



STRATEGIES FOR
SOCIAL CHANGE®

Love Notes to Our Social Justice Leaders

A Workbook to Support Your Reflective
Leadership Practice

Acknowledgements & Appreciations

We are sending lots of L♥VE to our team at Strategies for Social Change for their brilliant work and dedication to social justice and to our amazing colleagues at RoadMap who created a wonderful collaboration space and provided seed funding to make this workbook possible. ¡Mil Gracias!



Many of the ideas for this workbook evolved from SSC's leadership coaching circles for social justice leaders. Our latest coaching initiative, the Resiliency Project, began in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice uprisings. I am grateful to Lisa Nani Garrett Keiser, my brilliant colleague and friend, who has co-designed each step and been on this amazing journey with me, and to Faith Bynoe, Sonya Kharas, Surei Quintana, Yvette Diaz, and Corita Brown for their contributions as well.



Finally, on a personal note, this was truly a labor of love that was especially sweet because it was an opportunity to co-write this workbook with my daughter, Surei "Suri" Quintana, who I learn from each and every day.
Thank you, Suri!

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How To Use This Workbook

This workbook introduces key leadership concepts, reflective leadership questions, inspirational and thought-provoking quotes, as well as resources you can use to deepen your leadership practice. While there is a logic to the sequence of the chapters, each chapter covers a discrete topic and it does not need to be read sequentially. Start with whatever piques your interest and take your time to really ponder the questions.

Interactive PDF Features

Fillable fields have been embedded within this PDF to make this tool easy and flexible for you to use. You have the option of completing each exercise by typing your answers into the field on a computer, or you can print it out and fill it out by hand. You can also draw using a mouse or stylus within the field.

 Look for this symbol to know where you can insert your answers into the PDF.

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Introduction: What's Love Got to Do with It?

These are our love notes to all the social justice leaders of the world.

Since 2001, our team at Strategies for Social Change (SSC) has had the honor to coach and support hundreds of social justice leaders. If you are a social justice leader, whether we've had the opportunity to meet you or not — we consider you OUR PEOPLE; you are part of OUR TRIBE! We share your beliefs and values, and we have written this workbook for YOU, as a way of celebrating and supporting your brilliance, your humanity, your fierce courage, and indomitable spirit! In essence, we are writing this workbook because we love y'all.

Most of us learned to be leaders through trial and error, with little access to consistent training or coaching support. In fact, according to the National Council of Responsive Philanthropy, only 1% of foundation funding is dedicated to leadership development support, despite leadership development being critically important to organizational sustainability and strategic impact.¹

After many years of coaching leaders from many different movements, our team at Strategies for Social Change has identified some common challenges faced by social justice leaders. This workbook begins to address some of those topics. We've created this workbook to help you strengthen your leadership practice, through self-reflection exercises that will serve you well throughout your leadership journey.



Our
Work
is love
made visible.”

adapted from Kahlil Gibran



Chapter 1: The Art of Leadership Begins with Self-Reflection





Authentic, transformational leaders share some very essential habits. They strive to understand themselves and actively build a reflective leadership practice. It is this essential practice that fosters an extraordinary level of integrity, self-knowledge, and principled action.

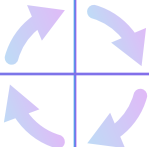
The truth is that leadership is like jazz, it's dynamic, complex, and nuanced. Not surprisingly, leadership success is often highly contextual. The same leader can be wildly successful in one situation and fail spectacularly in another. That being said, it is also a set of skills, and like most other things in life, leadership skills can be honed through meaningful practice. That is why leadership reflection is so essential; the more you know yourself as a leader, the greater your ability to grow and act from a place of integrity and authenticity, creating a solid foundation for success even in challenging times.

The leader you are today has been shaped by your past experiences, especially those pivotal or defining moments in your life, whether they were triumphant or painful. As you commence this journey of reflective leadership practice, it's important to start with reflecting on the experiences that have shaped who you are and how you lead.

Exercise 1.1: Your Leadership Journey

Use the diagram below to reflect on the key events, learnings, challenges, and transformational moments that have shaped the leader you are today.
Feel free to draw, doodle, and add dates to make the diagram come alive. Click inside the empty boxes to edit on a computer.

 Key Events & Accomplishments	 Challenging Moments
 Moments of Transformation	 Learnings & Insights





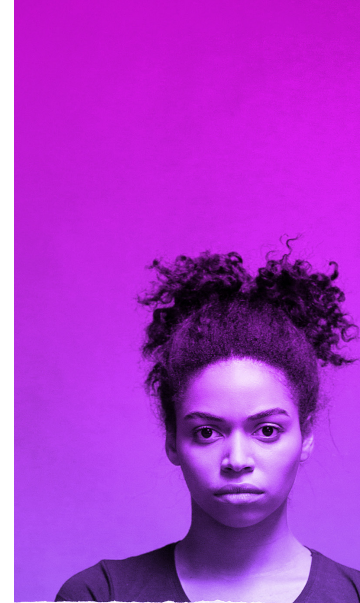
* Exercise 1.2: Reflecting on Your Journey

Reflecting on your journey, what experiences and people have shaped your leadership values, approach, and leadership behaviors/habits?

