



# TO EQUALIZE POWER AMONG US

*Tools for Change*



We can make active choices to create the space for transformation. For those of us who bring the pattern of privilege, here are some guidelines to help us equalize relations. Privilege is invisible to those who have it. To create a context which embraces diversity, in which no one is marginalized, a conscious and ongoing effort is required. Noticing and changing what we take for granted, we make room for everyone's contribution. From a place of Fair Witness, with a desire to examine our sensitivity to respecting boundaries in the presence of power imbalances, **Consider the following questions**

## **In The Ways We've Been Oppressed**

Chaos theory and study of complex adaptive systems teaches that the richest innovations and learning happen at the margin. Yet, we tend to ignore the margins, those with privilege have never needed to understand the experience of others. Offending behaviors may not be calculated to protect power but simply a reflection of ignorance reinforced by complacency.

For all to survive, we can't afford to collude with our own marginalization or oppression by being silent. It is precisely our experience at the margins that is needed to inform and shape decisions. So, in addition to keeping ourselves in check regarding whatever ways we possess privilege, it is vital that we stop constraining ourselves—despite the fierceness of the force and fear that push on us in the particular ways that relate to how we have experienced being an “outsider.” We have to take the risk of putting our experience into the center.

- Do I tend to always speak first, interrupt or take more than my share of space?
- Do I unilaterally set the agenda?
- Do I assume I'm more capable?
- Do I trivialize the experience of others?
- Do I challenge or question the tone, attitude or manner of others?
- Do I make assumptions about what someone is more “suited” for?
- Do I take responsibility for, think for, or speak for others?
- Do I assume an individual speaks for others from their group?
- Do I control the organization's resources?
- Do I reduce difficulties to personality conflicts, ignoring history or power factors?
- Do I assume the root of a problem is misunderstanding or lack of information?
- Do I ask others to explain, prove, or justify themselves?
- Do I mimic other cultural traditions or religious practices?
- Do I expect to be treated as an individual outside of my group's history?
- Do I ignore or minimize differences by emphasizing similarities?
- Do I equate all oppressions as equal?
- Do I expect others to be grateful?
- Do I defend mistakes by focusing on good intentions?
- Do I take things personally and miss the systemic aspects?
- Do I assume everyone has the same options I do?
- Do I assume that the visible reality is the only one operating?
- Do I expect “others” to educate me about their group's history, or sensibilities?
- Do I assume someone is exceptional compared to the “average” person of their group?
- Do I always expect to be trusted?

## **Am I willing to do the following?**

- Remember that others speak about more than the conditions of their own group.
- Take responsibility to learn about the history, culture and struggles of other groups as told by them.
- Notice what I expect from and assume about others, and note what experiences formed my ideas.
- Address accessibility, include such things as money, space, transportation, child-care and language.
- Make sure the context welcomes everyone's voice and listen.
- Regard people as whole human beings with families, interests and ideas.
- Name unacknowledged realities to include everyone's experience.
- Expect discomfort when relating to people different from myself.
- Take responsibility for equalizing power.
- Name dominating behavior when I see it.
- Encourage pride in my own and other's ancestry and history.
- Understand individuals in the context of their social history.
- Ask questions and respect disagreements.
- Struggle over matters of principle and politics.
- Make all information accessible so others can decide if they are interested.
- Appreciate efforts that point out my mistakes or lack of awareness
- Appreciate the risk a person takes in sharing their experience with me.
- Take risks, trust others.

Adapted from:  
*Breaking Old Patterns Weaving New Ties: Alliance Building*  
By Margo Adair & Sharon Howell  
with input from Bill Aal and Susan Partnow

*Tools for Change* offers  
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## Anti-Oppression Resources

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