

# Chapter 3

## Personal Healing and Political Action

Dear Facilitator(s),

This workshop series was crafted, reviewed by a multiracial team, and revised with several important issues in mind.

1. The series design allows facilitators to use one or more activity sections as standalone events or in various combinations. There are approximately 5 hours of content available for each chapter. It is unlikely that any group will have enough time to work through all sections. Therefore, facilitators should select from the various options, perhaps following one or two thematic strands. (See the Workshop Series Overview for more details about thematic strands.)
2. Moving through these workshops without reading the corresponding *Living in the Tension* book chapter will markedly reduce workshop effectiveness. It will make the process more challenging and is not recommended.
3. A primary purpose of this series is for groups to enhance the leadership capacity within their community. Detailed facilitator notes are provided for each activity so that one or more group members can practice facilitation while leading the series. A few notes of caution: a) the same facilitation team should run the entire series, b) the team should read the entire book in advance of leading workshop sections, and c) sufficient debrief opportunities should be created to discuss how each workshop went so that facilitators' skills can be developed.
4. The intended audience includes white people who recognize the need to support racial justice efforts and want to improve and solidify their anti-racism practice. The series has also been constructed with the understanding that some people of color might resonate with the tensions described in the book and find value in the exploration. For this reason, questions within the majority of sections are crafted to allow people of any racial background to participate. Sections designed specifically for white people's development are also noted. This series can be used in a racially caucused (affinity group) or mixed-race format. (See Facilitation Guide for more information.)
5. First-time facilitators are encouraged to use the language scripts provided in the openings, directions, and wrap-up portions of each agenda. Deviating from the language and tone may create confusion and undercut the purpose of the section.
6. Facilitators are encouraged to create a welcoming, inviting space where participants feel free to speak the truth of their experience without fear of shaming or reprisal. It is essential for facilitators to understand that a hallmark of both the book and the series is the need to validate some element of people's perspectives while seeking to add to their understanding.

Best wishes,  
Shelly Tochluk

# Living in the Tension - Chapter 3

## Personal Healing and Political Action

### 3.0 – Warm-up – Scattered Numbers (10 minutes)

**Materials needed:** Number chart handout. Pencils or pens.

**Purpose of piece:** To demonstrate that it is much harder to navigate a system when you don't know the rules. To make the point that being able to recognize a system in operation is valuable.

**Say to group:** This exercise is not new, but we're going to use it to make a point. It is modified from something Dr. Eddie Moore Jr. has done with groups when he gives presentations. To start, take a look at this sheet of scattered numbers. In the next couple of minutes, we want to find out how quickly you can locate all numbers in order, from 1 to 80. Use a pen or pencil to circle each number as you find it. Remember not to skip any numbers.

**Facilitator's Note:** *Give the participants about 40 seconds to search (or until some people are about half way finished). The idea is to stop the group midway so that they can experience continued searching after learning about the hidden structure on the page.*

**Say to group:** Let me interrupt you for a moment. I'd like to tell you something I didn't mention earlier. Take a moment to notice that the number 1 appears in the upper left quadrant. The number 2 then appears in the upper right. Search in the lower left quadrant for number 3, and follow the pattern from there. I'll now give you a final minute to finish this activity. (5 minutes)

Large group discussion: (5 minutes)

1. What did you notice about searching before the hint was given versus afterward?
2. How might this relate to our lives in general?
3. How might this illustrate how oppression works in our society?

**Wrap Up:** If the rules of the game are already set up for us and our life experiences teach us how to maneuver the system, we are advantaged by the rules. People who live in communities that follow different rules or are not taught the rules explicitly are disadvantaged by them. In order for us to become more effective in moving people toward anti-racism, it is important that we become cognizant of the systematic nature of oppression (how things function without our awareness) and how to help others become cognizant of how it affects people's lives.

