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Degree of Life:
Validating Life Experience in the
World of Community Work and Leadership

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Validating the Role of Life Experience In Community Work, Leadership and Volunteerism

Key Concept

Promoting the value of life experience in the world of community work, leadership and volunteerism is key to our future survival as productive and responsive communities. As the trend for promoting community partnerships and collaboration increases; so does the need to validate and build the confidence levels of community workers and volunteers to participate as equal and contributing partners.

Trainer Background

Our society has traditionally placed great value on formal learning. Formal schooling and the acquiring of bench-mark degrees have been viewed as key indicators of an individual's knowledge, skills, competencies and expertise.

Leadership roles have traditionally been reserved for those who have been formally schooled to lead. This prerequisite for attaining leadership positions has been the criteria used to determine who is given charge of important tasks, the management of key resources, power and other people.

The more traditional approach of "top-down-leadership" in the community setting is giving way to more collaborative and responsive styles of leading. Community citizens are being tapped as a valuable resource to the process of visioning, building and maintaining more responsive leadership for our communities.

Community citizens bring with them the most reliable and authentic experiences and insights to be used in the process of creating programs to meet the needs of individuals and families like themselves. The authority and expertise of a community citizen is valuable to any work or project that will serve, educate or lead a community of people.

Embedded in these life experiences is the practice of key life skills. Everyday community citizens communicate, make decisions, negotiate stressful situations and set goals for a healthy future for themselves and others. It is important to pro-actively validate this life experience and its role in today's community work and leadership.

Embedded in these life experiences and life skills is the power to improve the quality of life for a community and its citizens.



Lesson Road Map (Approximately 90 minutes)

Activity, Time, and Materials

Activity 1 Building Our Profile: (20 minutes)

- chalk board or chart paper
- chalk or markers

Activity 2 Examining Our Power (10 minutes)

Activity 3 Exploring Our Power (40 minutes)

- Things I Do Activity Sheet** (1 for each participant)
- Overhead projector
- You Are a Communicator** transparency
- You Are a Decision Maker** transparency
- You Can Manage Stress** transparency
- You Are A Goal Setter** transparency

Activity 4 Celebrating Our Power (15 minutes)

- The Differences I've Made** transparency

Activity 5 Validating Our Power (10 minutes)

- Degree Of Life Certificate** (1 for each participant)

When Time Matters: Modifying the Agenda

Modifying the agenda to save time is possible to do without losing the impact of the lesson. Simply keep Activity 1 as an oral activity and do the same for Activity 3 by presenting the transparency material orally. Note that using the activities as they are designed will help the more visual learners in your audiences.



Before You Begin

Note: This lesson is highly constructive in nature. That means that it will give your audience, through their conversations with you and each other, plenty of opportunity to explore and create their own meaning about the ideas, issues and relevance of this topic to their roles as community workers, leaders and volunteers.

- Review the entire lesson and modify as needed.
- Prepare the transparencies
- Copy the activity sheets

Activity 1: Building Our Profile (20 minutes)

Objective To think about, discuss and generate a list of the advantages and challenges of participating as community workers, leaders and volunteers.

Activity Steps

1. **Begin by writing the words; community workers, leaders and volunteers at the top of a piece of chart paper.** Ask the audience to think quietly for a moment about the meaning of these words to them. Invite a brief discussion of their thoughts. (5 minutes)
2. **Tell the audience that they are now going to organize their thinking about these roles into 2 categories.** Divide the chart paper into a “T” chart with space for two lists. Ask participants to list the advantages for a community to be served by leaders and volunteers that are community citizens. Record the responses. (5 minutes)

Ask participants to now list the challenges for community citizens to fill these roles, especially the leadership role. Record the responses. (5 minutes)

3. **Review the list of responses and focus on the idea that often one of the most challenging aspects of community work and leadership is the traditional idea of who and what a leader should be.** Ask for reactions to this statement. (5 minutes)



Activity 2: Examining Our Power (10 minutes)

Objective -To validate life experience as a training ground for community involvement and community leadership positions.

Activity Steps

Step 1 Orally share the following 2 points:

-In the times to come the organizations and communities that will thrive will not be the ones with the most money or material resources, but the ones with the most powerful and productive relationships.

-These successful organizations and communities will demonstrate a true value for the collective insights, experiences, skills, knowledge and culture of people.

Ask for a brief reaction to the points. (3-4 minutes total)

Step 2 Share the following 2 points:

-These organizations and communities will need community citizens who believe in their ability to make viable contributions as well as their capacity to shape and lead community process.

-The pool out of which many citizen leaders will draw knowledge, skills, and expertise will be one called "life experience."

Ask for a brief reaction to the last two points. (3-4 minutes total)

Step 3 Share that much of the research and work that is being done regarding community leadership and development has centered on the importance of the involvement of everyday people in the community process. Add that the vision includes two parts; people willing to share power and people willing to believe in their ability to assume power. Tell the audience that the activities that follow will help them to do 3 things:

-to validate their own life experience as a training ground for community leadership work.