What have been your leadership high points? Take a few moments to think back to those high points. What happened? How did you behave, how did you lead?

What have been your leadership low points? Take a few moments to think back to those low points. What happened? How did you behave, how did you lead or not lead?

What are your greatest insights or lessons learned from these past experiences? How have those experiences (both triumphant and painful), made you stronger, smarter, and a better leader?



NO JUST
NO PEAC





✦ Exercise 1.3: Do Your Own Leadership Assessment

Drawing on your reflections from your leadership journey, make an inventory of your current strengths, challenges, fears, and learning edges (i.e., top of your comfort zone). Use this self-assessment data to better understand what motivates you to act in certain ways and use that data to develop your leadership plan.

What are my greatest strengths and talents?

How can I apply my strengths and talents more fully in my daily leadership practice?

What are my fears, self-limiting beliefs, and/or emotional triggers? How are they impacting my leadership? For example, what situations tend to make me more fearful or defensive and why?

How can I use my strengths, insights, and skills to manage my fears, self-limiting beliefs, and emotional triggers?

What makes me feel inspired and courageous as a leader? How can I cultivate more inspiration and courage in my leadership practice?



Chapter 2: Challenging Leadership Mythology

We Don't Need Martyrs, Saviors, Superheroes, or Even Unicorns

The truth is that we are still holding onto a lot of mythology around leadership. Leaders in the social justice sector are expected to be collaborative and decisive, humble and bold, fearless and emotionally vulnerable, creative and laser-focused, kind and fierce — geez it's a tall order!

While our words may say differently, oftentimes we actually expect leaders to act as martyrs, saviors, superheroes or even unicorns. It's time for all of us to let go of the mythology and talk about authentic leadership.



Let's be honest. Even in social justice organizations, we are still working to shed white supremacy thinking about leadership. Our culture has embedded deep within us a leadership mythos of exceptionalism and perfectionism.

Exceptionalism manifests in the belief that somehow leaders are rare and superior human beings endowed with characteristics not found in the majority of our people. That sense of exceptionalism means we often hold leaders to unreasonable standards of perfectionism. While many leaders believe that perfectionism is a character trait that drives them to excellence, it is actually a learned behavior that can exact a damaging toll on our minds and bodies.

Any reasonable person will admit that perfection is impossible, and yet many of us still unfairly compare ourselves to others and berate ourselves for not meeting impossible standards. Against the backdrop of this toxic leadership mythology, it's not surprising that many leaders struggle with imposter syndrome, manifested in chronic self-doubt and difficulty in being able to embrace their accomplishments, no matter how successful they are in their work.

When perfectionism takes its inevitable toll and pushes us to the edge of our endurance, those culturally embedded notions of leaders as saviors and superheroes can also fuel expectations of extreme self-sacrifice or martyrdom. While this may seem heroic, it is unsustainable and sacrifices long-term health and well-being for short-term wins.

Even when we consciously embrace concepts of shared leadership, self-care, and sustainability, we may still be unconsciously following the leadership mythos in our habits and organizational culture. This makes it even more difficult and confusing for leaders to figure out how to show up.

What's the difference between unhealthy perfectionism and a healthy drive for being your most excellent self?

Ultimately, how you react to either falling short or achieving a goal determines whether your drive for excellence is healthy or not.²

Consider some of the high and low moments in your recent leadership experience:

How have you responded to achieving excellence?

- Have you taken the success for granted and then immediately moved on to your next goal?
- Or have you taken time to celebrate and practice gratitude?

How have you responded to falling short of your goals?

- Have you mentally berated yourself and questioned your "worthiness?"
- Or have you acknowledged your disappointment and non-judgmentally reflected on how to do better in the future?

What's really needed in our leaders is **AUTHENTICITY** (and self-compassion).

Authentic leaders reject the myth of the charismatic, natural-born leader and superhero. Instead, they understand that leadership requires deep honesty, constant reflection, the courage to experiment and fail, and the ability to continuously integrate new learning in order to grow as individuals and as leaders.

These abilities help leaders transform their mistakes and shortcomings into significant leadership growth opportunities. Moreover, by modeling this type of reflective leadership stance, they inspire and encourage the same behaviors in the people around them, creating a multiplier effect. This synergy creates high-impact, innovative organizations at the forefront of our social movements.

Bottom line: We really don't need martyrs, saviors, superheroes, or even unicorns, we just need leaders who are authentic and who practice self-reflection and self-compassion.

✦ Exercise 2.1: Challenging Leadership Mythology and Cultivating Authentic Leadership

What leadership mythology are you holding on to?

In what ways do YOU act as a savior, martyr, or superhero? How has it benefitted you? How has it harmed you?