### 3.1 - Developing our Community – Exploring Tensions: Leveraging Polarities (60 minutes)

**Materials needed:** Leveraging Polarities packet, pens or pencils

**Purpose of piece:** To provide a group with the opportunity to evaluate and consider how to leverage the wisdom of each pole of the core tensions described in Chapter 3 in order to create a shared understanding among group members.

**Say to group:** We’re going to work through these packets on Leveraging Polarities together. We’ll take turns reading through the explanations and then pausing to do the activities as suggested.

**Facilitator’s Note:** *The information included in the packet is complex and should be reviewed carefully in advance of the workshop. It is possible that additional exploration on the topic may be required before facilitators feel comfortable using this material. You may want to turn to that handout now to review before reading further.*

The anticipated time frame for working through the packet is the following (45 minutes total):

1. Read and discuss pages 1 through 3 as a group (15 minutes)
2. Pause to complete and discuss filled in table at the bottom of page 3. (10 minutes)
3. Read and discuss page 4 as a group (10 minutes)
4. Individually complete page 5 (10 minutes)

The individual activity includes the following:

Select one of the polarities from the table below and use the polarity map provided to create your own Positive Results, Negative Results of over focusing on one pole to the neglect of the other, Action Steps and Early Warnings on the map.

**Facilitator’s Note:** *It may be useful to highlight that in this exercise, the term privilege is used expansively to encompass more than race privilege. Therefore, participants may want to reflect on other areas where they receive privileges, such as via citizenship, gender, ability, sexual orientation, etc. (particularly if your group includes people of color).*

Set 1	Self-Directed <i>My inner Self is my guide for personal growth.</i>	and	Take Guidance <i>Feedback from others is essential for my personal growth.</i>
Set 2	Value Individual Dignity <i>I am accountable to myself.</i>	and	Respect Interdependence <i>I am accountable to my community.</i>
Set 3	Personal Agency <i>All people have personal agency in how they react to life circumstances.</i>	and	Systemic Barriers <i>My values require me to work to end systematic oppression.</i>
Set 4	Reflect <i>Ensuring I understand how privilege affects my life is necessary.</i>	and	Take Action <i>Taking action against injustice is necessary.</i>

Large group discussion: (15 minutes)

1. What insights did you gain through this exercise?
2. How do these tensions currently affect our community?
3. What can we do to support our community in leveraging the positive aspects of these poles?

**Wrap Up:** The value of the polarity leverage approach is in its recognition that we will always live with these tensions. Learning strategies to leverage the positive aspects of each side can support a community to stay focused on productive discussions and avoid getting sidetracked into either/or positions.

### **3.2 - Developing our Community - Exploring a Dilemma (55 minutes)**

**Materials needed:** Copies of Scenario Response Worksheet (3.2a or 3.2b). Pencils or pens.

**Purpose of piece:** To use a scenario to reveal participants' thoughts about how various tensions manifest, provide an opportunity to create a common understanding of the issues, and strategize future responses.

**Facilitator's Note:** *Two scenarios are provided so that you might select the one that is most appropriate for your group. Each has its own handout version. Skilled facilitators who are aware of a particularly relevant issue that the community is facing may want to write out an alternative scenario and use that in place of those printed below. Keep in mind the degree to which it aligns with the specific tensions highlighted in this chapter, and modify the exercise accordingly.*

**Facilitator's Note:** *To prepare for implementation of this section, reflect on the first question yourself and develop possible answers regarding what tensions exist in this scenario that relate to the book content. Share these with the participants as prompts as you begin the exercise.*

**Say to group:** Read this scenario silently to yourself. Then answer the first set of prompts on the worksheet: 1) what are the tensions in this scenario, 2) to what degree do the themes in this scenario play out in communities of which you are a part, where do you think they come from (culturally, theologically, etc.), or how are they supported, 3) how is privilege and/or racism manifesting, 4) how would you feel if you were in this situation, and 5) what would you say in response? (*Silent reading/reflection – 10 minutes*)

