



THE CHALLENGE OF HOPE

Each year, at this time, we are inspired by the possibilities of another beginning. Yet, if we have not learned from our past, then we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes. It has now been thirty-three years that I have been doing diversity work and making films. And so, the question most often asked still remains: What changes, if any, have I observed?

The answer is neither as simple nor as complex as it appears. As with most diversity trainers, the changes are not always noticeable or measurable. During a workshop, I can often sense an emotional awareness taking place, but has that been enough to instill a desire for change? I am not sure. Even after all these years, I am amazed at how unaware and naive so many workplaces still are, when it comes to truly understanding what diversity means and putting it into practice. Why after so many years and billions of dollars invested in diversity trainings are

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we still so slow in making the necessary changes? Why are there still so many discrimination lawsuits and seemingly endless stories of folks of color and women still feeling unheard, unacknowledged and devalued? Why after so many years are white women still the primary benefactors of affirmative action?

The truth lies not in finding blame with one particular group, but in the very premise of diversity itself. For too many years now, we have been indoctrinated to believe that diversity means simply to respect and understand one another. To many, that has become a mantra without any accountability or need for change. More recently I have been asking much more penetrating questions: “What do you understand? What do you respect?” And in the same tenor, “What don’t you understand? What don’t you respect?” You see, I think that these types of questions need be asked and the answers that come from them, need to be heard and discussed as an essential part of a dialogue on diversity. To me, we have been a nation of Don’t Ask and Don’t Tell for the past five hundred years and the time has come to be real with one another.

Many years ago, a black Bermudan interrupted my workshop and asked a very poignant question: “Why would whites ever want to give up racism? They benefit every day and in every way.” I shared with him that I could see he was very upset, but that I was the wrong person to be answering his question. I told him that the most appropriate folks to be answering this were the whites who were here that today. And so, I called on all the white Bermudans to come up on the stage to answer his question. What took place was an incredible dialogue that rocked the audience and brought about a greater honesty and understanding than anyone had ever witnessed before.

You see, it would have been easier for me to answer his question, but that is what we do all the time as facilitators and diversity trainers—provide answers and amusing exercises, but we do not necessarily facilitate or support an authentic and much needed dialogue between folks who are afraid and suspicious towards one another. Diversity needs to be practiced with the very people we have been taught to see as inferior or dangerous. We need to look at where we learned those prejudices, how they affected us, and how those images affect our perceptions and relationships with people who are different from ourselves.

So, as the November elections are close at hand, what path will we choose this time? What actions will we take to make this a more equitable world? What

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aspects of ourselves will we question and change? When will we begin this much needed dialogue with those we love and with those we have never truly gotten to know because of our fears? For me, that is the challenge and the hope. As was shared in the film, Shawshank Redemption:

*Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things.
And no good dream ever died.*

And so, in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. and so many others, it is my hope and prayer that someday we will look back with pride, knowing that on that cold November in 2024, together, we brought back the Dream.

Lee Mun Wah



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NEW IN 2024!

Creating a community of belonging where everyone is seen, heard and valued

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UPCOMING WORKSHOP

MINDFUL FACILITATION INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

MARCH 9-10, 2024 (SAT & SUN) 9 AM-3 PM PST

FACILITATED BY LEE MUN WAH

This workshop is one of StirFry Seminars' most popular follow-up trainings from Part 1 because participants get the chance to practice with an assortment of culturally sensitive role plays and filmed vignettes, as well as a myriad of confrontational scenarios that will hone advanced-level intervention and facilitation skill sets. Participants will also be making use of advanced-level group interventions that will enhance group processing and observational techniques.

Participants will learn:

- To Notice Intent & Impact
- Advanced Interventions for Individual/Group Interactions
- How to De-escalate Cultural Conflict Within Seconds
- 22 Ways to Stop a Diversity Conversation
- How to Transform Anger into Compassion
- Ways to Develop Curiosity & Understanding
- How to Create a Culturally Competent Community
- Ways to Develop Empathy & Trust
- Noticing What's Missing Part 2
- How to Respond, Not React

Prerequisite: Participants must have completed the Mindful Facilitation Beginning Level session. Online Only (Zoom)

Visit stirfryonline.com for complete schedule.