What does practicing authentic leadership look like for YOU?

What five steps can you take to live more fully into your authentic leadership?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



"I have a vision that movements... become living models of abolition. But first we have to find the rigor to fight fair, struggle in principled ways, and practice accountability beyond punishment with each other."

adrienne maree brown
We Will Not Cancel Us

Chapter 3: Practicing Love and Rigor

"I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace — not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest, and daring and growth."

James Baldwin
The Fire Next Time

At Strategies for Social Change, we talk a lot about love and rigor, two essential and interdependent components of every thriving social justice movement.

The LOVE Part:

We are all working together to advance justice. We are warriors for justice and peace. We take on this work as imperfect beings who thrive when we are loved, respected, and treated with dignity. It is that energy, that nourishment that makes us our most creative and courageous selves — it enables us to do the impossible, to create solutions to seemingly intractable problems, to achieve big movement wins, and create new possibilities for our collective liberation.

We are beloved community, working to advance our movements. Our ability to advance justice is intricately tied with our ability to love each other, trust each other, help care for each other, and have compassion and forgiveness for each other. Sometimes that is not easy — people get on our nerves and bring their \$%*# with them. But without love, movements are really just pseudo-movements and quickly crumble and fail.

The RIGOR Part:

The tricky part is to hold ourselves accountable, to be true to our word, to show up consistently to do the work, and to hold ourselves and each other *lovingly accountable* — to be honest about what is working and not working.

Rigor is not self-righteousness, calling out, one-upping people, or indiscriminate critique. Practicing rigor is the highest form of love, it is about being in a consistent state of questioning, reflection, and acting in service to the mission or purpose.

It's about being courageous enough to tackle hard truths about yourself and the challenges our movements face, without succumbing to demoralization or disconnection. It is about having courageous conversations with each other, to not let your ego get in the way, not walk away when things get tough, and not get too comfortable or blinded by our own brilliance.

It's about strategic disruption — being in a perpetual state of learning, challenging the prevailing ideas and strategies with enthusiasm and scrutiny in order to collectively sharpen our thinking, and advance even better strategies and evolve our liberatory practices.

What do we mean by liberatory practice?

The process or praxis of putting our ideas about liberation into meaningful practice which often includes testing and refining new ways of being and working together. This involves exploring better ways of communicating and supporting each other and building inclusive, anti-racist, transparent, and truly democratic organizations and practices. It requires us to craft better ways of building consensus, embracing generative conflict, bringing more community care, joy, and celebration into the work to nourish us and to help us heal from the trauma our communities have endured across many generations.

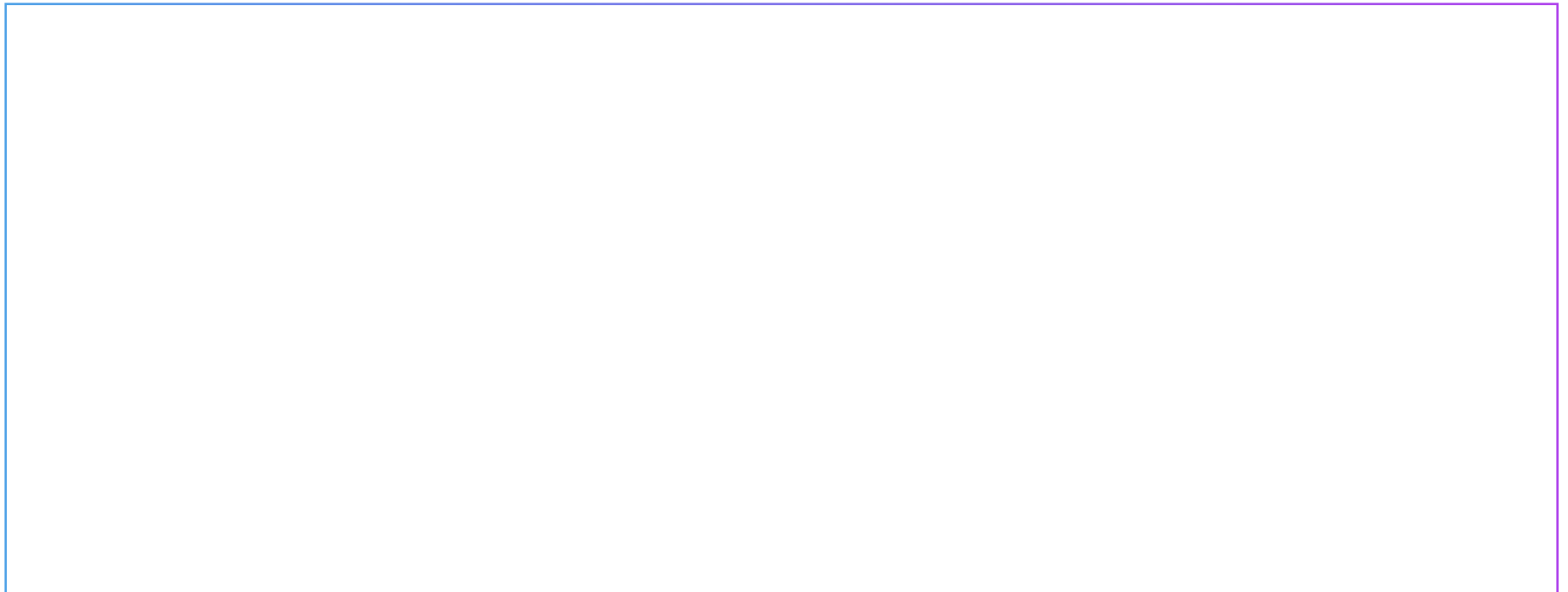
As our colleagues from the Resonance Network note, we need to build a bigger tent, a bigger "WE." To make that happen, Toni Cade Bambara reminds us to "make just and liberated futures irresistible."³ Liberatory practice is also about our movements getting a lot more disciplined about articulating and actually building what we are *for* rather than merely what we're against. It requires our movements to get better at going beyond visioning to designing and engineering a liberatory future within and outside of our organizations.