#### **Scenario 1 (Handout 3.2a):**

A church committee, composed of mostly white individuals, is meeting to discuss a decision about making a public statement in support of an organization seeking justice for a marginalized group, a group composed of people of color. The committee chair, a white person, has been talking to some of the congregants who are part of the marginalized group and is proposing that the congregation place a banner up in front of the church. The minister has been preaching for weeks about the importance of standing up for those who are being targeted in the U.S. One committee member, who is also white, is really uncomfortable with

the preaching, believing it is focusing too much on politics and not enough about one's inner experience and growth. Another white member expresses concern that there have been complaints from some congregants that they don't want to come to church anymore until the overt attention toward politics stops. The committee chair tries to convince those who are skeptical that making a public statement would be an enactment of their faith.

**Scenario 2 (Handout 3.2b):**

Yoga sutras are assigned reading at a retreat. During a discussion session, an African-American participant asks a question about the concept of karma, saying, "How am I supposed to go to the West side of Chicago, where a woman has just lost her son to violence, and tell her this is about karma?" A white participant offers that if she was working on the South side, she would think about karma internally, but not say it out loud. The African-American woman replies, "I'm not asking you to fix this. I'm asking someone to tell me how you hold this idea of karma without it being victim blaming." The white retreat leader says, "What you're talking about is activism. That's important work. But, that's not what we're here to do." The African-American woman says she's not an activist and doesn't identify that way. The retreat leader continues, "No one should judge how someone spends their time. I read the Bhagavad Gita, and that's just as important." A different participant says in a fairly exasperated tone, "How are we going to make change in the world?" Another questions, "What are we here to do? I'm here to focus on my liberation and my transformation, and that's what's going to change the world."

**Say to group:** Now that we've finished with the silent reflection, let's get into groups of 4 or 5 to share our responses, each person taking two minutes to share what they wrote down. (*Small group sharing - 10 minutes*)

Staying in the same small group, discuss the next set of questions on the worksheet: 6) How would you hope our community would respond to this situation, and 7) How could the use of "both/and" thinking inform the response? (*Small group discussion - 15 minutes*)

**Facilitator's Note:** *Prior to beginning this workshop, try to answer the large group discussion question #3 for yourself. Be prepared to offer an example for the group.*

**Say to group:** Let's come back together and talk as a whole group about this scenario and what we can take from it. (*Large group discussion – 20 minutes*)

1. In what ways do the communities you are a part of deal with the issues raised in this scenario?
2. How do people tend to respond? Where do we learn these ideas?
3. How would a "both/and" approach be helpful, and what might that look like?
4. For faith-based and spiritual communities: Where in the principles, scriptures, philosophy, and/or theology is support for these ways of thinking found?

**Wrap up:** The purpose of this activity was to dig into a complicated issue that faces many communities in order to learn more about each other and our tendencies so that we can be more prepared to respond when something arises in our own community.

### 3.3 – Developing Our Analysis - Consciousness Raising and Taking Action (60 minutes)

**Materials needed:** Definitions Exploration sheet, category placemats, activity cards, Beliefs and Goals sheet, Raising Consciousness and Taking Action (Ideas) sheet, pencils or pens

**Purpose of piece:** To clarify our understanding of what constitutes racial justice, consciousness-raising, and action. To explore our personal beliefs and set personal goals.

**Say to group:** People invested in racial justice often believe that paying attention to both personal consciousness-raising and action are necessary. What gets complicated is that the way various activities get characterized can sometimes lead to conflict, critique, and bad feelings. Specifically, in many groups, activities defined as “political action” are valued over those considered “personal consciousness-raising.” Today we are going to delve into some definitions that have been put forward regarding what constitutes racial justice work in order to clarify our own thinking about how we classify consciousness-raising and taking action. We’ll then make plans for our own forward movement.

