be angry, be useful, have to win).

Role Playing

• Noticing anxiety rise just for role play, center.
• First scenario: Dismissive Family Member. Goal: Identify her values and experiences and make connections.
• Second scenario: Uncle worried about violence in Oakland.
• Third scenario: Gaslighting.
• Fourth Scenario: White people saying: “This doesn’t affect me.”
  o Remind them how recently their ancestors or family members were oppressed – whiteness and white privilege are recent constructs
  o Discuss the financials and statistics
- What moved me into caring?
- Parallels to others in history who had “nothing to lose” such as slave owners during the slave rebellions and slave patrols.
- Discuss the safety of their kids – What would it be like if you were afraid for your child’s life every time they left the house?”
- Be authentic.