✦ Exercise 3.1: Practicing Love and Rigor

How can you practice greater self-love so that you can thrive and bring your most brilliant self to this liberation work?

What is your vision for building a stronger organizational culture of love and liberation?

- Close your eyes and envision it.
- Jot down the words that come to mind.
- Draw a picture of what love and liberation can look like within your organization.
- Be inspired by it!



*To lay the ground for love and liberation, we need to be courageous enough to confront **hard truths**.*

What hard truths must you examine about yourself?

What are the hard truths or challenges your organization is facing? How are you holding each other with love and care as you address these hard truths?

What's one courageous conversation you need to have with yourself or another colleague?



What does loving accountability look like in practice?

What liberatory practices do you want to nurture in your organization? What steps can you take to seed that process?

Chapter 4: It's Not Enough to Be Smart, You Need to Be Emotionally Intelligent

"It turns out that such seemingly 'soft' attributes such as knowing yourself, self-management, the ability to navigate emotions, and empathy for others have a dramatic impact on our ability to get results."

Robert Gass

Research indicates that leaders with a high degree of emotional intelligence outperform their counterparts by as much as 15%–20%.⁴ Imagine what we could accomplish if we were all more emotionally intelligent. In the fast-paced, ever-changing, and under-resourced world of nonprofits, building emotional intelligence can mean the difference between an organization imploding and an organization thriving and accomplishing transformative change.

To lead effectively leaders must be self-aware; understanding how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors affect the people around them. Equally important, they must become attuned to the thoughts and feelings of their staff in order to find the best ways to support and encourage them.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize your own emotions and those of others, and to use this information to navigate the emotional terrain that is part of every human interaction.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are self-aware and empathic. They can often "read" a room, figure out what is called for, and effectively manage moments of anger and frustration. Because they are emotionally attuned, these leaders are especially good at building positive interpersonal relationships to inspire and motivate others to action and foster a climate of creativity and effective problem solving.



The good news is that we can all learn to be more emotionally intelligent with some practice. Emotional intelligence encompasses a number of skills including self-awareness, self-management, empathy, motivation, and the management of interpersonal dynamics.⁵

Self-Awareness

The concept of self-awareness can be broken down into two categories: internal and external self-awareness. Internal self-awareness is the understanding of your internal state, your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, values, strengths, and challenges. External self-awareness is understanding how others view you in terms of all those factors listed previously. Both are equally necessary to be an effective leader.⁶

Because our experiences shape who we are; we all have behaviors and traits we consider positive and some “default” behaviors that can be unproductive and no longer serve us well. Past harms, micro-aggressions, and our perceived failures trigger emotional responses within us that can sometimes cause us to react defensively. When we react defensively, we can create unintended ripple effects throughout our organizations.

The process of becoming more self-aware opens up the possibility for healing, change, and growth and enables leaders to act more authentically, with confidence, compassion, and integrity. As human beings we need to prioritize healing from the trauma that so many of us have experienced that sometimes causes us to be defensive or angry. As leaders we need to be aware of how our emotions impact others.



Understanding the Amygdala Hijack

The amygdala is an almond-shaped collection of neurons located in the limbic system of our brain. The amygdala is key to how we process emotions. It is a pretty ancient part of our brain which evolved to increase the chances of survival among early humans threatened by wild animals and other physical harm. The amygdala triggers the fight-or-flight response that allows you to react quickly without thinking.