**Say to group:** Let’s start by reviewing some definitions. These are not necessarily “the” definitions we must hold. But, they are reflective of generally agreed upon approaches to the terms.

- How are the definitions of “racial justice,” “anti-racism,” and “consciousness-raising” similar or different? (In case it is not clear, we want to look at the three different terms. The intent is not to compare the two definitions offered for each term.)
- What reactions do you have to the terms and their definitions?

*(10 minutes)*

**Say to group:** Given these definitions as well as our discussion, in groups of 3 or 4, we are going to do a quick categorizing activity. I’m going to hand you a set of cards. Each one has an activity written on it. I’m also going to hand you a set of category placemats. Your task is to determine which activities go with which category. Your group needs to come to consensus regarding how to categorize each activity card. Feel free to spread out on the nearest flat surface. You’ll have a fairly short time period to accomplish this. The reason for the time limit is to challenge you to notice which of the tasks seem easy or harder to categorize. *(10 minutes)*

Category Cards		
Personal Consciousness-Raising	Taking Action as an Individual	Nice, but not anti-racist action nor consciousness raising
Consciousness-Raising with Others	Taking Action in a Group	

Activity Cards		
Participating in a march or rally	Reading a book or watching a film on race issues	Contacting a public official to advocate a position
Writing a blog, article, or book related to racial justice	Attending lectures or conferences focused on race	Attending meetings held by activist organizations

Creating workshops to educate about race and racial justice	Talking with family/friends about racial justice	Disrupting enactments of privilege during conversations
Supporting POC-led political actions	Fund-raising to support POC-led groups	Giving a speech
Hosting multi-racial or affinity group dialogues	Participating on a diversity, equity, or inclusivity committee	Phone banking to push a position
Door-to-door canvassing to promote justice-oriented legislation	Creating or participating in community-based development projects	Creating or participating in initiatives to shift policies in one's community
Providing one-to-one mentorship to people building an anti-racist practice	Acting as an ally for a friend or associate	Writing a letter to the editor
Using personal resources to support anti-racism activities	Studying theories of social change	Recruiting people into anti-racism through one-to-one conversations
Creating or implementing curriculum that supports anti-racist practice development	Participating in consciousness-raising groups	Investigating one's own relationship to privilege
Starting a tutoring program to support at risk students of color	Serving food at a homeless shelter serving mostly POC	Collecting holiday gifts for disadvantaged kids of color

Large group discussion: (20 minutes)

1. To what degree was categorizing the activities easy or difficult? Why?
2. What are some of the questions that arose?
3. How important is it that we agree on the definitions and categorizing?
4. What can affect one's perspective?

**Facilitator's Note:** *The point of this exercise is to critically interrogate the idea that there is one correct way to characterize these activities. Many times, the same activity can be interpreted multiple ways. If a group feels the need to make decisions regarding an activity's classification for the sake of internal clarity and decision-making, there is nothing wrong with that. The caution is that an emphasis on classification can result in a hierarchy of valued activities, leading the group to value some people's contributions over others. Sustained community engagement requires ensuring that all contributions are valued, even while a balanced approach that includes both consciousness-raising and action should be encouraged. A secondary purpose can be highlighting that it can be useful to notice if there is a tendency to select a particular type of activity over another. This can reveal areas for stretching and growth.*

**Say to group:** The Consciousness Raising and Taking Actions (Ideas) resource sheet has a number of possible action steps, along with most of those we worked with in this last activity. Feel free to use it as a reference as we move into the next part. Now, using the Personal Beliefs and Goals handout, I want to invite you to create a statement that includes the following: (10 minutes)

- How you view consciousness-raising and taking action in terms of the relationship between them and the importance of them both.
- Your goals regarding how you will do both consciousness-raising and action.

- Within the next week I am going to...
- Within the next month I am going to...
- This year I plan to...