-to identify the key life skills that transfer to the tasks of community leadership.

-to communicate their skills to others. (2-3 minutes)



Activity 3: Exploring Our Power (40 minutes)

- Objectives**
- To identify, list and discuss typical community activities.
 - To correlate the activities to a list of key personal and social skills.
 - To validate life experience as a viable training ground for teaching and practicing the key personal and social skills of effective leaders.

Activity Steps

1. **Give each audience member a copy of the Things I Do activity sheet.** Ask them to complete the list on the left side of the sheet by writing down 10 things or activities that they have done or participated in within the past week. Stress that they can be as simple as talking with a friend or family member, walking the dog or cooking a meal, or as complex as planning a wedding or doing taxes, all activities will count. Encourage them to work quickly. (5-7 minutes)

2. **Ask the audience to share their lists.** (8-10 minutes)

Note: Most audiences find this part of the activity enjoyable as they are given the opportunity to compare everyday life experiences.

3. **Ask the audience to look over the list of life skills on the right side of the sheet.** Instruct them to draw a line from the items on their list to each skill they used to carry out their activity. (5 minutes)

4. **Using the following process to display and review each of the 4 life skill transparencies.** (15 minutes total)

- Ask the participants to focus on their list as you read the transparency.
- Ask them to raise their hand every time you identify a subskill that they used to accomplish a task of their list.
- Read through to the last statement on the transparency.

Share that this list of life skills in action has been identified as having the power to be life directing, life enhancing, and life changing as well as having the power to impact the quality of life itself for individuals and the communities they live in.

Activity 4: Celebrating Our Power (15 minutes)

Objective To highlight the work and accomplishments to date of your audience members within their communities as well as to network their community projects.

Activity Steps

1. **Tell your audience that they are now going to focus on the community work that they have accomplished or are currently involved in.** Ask members to share a bit about their projects and accomplishments. Ask them to highlight the life skills that they used most often to do their work. (15 minutes)

Note: This step helps to personally validate this entire lesson. It is also a time to offer inspiration to people in your audience who need to hear about the willingness and rewards of others who have stepped forward to exercise their life experience and skills in the name of community work and leadership.

Activity 5: Validating Our Power (10 minutes)

Objective To formally validate life experience in the world of community work, leadership and volunteerism by presenting participants with a commemorate Degree of Life Certificate.

Activity Steps

1. **Give each audience member a copy of the Degree of Life Certificate.** Have them complete the certificate with their name and date.
2. **Close the lesson with the following script:**

“There is a degree that no university in this land grants. . .A degree for which there is no official document to frame or ceremony with which to bestow. Yet the course work for this degree is labor intensive. . .completed bit by bit with every day of life that is lived to its end. It is the Degree of Life. . .It validates the fact that life is an education too!”



Activity Sheets and Transparencies
in the order they are used



Things I Do

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

A. Community

B. Making Decisions

C. Managing Stress

D. Setting Goals



Did you . . .

- share thoughts, feelings and ideas with others?
- ask a question and listen to an answer?
- keep peace or build understanding?
- say no?
- take a stand?
- read body language?
- explain something?
- read or write something?
- express a strong emotion in a healthy way?

You are a communicator!



Did you . . .

- choose one thing over another?
- seek advice?
- examine your values?
- imagine or predict results?
- generate alternatives and play them out?
- act on your choice?

You know what it takes to make decisions!

Did you. . .

- take time to relax?
- start a good habit?
- stop a bad habit?
- identify a stressor?
- get help when you needed it?
- rearrange your priorities?
- simplify you life?
- think of you first?
- tend your support system?
- talk yourself through something?

You can manage stress!



Did you. . .

- make a plan?
- think of things that might get in your way?
- ask yourself what you really want?
- ask what influences you?
- track your progress?
- think about what happened the last time?

You know what it takes to set goals!



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"Degree of Life"

INFORMATION & EVALUATION CARD

KNOWLEDGE GAINED 1 2 3 4 5

USEFULNESS OF INFORMATION 1 2 3 4 5

Is this information helpful to you personally? Y N

Will you share this information with others? Y N

How? _____

This card to be completed by participants. Please make comments on back.

fce...Building Towards The 21st Century

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INFORMATION & EVALUATION CARD

KNOWLEDGE GAINED 1 2 3 4 5

USEFULNESS OF INFORMATION 1 2 3 4 5

Is this information helpful to you personally? Y N

Will you share this information? Y N

How? _____

This card to be completed by participants. Please make comments on back.

This Degree of Life

awarded to:

In recognition of ____ years of:

- Making real life decisions.
- Communicating with important people.
- Staying calm and managing just one more thing.
- Living, loving, hoping and caring - all without losing sight of the future.