The problem is that the amygdala cannot distinguish between the fear of physical danger and psychological stress associated with fear, anxiety, aggression, or anger that are common in modern-day life. When the perceived threat is mild or moderate, the frontal lobes of our brain can override the amygdala activating our ability to think, reason, make decisions, and plan. However when the perceived threat is strong, the amygdala is activated causing a fight-or-flight response. You may experience a rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, more heat in your body or goosebumps on your skin. In those early moments when the amygdala has been activated – you may appear to overreact or seem irrational to the people surrounding you.⁷

The best way to prevent amygdala hijacks is to become aware of your triggers and warning signs. Take note of the kinds of stressors that tend to trigger you. Oftentimes triggers are associated with deep hurts or trauma from the past. When triggered, do your best to pay attention to your breathing and breathe slowly, expanding your stomach instead of your chest. As you become more conscious of the kind of situations that tend to trigger you, developing these simple yet powerful techniques will help you interrupt or lessen the hijack. Explore different ways to self-soothe including: slowing down your breathing, taking a long sip of water, or even stepping away for a short time.



Building your “self-awareness muscle”:

- *Keep a journal:* If you have struggled to keep a journal in the past, experiment to find how you can make it more enjoyable for yourself. Some people enjoy the tactile experience of writing by hand with fun stationery or colorful pens, while others find a sketch pad where they can write, draw, and doodle more helpful, and still others prefer the convenience of keeping a digital journal. You could even write it on loose sheets of paper and throw it away! However you choose to journal, the essential part is taking the time to reflect on what is occurring in your life, how it makes you feel, and considering why you feel that way.
- *Evaluate your strengths and areas for improvement:* There are many assessment tools that you can use from a simple personal SCOT analysis (an acronym for Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats), to more focused personality surveys such as the Strengths Finder and Myers-Briggs tests.⁸

Self-Management

Effective leaders are keenly aware of their emotions and their impact on others. They understand that organizational members often look to the leader to set the emotional tone. They are able to regulate their emotions and attitudes like anger, frustration, impatience, and disappointment that over time may lower morale and trust within the organization. They are able to remain optimistic during turbulent times and manage conflicts and triggers to find common ground and productive solutions.

Building your “self-management muscle”:

- *Deep-breathing exercises:* Focusing on breathing slowly and deeply calms your nervous system, reducing the power of overwhelming emotions such as anxiety and anger.
- *Check-in with yourself:* Take a few moments to ask yourself, “What am I feeling right now and why am I feeling this way?” It seems obvious, but it can be surprising how often we go rushing throughout the day without consciously being aware of our own emotional states. Acknowledge your feelings without judgement.

Empathy

Leadership is a highly social endeavor. Effective leaders possess a high degree of empathy including the ability to understand the emotional makeup and responses of other people. They are curious about people, listening actively to better understand the perspectives, values, motivations, and learning styles of the people around them. Leaders utilize this information to motivate, work more effectively with others, and foster broad-based alignment among stakeholders.

In their book, *Coaching Skills for Nonprofit Managers and Leaders*, our respected colleagues, Judith Wilson and Michelle Gislason identify four modes of listening which they describe as follows:

Four Modes of Listening⁹

- *Superficial Listening*: I am barely listening to you and I am distracted with my own thoughts.
- *Self-Referential Listening*: I steer the conversation to be about me not you.
- *Fix-it Listening*: I am listening to figure out how I can fix the situation for you.
- *Engaged or Active Listening*: I am giving you my full attention and I am looking to better understand your experience and perspectives.

Although there are four modes of listening, only “**engaged or active listening**” helps us understand the perspectives of others.

Building your “empathy muscle”:

- *Practice active listening skills*: Give the speaker your full attention, pay attention to their tone of voice and body language, defer judgment, paraphrase to check for understanding, and refrain from engaging in rebuttals.

Motivation

Motivation is what fuels passion, drive, and intense focus. Motivated leaders are intrinsically driven to excel at their goals, believe in continuous improvement, and are not easily deterred. They believe in our human potential, our ability to be innovative, and create breakthroughs. They have the capacity to remain

optimistic even in the face of failure. They show perseverance, demonstrate grit, and resilience. They also help create a culture of experimentation, promoting new learning, excitement, and innovation across the organization.

Ways to build your “motivation muscle”:

- *Keep and display your “did it” list*:¹⁰ Keep track of your accomplishments, even the small ones, and place it in a spot where you will see it often. This is especially important for all of you perfectionists who are never satisfied even when you are successful.
- *To help motivate your community*: Make it a habit to regularly express your appreciation! The research indicates that the optimal ratio of positive to negative feedback is 5:1 (i.e., for every piece of negative feedback also give 5 positive appreciations). It's not just nice to hear, it's imperative because most people have the tendency to pay more attention to and remember negative feedback. By adding more positive feedback into your interactions, you make people feel appreciated, an important prerequisite for motivation.

Interpersonal Skills and Organizational Awareness

Emotionally intelligent leaders have the capacity to build positive relationships with diverse individuals and groups and read the emotional climate throughout the organization. They understand the importance of attending to staff morale, celebrating wins, and bringing fun and joy into the workspace. They excel at developing teams, managing conflict productively, and actively work to build wide networks, effectively tapping into the collective or group intelligence in many spaces and at different levels.