Large group discussion: (10 minutes)

1. Are there any volunteers who want to share their personal view regarding the relationship between consciousness-raising and taking action?
2. Is there anyone who would be willing to share their goals for learning and action?
3. Does anyone fear their goals are a bit ambitious, and would like to create an accountability partnership to make follow up more likely?

**Facilitator’s Note:** *Accountability partnerships are always useful, and so feel free to invite everyone to get together with a fellow participant and plan how they will follow up with each other.*

**Wrap Up:** There is much to criticize in the realm of racial justice action, particularly when a set of well-meaning people jump into action without understanding the complicated dynamics of the situation and/or what assumptions borne from a privileged position are evident in one’s behavior. For this reason, it is essential that we always retain a self-reflective stance, keep an eye trained on expanding our awareness, and regularly take action in support of justice. This keeps us moving in the direction of Praxis, the last definition on our Definition Sheet. Praxis occurs when we take theory and move it into action, reflecting on the experience, learning from it, and then acting again based on what we’ve learned. A necessary catalyst for the growth is the dialogical relationships we create amongst each other, both within affinity groups and across difference. Regular opportunities to self-reflect in conversation with others is often the driver of the necessary growth. Two questions we can keep asking ourselves are: 1) What more do I need to know in order to take my next step or form an educated opinion on this matter, and 2) How can I make sure I am making the most impact?

### **3.4 – Developing our Emotional Capacity – Cultivating our Capacity to Receive Critique (1 hour 15 minutes)**

**Materials needed:** Meditation Reflection worksheet. Pens, pencils, crayons, and markers. Dental Hygiene Model of Anti-racism video by Jay Smooth.

**Purpose of piece:** To expand our capacity to listen and experience gratitude when receiving critical feedback.

**Say to group:** This exercise will begin with us thinking back to an uncomfortable moment when we were told we messed up or when we got critical feedback about something. We’re doing this because if we plan to engage with racial justice work, we are going to experience criticism. It is going to happen. The criticism may come in a form that we think is fair. Or, it might be given in a way that doesn’t feel right or makes a point with which we disagree. The question is how we can ensure that we stay open to receive the critique. Today’s exercise will help us identify how to increase the capacity to listen and feel a sense of gratitude, even when receiving feedback that doesn’t resonate or is delivered in a way we dislike.

**Facilitator’s Note:** *This activity asks participants to generate a memory that might not be that close to daily consciousness. During the brief guided meditation, pause between each question to allow for internal processing.*

**Say to Group:** To get started, I invite you to take a few moments to get comfortable where you are sitting, perhaps allowing your arms and legs to relax into whatever is supporting you, the chair, the ground... You may want to close your eyes, or if it’s more comfortable, let your eyes lose focus as you gaze at a neutral spot in front of you.

I invite you to allow your mind to remember a time when you were criticized in a way that was difficult to handle. It could have been about anything. Maybe you made a mistake, or someone found fault with something you said or did. *(Allow for a significant pause)*

- What did it feel like to experience the criticism?
- Were you anxious, relieved, grateful, embarrassed, or ashamed?
- Did you feel defensive?
- Did you value the information being given? Or did you feel that it was inaccurate?
- Was it delivered with care? Or did you feel mistreated?
- What was the feeling in your body? Did you get tense? Did your face flush? Was it more of a freezing sensation? Did you feel it in your belly?
- What went through your head?
- How did you feel about the person making the critique? What were you thinking about that person?
- How did you respond?

As you sit with this recollection for a moment, you may want to notice how your body is feeling. After taking a few deep breaths, we’ll open or refocus our eyes, and return to the group. *(15 minutes)*

**Say to group:** We’re now going to take about 10 minutes to more fully engage with that experience silently. You are being given a worksheet. In the box on the upper section you can use images, words, or symbols to represent either 1) how you saw that person in that moment, 2) how you experienced yourself, or 3) a representation of the emotion you felt. It’s completely up to you how you want to use that space. *(10 minutes)*

Underneath the box, complete the following sentences:

While receiving this critique,

- I felt...
- My sense of self was...
- What I wanted more than anything was...
- I thought the person delivering the critique was....
- My feelings about the person were...
- What I wanted to say was...

