

Three Applications – Relay Race

Goals:

help participants learn the theory of three applications of nonviolent action;

expose participants to how to apply that to better understanding a range of situations

Time:

80-120 minutes

How To Lead:

This exercise is based on the idea of “relay races,” although in this version there is less emphasis on “winning” and more on learning.

PREPARATION

Collect conflict situations ahead of time by asking participants in the workshop or having participants one-on-one tell you a situation that is active for them back home, preferably not resolved. The conflict situation needs to be one in which there’s explicitly a justice issue involved rather than, say, criminal gangs fighting each other. Write up each of these conflict situations in two sentences, or three at most, on individual cards. (Alternative preparation: have such situations already written up before the workshop.)

RUNNING THE RELAY RACE

First, break groups into at least two teams (teams should be made up of 5 to 6 players each). To “warm up” their team, give them a minute to come up with a team name.

While participants are coming up with a team name, put up four headings at one end of the room: Social Change, Third-party Nonviolent Intervention, Social Defense, and Unclear. Then have each team present their team name. (Place teams to make sure they are about equal distant from the headings.)

Then explain briefly (five-eight minutes) that there are three major applications of nonviolent action: social change, social defense, third-party nonviolent intervention, with an example of each.

Explain that people are about to do a “relay race.” The rules of the relay race are as follows:

Each team will get a set of cards. Participants will pick up one card at a time.

Each card will contain a situation which the team as a whole should reach consensus on whether the situation the situation calls for nonviolent social change, or defense, or third-party nonviolent intervention, or is unclear.

As soon as your team decides, someone will grab the card and, using masking tape, put it under that heading.

The role of the runner needs to keep rotating throughout the group to each person (so it is not only one person running), keeping in mind differences in physical ability.

IF YOU WISH, you can add: The first team to finish putting up all of their cards, “Wins.”

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Ask for any clarification questions. Make sure the teams are clear about the rules of the relay race. Handout sets of cards face-down, telling groups not to start until you say “Go.” Finally: say “Go” and let them begin!

DEBRIEF

After the game is “over” – when a team runs out of cards or when every team runs out of cards (your choice based on your sense of the group) – give the group a moment to catch their breath. Invite them to go to the far end of the course to inspect where the various cards were placed.

Wherever they put various cards, congratulate them on doing some tough thinking and some tough calls.

Begin debriefing by giving space for people’s immediate reactions. It can be a challenge to be making so many decisions rapidly. After people have expressed any feelings along those lines, help the group to look at why they put what where (and how that action might affect people in the area). Some of the following questions could be raised as time permits:

What considerations did people make in deciding where to place cards?

What made some of the situations unclear? If they were framed differently, how might that impact the movement? (In numerous cases, changing the framing from, for example, social change to social defense can make a major impact. Consider the situation of destruction of forests: it could be framed as changing social habits, policy and the culture or as defending a vital part of our world).

Debrief with clarification about the three applications of nonviolent action.

Where This Tool Comes From

George Lakey, originally for work in Geneva with indigenous leaders from around the world.