✦ Exercise 4.1: Building Your Emotional Intelligence

Think back to incidents when you were emotionally triggered or activated. What seems to be your typical response to being emotionally triggered? For example, do you tend to want to fight, flee, or freeze? What bodily sensations do you typically experience when you begin to be triggered? What thoughts typically rush through your head when triggered?

"Between stimulus and response, there is space.
In that space, is our power to choose our response.
In our response, lies our growth and our freedom."

Steven Covey, paraphrasing Viktor Frankl
From *Amare Wave* by Moshe Engelberg and Stacey Aaronson

Think about how you have handled emotionally triggering events in the past. What, if anything, do you wish you could have handled differently in moments where you were emotionally triggered? What simple steps can you take in the first 60 seconds of being triggered that will help you show up with greater emotional intelligence?

What are your strongest emotional intelligence skills? How can you apply these more intentionally in your daily leadership practice?

Think about the emotional intelligence skills you need to strengthen. Identify five action steps you can take to strengthen those skills.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Navigating Organizational Dynamics

*"Organizations are living systems,
possessing the same capacity to
adapt and grow that is common to all life."*

Margaret J. Wheatley
Leadership and the New Science

Recent research indicates that navigating organizational dynamics is perhaps one of the most complex tasks leaders face. It is not uncommon for organizations to face competing priorities, a continuous sense of urgency, and to make superhuman demands of its leaders and staff. Based on research in the area of interpersonal neurobiology, we now know there is a strong interplay between our mind, our relationships, and our brain; our relationships and practices influence how our mind perceives the self and the world around us. In turn, these factors can create physical changes in the wiring of our brain due to neuroplasticity.

Similar to "group think," research on the phenomenon known as *emotional contagion* suggests that within organizations, members can significantly influence each other's emotions.¹¹ When the emotional tenor within an organization begins to shift toward frustration and anger, and the underlying concerns are denied, ignored, and left unaddressed, the organization runs the risk of eventually self-imploding as emotional contagion spreads and magnifies. Therefore paying attention to the mood or emotional tenor within the organization is paramount to building healthy, sustainable, and impactful organizations.

*"Through adversity we have a choice.
We can run away from each other
or we can run toward each other."*

J. Gordon and D. Decker
Stay Positive



Grounded Optimism: A Key Strategy and Essential Practice

Nurturing grounded optimism among our staff and communities is crucial. At Strategies for Social Change, we define grounded optimism as the belief that our people are brilliant, resourceful and whole, possessing all the necessary skills and wisdom to find solutions to the challenges they face when they act collaboratively, with courage and creativity. It's not naïveté, but optimism born from the ingenuity, resilience, fierce warrior spirits and grit of our communities.

We think of grounded optimism as both a strategy and an essential practice. Grounded optimism is an organizational and movement strategy in that it needs to be cultivated in order to envision and orchestrate big social change wins. It is an essential practice in that it needs to be nurtured within each one of us in order to help sustain our passion and commitment to social change work.

Without grounded optimism — the energy that flows through our social movements will become stagnant and dissipate and what will grow in its place is cynicism and disconnection.

Grounded Optimism

The belief that our people are brilliant, resourceful, and whole. They possess all the necessary skills and wisdom to find solutions to the challenges they face, when they act collaboratively, with creativity and courage.

✦ Exercise 4.2: Managing Organizational Dynamics

What's the emotional tenor or temperature of your organization right now? How would you describe staff morale?

How well are you managing the tension, anger, and frustration that might be arising within your organization?

How are you supporting community care, resiliency, and grounded optimism? What additional steps can you take to build a healthy, sustainable, and joyful organizational culture?



Chapter 5: Leading in the Context of the Trauma of Racism

“Trauma is routinely passed on from person to person — and generation to generation — through genetics, culture, family structures, and the biochemistry of the egg, sperm, and womb. Trauma is literally in our blood.”

Resmaa Menakem
My Grandmother's Hands

Social justice work is born of great love for our communities and for humanity. It is also born of pain, trauma, and injustice; these feelings manifest in complex ways.

BIPOC communities and their leaders have endured historical and multigenerational levels of trauma based on racism and oppression ranging from slavery, colonization and genocide, to newer but equally deadly policies and systems that enable the killing, exploitation, neglect and exclusion of Black and Brown peoples.¹²

While at the same time that BIPOC communities have shown themselves to be brilliant, resourceful, and resilient in the face of the trauma of racism, the cumulative negative impact of racism cannot be denied and weighs heavily on BIPOC leaders.

Not surprisingly, BIPOC leaders face even more complex leadership challenges. Not only are BIPOC leaders often denied or passed over for leadership positions but when they assume leadership, they are almost always held to a different and higher standard of leadership.¹³ They encounter micro-aggressions daily and their leadership decisions are more frequently scrutinized. When BIPOC leaders stumble — as all leaders do — they are given far less grace.