**Say to group:** To the degree that you are comfortable, share with a partner. *(5 minutes)*

**Say to group:** In order to help ourselves sustain a listening posture and access a sense of gratitude during moments when we're receiving critical feedback, it helps to realize that in any given situation, we are bringing our own interpretation to the moment. We tell ourselves stories about what is happening. These stories may have some truth to them, and they may also stop us from recognizing other valuable information. They may be overly self-critical, and they may validate us in a way that stops us from appreciating others' concerns. One way we can train ourselves to become less defensive, is to practice generating different kinds of stories about challenging moments.

**Facilitator's Note:** *Be prepared to offer an example of your own. For example, an important shift for me came when I realized that people offering me a critique were not trying to be mean or tell me I was worthless. Instead, they were taking their time and energy to connect with me and help me improve how I approached work in the community.*

Take a few minutes to imagine how your experience might have changed if you had been telling yourself a different story about yourself, the person offering the critique, or about your knowledge base in general. Complete these new stories on the back side of the sheet, and feel free to generate a new image to go along with this updated story. (10 minutes)

Underneath the box, complete the following sentences:

1. A different story about the situation is...
  - a. I was given a critique because...
  - b. The intention of the person delivering the critique was....
  - c. My feelings about the person are...
  - d. This story makes me feel...
  - e. If I could do it again, I would want to say...
  - f. I want more than anything...

Large group debrief: (15 minutes)

1. When have you needed feedback from someone else in order to grow?
2. What can help us stay in an "I want to know" listening mode as opposed to an "I already know" mode? (*Refer to the bottom of the back side of the Meditation Reflection for a few ideas.*)
3. What can help us tell ourselves more useful stories?

**Wrap Up:** As we wrap up this exercise, we want to acknowledge that we're not only concerned for ourselves. We also want to support others in generating the emotional capacity to pay attention to race. A very accessible way to talk about this issue with others is to use the dental hygiene paradigm of racial discourse, as described by Jay Smooth. Jay Smooth offers a useful TEDx talk that reminds us that we all live in an environment in which we are awash in racism every day. We need a regular practice that supports us to stay open to receiving the message that we've got racism in our teeth. Play video (12 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbdxeFcQtaU>

Invite comments or thoughts after the video. (5 minutes)

### **3.5 – Developing our “Both/And” Skill Set – Learning to Use a Systemic Lens (1 hour 15 minutes)**

**--- DESIGNED FOR GROUPS COMPOSED OF WHITE PARTICIPANTS ---**

**Materials needed:** Butcher paper, tape, Skill Sets of Agents resource sheet, Skills Transition worksheet, pens and pencils.

**Purpose of piece:** To reflect on the use of the terms “allyship” and “solidarity,” investigate how the Skill Sets of Agents theoretical model, by Leticia Nieto, might help us more effectively engage people while offering a systemic lens, and reflect on our own stories of how we became aware of systemic injustice.

**Say to group:** It’s important that we ground ourselves in our values and intentions when talking with people we hope to influence. One of the things we need to be clear about is why we are invested in racial justice. What is our stake in this work?

One area to consider is how we relate to the terms allyship and solidarity.

1. What does it mean to be an ally? What thoughts, intentions, and beliefs does it inspire?
2. What does it mean to work in solidarity? What thoughts, intentions, and beliefs does it inspire?

Take a few share outs for each questions. Take notes on butcher paper taped to a wall. (5 minutes)

Increasingly, people are offering critiques of the ally approach. This is partly because the following ideas are common within the ally approach:

1. Being an ally is about helping other people.
2. It’s the right thing to do, but it doesn’t imply me having a personal stake in the issue.
3. People from that marginalized group need me to take action because they do not have the power to stand up for themselves.
4. My involvement in their liberation is essential.

