Guidelines for Improving Communication
Within a Diverse Group

1. Begin with the assumption that human beings are natural communicators, and that we desire warm, close relationships with each other.

2. Assume that biological/cultural/ethnic/sexual/religious/age differences between human beings are seldom the real cause of difficulties in communication.

3. Assume that the real cause of such difficulties is the division and separation resulting from institutionalized imbalances in social and economic power, i.e., social oppression. The conditioning which perpetuates the divisions between us separates us into target and non-target groups.

4. People who are the target group of a particular form of mistreatment are socialized to become victims; people who are the non-target group of a particular form of mistreatment are socialized to become perpetrators -- either in a direct, active form or in an indirect, passive form. Neither of these roles serves our best interests as human beings.

5. Assume that no one wanted these roles; no one wanted these divisions. Everyone resisted the social conditioning to take on these roles as best they could. But this conditioning clings to us and makes it difficult to see and hear each other clearly. We make unaware assumptions about what other people are thinking and feeling. We forget to check with each other and to really listen.

6. Assume that issues of oppression have some connection to difficulties in communication. Assume that racism, sexism, job status, etc., figure in somewhere.

7. Assume that target group people are the experts on their own experience and that they have perspectives and information which non-target people need to hear.

8. Assume that everything is taken into account, every human being has communicated as clearly as they could, and in general has done the best that they could in each situation.

9. Assume that in spite of the ways we have divided, it is possible to reach through those divisions, to listen to each other well, and to change habitual ways of acting which have kept us separated.

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