The stakes often feel higher for BIPOC leaders because many feel a sense of responsibility to undo the long legacy of historical trauma and address the urgent needs faced by their communities. At the same time, because of our society's devaluing of BIPOC leaders, it may be more difficult for BIPOC leaders to trust, ask for help, or show vulnerability, for fear of being seen as an ineffectual leader. At times, self-doubt and internalized oppression may lead to inaction, excessive self-criticism, imposter syndrome, and defensive reactions.

“The trauma of racism is the result of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, defacto and legal discrimination, oppression, employment discrimination, poverty, social alienation, hate crimes, demonization of non-white cultures, discriminatory child welfare practices, mass incarceration, unjust imprisonment, racially biased systems, mandatory sentencing, inhumane treatment within societal institutions, unethical medical experiments on ethnic and racial minorities, forced sterilization of Black women, the school to prison pipeline, inferior schools and education, the achievement gap, the sequestering of minority students in special education programs, racial housing segregation, inhumane housing conditions, and discriminatory policing.”

The McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research
Facts Matter! Black Lives Matter! The Trauma of Racism

How the Trauma of Racism and Oppression Impacts Organizational Culture

In our quest to change the world, we sometimes forget the emotional labor involved in fighting for social justice and the need to sustain ourselves and our staff in the face of the formidable challenges we encounter. When we neglect this part of our work — community care — we increase the chances that our exhaustion and emotional labor will turn into frustration, criticism, disconnection from each other, and eventually burn out.

Let's unpack how this might show up in our social change organizations.

Our World

- Systemic Racism
- State-Sanctioned Violence (Criminal Justice System)
- The Rise of White Nationalism Groups Left Unchecked
- Militarized Borders
- Decline in Basic Democratic Reforms
- Increased Political Polarization
- COVID-19 Pandemic
- Economic Insecurity
- Rising Unemployment
- Housing Insecurity & Homelessness
- Food Insecurity
- Climate Change

Our Staff & Communities

- Feeling Unsafe & Attacked
- Feeling Angry & Afraid
- Uncertainty About Best Strategies to Adopt
- Chronic Stress
- Feeling Battle Wary but Driven to Do More
- Lack of Self-Care & Community Care
- Exhaustion & Burnout
- Multigenerational Trauma
- Angry & Afraid
- Diminished Sense of Joy
- Perfectionist Demands of Our Leaders
- Displacement of Anger Onto Each Other
- Disconnection as a Self-Protection Measure

Our Leaders

- Feeling Unsafe & Attacked
- Feeling Angry & Afraid
- Uncertainty About Best Strategies to Adopt
- Chronic Stress
- Feeling Battle Wary but Driven to Do More
- Lack of Self-Care
- Exhaustion & Burnout
- Multigenerational Trauma
- Invisibility or Hypervisibility
- Diminished Sense of Joy
- Perfectionist Demands of Self & Staff
- Heavy Emotional Labor Supporting Staff & Community
- Hyper Self Critique + Internalized & Externalized Anger
- Reduced Emotional Intelligence & Resiliency
- Imposter Syndrome
- Heightened Fear of Failure
- Martyrdom Syndrome

A Note About This Exercise:

This exercise may feel emotionally “heavy.” By itself, it cannot possibly convey the complexities of community and organizational life. However, we still think it serves an important purpose in helping to unpack some of the challenges our social justice leaders face. We truly recognize that our communities are filled with brilliant, resourceful, and joyful people while also experiencing some very real challenges stemming from racism and injustice. The objective of this particular exercise is to help leaders unpack some of the challenges and burdens they may feel so they can build resiliency strategies and practices. Feel free to opt out of this exercise if it does not feel comfortable to you. We also welcome your feedback on ways we can improve it.

✧ Exercise 5.1: Leading in the Context of Racism and Trauma

Looking at the list “Our Leaders,” what resonates with your own experience as a leader?

To what extent is your organization’s staff manifesting some of the conditions described in “Our Staff & Communities”? Please be as specific as possible.

Practicing Self and Community Care: Key Steps Toward Our Collective Healing

"There is no liberation without community."

Audre Lorde

We need to counter the historical and multigenerational trauma perpetuated by racism and oppression by continuing to build strong and loving communities; our social justice organizations and their leaders play a central role in that effort. Our organizations need to center self and community care, making room for rest, reflection, joy, and celebration. Without these essential life-giving forces, we are just perpetuating oppressive and exploitative work environments that bear no resemblance to the liberatory future we seek.

"It can often feel paradoxical, if not downright wrong to experience joy in a crisis. But our ancestors have taught us that joy and love are a path to hope that can sustain us in hard times. How can we embrace the paradoxes of this moment? How can we notice, have and nurture joy and hope during this time?"