Regardless of intention, these motivations/rationales support supremacist thinking (albeit unconscious) that undermines the agency of other people and contributes to a destructive sense of self-importance.

Alternatively, solidarity implies the following:

1. I am invested in justice efforts because injustice is bad for all people.
2. Our collective liberation is bound together, and I must do my part.
3. Each group has particular contributions to make to our collective liberation.

**Facilitator’s Note:** *This discussion is not meant to leave participants feeling chastised for using the term ally. In many places, the term ally is the best first step toward creating a racial justice practice. The intent for this discussion is that participants can gain a clearer view of a current shift in language and thinking taking place so that they may understand the rationale (and impacts) and modify their speech as needed.*

It is important that each of us develop our own authentic language to convey why we're invested in racial justice. Given what has just been discussed, take a few minutes to write down some reasons you engage in justice work that focus on your personal stake.

Some questions to consider while you brainstorm are:

1. How does racial inequality impact you?
2. How does racism affect your connections with others?
3. How would life be better for you, your family, and your community if racism did not exist?

(10 minutes)

**Say to group:** The reason crafting this language is essential is because we will draw upon it when explaining to others why we think this work is important and invite them to be involved. The message we give to others makes a difference, and the more we can avoid sounding like we're motivated by a savior or guilt complex, the better.

**Say to group:** What I am now passing out is a tool that describes various skill sets people use when they are in an Agent position (the privileged position within a particular social category). The ideas were developed by Leticia Nieto as part of a larger theoretical model. DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT.

When reviewing this, note on the far right column that one of the characteristics of allyship is working to educate and activate other people within the privileged group. This is an example of a moment where we invite the both/and. Yes, many are critical of the focus on allyship for the reasons we've discussed. And, there are beneficial tools offered under the guise of supporting allyship that we can use.

The importance of this document is its ability to help us be realistic and strategic. We cannot expect people to move from Indifference to Allyship overnight. For many, it's a fairly lengthy process. This model can help us identify where people are in their skills and what might come next. For example, for someone who exhibits overt racism or is indifferent, the next step might be trying to get the individual to see people of color in relationship to our common humanity, moving a column or two to the right.

Another important aspect to note is that there is a doubled line between Inclusion and Awareness. This indicates that the three columns on the left involve the use of an individualistic lens. The two columns on the right, on the other hand, involve an understanding of the systematic nature of oppression. (5 minutes)

At this time, take a few minutes to review the handout, including the definitions at the top of the page.

1. In your own words, how would you describe the five different 'skill sets'?
2. How might this information help us approach conversations with others?

(15 minutes)

**Facilitator's Note:** *Some white people living in highly segregated communities may object that this work isn't as necessary because a large number of people of color are not part of their network, community, or city. However, it's essential that facilitators make the point that we can (and must) engage in these conversations regardless of how many people of color we interact with regularly. To*

*do otherwise would reinforce the idea that race only exists when people of color are present, a primary point of privilege that must be challenged.*

**Say to group:** In order to prepare ourselves to more effectively communicate the value of using a systemic lens, it is important for us to understand where we are in our own journey. Some of us may find that interpreting things systemically is new and difficult. Others might have interpreted things through a systemic lens for so long that we've almost forgotten what it's like to focus on individual responsibility and agency. Regardless of where we are on the journey, when we talk to others who are not yet in a position of acting as ally or solidarity partner, the most effective strategy may involve telling personal stories.

**Say to group:** To anchor ourselves in our own stories, stories that might be useful to tell others, we're going to reflect on the personal experiences we've had that helped us shift from one of the 'skill sets' to another. In other words, what experiences helped move you from one column to another? (Distribute the Skills Transition worksheet.)

*Individual reflection (10 minutes)*

**Say to group:** Now let's move into pairs (or triads).

- Share some of the important moments in your life that helped you move from one position to another. (*If you can't think of anything related to race, consider an experience that caused you to think differently about another issue.*)
- Consider what it was about these experiences that made such a difference in your thinking. Why were they so impactful? What did they make you realize? (20 minutes)

Large group debrief: (10 minutes)

1. Has anyone had experiences that helped you interpret events/issues through a systemic lens?
2. How do we accountably hold a "both/and" in terms of how each person needs to feel a sense of *personal agency* and that *systemic injustice* affects people's lives?
3. How might telling our stories and experiences be useful when speaking with others?
4. What would make you feel more confident engaging in conversations about the systemic nature of oppression?

**Facilitator's Note:** *It is not expected that this single activity will generate a lot of confidence. This is a moment when the community could discuss how to continue providing practice and learning opportunities for infusing systemic ideas into conversations. Small groups of people could meet together to support one another either practicing or debriefing together. The point would be to create a habit of practicing these skills. They do not come naturally. Putting in time and effort leads to effectiveness. Handout 3.5d, Conversations Offering a Systemic Lens, is an additional resource that may support further strategy and practice conversations.*

**Wrap Up:** To offer a final word on this process, it's up to Agents to work to expand the perspective of other Agents. We can talk about it as allyship or solidarity work. Either way, being strategic is important. And recognizing that multiple stages of development might be needed is part of that strategic understanding. Also, it will take lots of practice before we develop a sense of confidence in our ability to engage people in a way that effectively expands their perspective. That's normal.

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Hopefully we can work together to help each other use our voices and stories as effectively as possible.

### **3.6 – Closing Ritual/Checkout – (10 minutes)**

A closing reflection to read before participants offer one word to capture their feeling.

#### **Option 1.**

This is a quote from Rebecca Parker, published in *Soul Work*. It is a statement that reflects how a commitment to racial justice includes the political as well as the personal.

*“My commitment to racial justice is both on behalf of the other – my neighbor, whose well-being I desire – and for myself, to whom the gift of life has been given but not fully claimed. I struggle neither as a benevolent act of social concern nor as a repentant act of shame and guilt, but as an act of desire for life, or passion for life, of insistence on life – fueled by both love for life and anger in face of the violence that divides human flesh.”*

Reference: Rebecca Parker, “Not Somewhere Else, But Here: The Struggle for Racial Justice as a Struggle to Inhabit My Country,” in *Soul Work: Antiracist Theologies in Dialogue*, edited by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (Boston: Skinner House, 2003), p.184.

#### **Option 2.**

A statement by Xolani Kacela

From the book *Voices from the Margins*

Are We Living in a Post-Racial World Yet?

*We get good at what we practice. Research now tells us very clearly what distinguishes amateurs from experts – it’s the amount of time they spend practicing their craft.*

*To become exceptional, you must do two things. First, you must practice with intention – you have to aim to become very good. If you set out just to know how to do something or do it “good enough” then that is how good you will become. To become expert, you have to envision yourself as a master of your craft.*

*Second, you must practice a lot and consistently. Studies show that amateurs practice about three times a week for about an hour per sitting. Those who develop into experts put in three hours a day almost seven days a week. They become consumed with their craft.*

*In addition, there is a magic number. Becoming an expert demands about ten thousand hours of practice! That’s twenty hours a week for about ten years.*

*The notion of intentional practice also applies to how we become the beloved community. It’s not enough to just say that we are post-racial, we have to practice being post-racial.*

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*It is said that if you're not on the court, you're not in the game. We have to put in the time on and off the court.*

Book Reference:

Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison-Reed (2012). *Voices from the Margins*. Skinner House.

### **Option 3.**

A poem by Goethe

From *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*

Until One is Committed

*Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.*

*Whatever you can do,  
Or dream you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius,  
Power and magic in it.*

Book reference:

Robert Bly, James Hillman, and Michael Meade (Eds) (1992). *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*. Harper Collins.