Up With Community

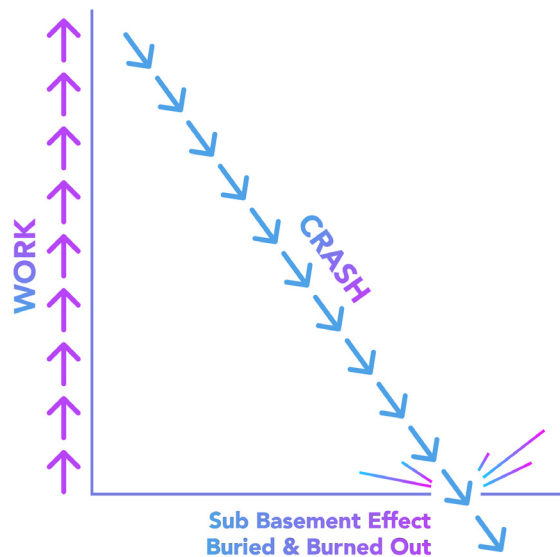
**"Self-care is foundational to our power,
our resilience, our creativity, our health
and our collective impact."**

Norma Wong
Move to End Violence
Self Care for Sustainability & Impact

Unsustainable Work Cycles: The Sub-Basement Effect

The diagram below shows the typical workflow within social justice organizations, where the pace of the work escalates unrelentingly. More and more is demanded of staff and volunteers as the campaign or project unfolds. Staff and volunteers then crash in exhaustion after the campaign or project has finished. For a while the organization seems to be at the vanguard but the pace is not sustainable. Over time, energy reserves are depleted, people begin to burn out and it becomes increasingly difficult to reach even a baseline level of people power and energy upon which to build a campaign. In the end, these organizations on the road to burnout risk becoming ineffectual.

The Unsustainable Organizational Work Cycle



Resiliency & Renewal Model



Renewal & Resiliency Work Habits

Leaders who model a more sustainable work pace have a longer-view perspective. They understand that retaining staff means our movement benefits from their expertise and knowledge over the long-term. Moreover, they understand that social transformation work begins with one's self. As Mahatma Gandhi noted, we must "be the change we seek in the world."

The diagram above illustrates a more sustainable model for social action that intentionally builds space for renewal, reflection, and celebration. This model builds resiliency and keeps our people — our most precious resource — inspired, energized, and thinking at their best.

✦ Exercise 5.2: Seeding a Culture of Care

What five steps can you take to build your daily self-care practice?

What steps can you take to build an organizational culture that builds resiliency, grounded optimism, community care, and joy, some of the essential elements necessary to counterbalance the negative forces at play?

Chapter 6: Leading in a VUCA World

"Uncertainty is the only certainty there is..."

John Allen Paulos
Mathematician

Now more than ever, we are living in a "VUCA" world. The acronym VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

The concept was originally introduced at the U.S. Army War College in the late 1990s to describe the perceived changes happening globally at the end of the Cold War.¹⁴ While it has military origins, it is a valuable tool for leaders in nearly any context.

Thanks to technology advances in the last few decades, the magnitude, speed, and frequency of human communication across the globe has increased to levels never possible before in human history. Those with access to technology are now able to tap into more information and shape global conversations and narratives nearly instantaneously. Although technology has enabled individuals the power to be heard, it also introduces an ocean of noise, as each voice tries to be heard above the cacophony. Periodically assessing your movement landscape using a VUCA lens will help you and your organization remain agile in confusing and uncertain times.

VOLATILITY: The rapid speed, high volume, and magnitude of change; oftentimes engendering a sense of turbulence and chaos.

UNCERTAINTY: The difficulty of predicting change as a result of increased volatility.

COMPLEXITY: The issues we face are intertwined and multidimensional with compounding effects making it more difficult to craft solutions.





AMBIGUITY: Lack of clarity regarding how to interpret the meaning and impact of key events.

How can working in a VUCA environment impact our organizations?

- VUCA challenges can act as a destabilizing force
- Increases organizational and individual anxiety due to higher levels of uncertainty
- Can feel overwhelming for staff causing hesitancy in decision-making or inaction leading to missed opportunities
- Increases the need for ongoing reframing, repositioning, and adaptation to unfolding events
- Makes longer-term planning and projects more difficult

Guiding Principles for Leading in a VUCA World

Building on the ideas of Bob Johansen, at Strategies for Social Change we've developed some guiding principles to help you navigate more effectively in these VUCA times.¹⁵

Principle #1: Navigate Volatility with a Powerful and Vibrant Vision

Navigate volatility with a vibrant vision of the future that resonates powerfully across the organization and your constituency. While strategies and tactics may need to change more quickly in our VUCA world, your vision should serve as your North Star helping you to navigate turbulent seas. Then work to create an organizational culture that feels more comfortable and accepting of volatility, recognizing that volatility creates new openings and opportunities to begin to actualize your vision for the future.

Principle #2: Counter Uncertainty with Uncommon Understanding

Uncommon understanding refers to helping your organization to become an exceptional learning organization. Organizations with an uncommon understanding are known for their sophisticated ability to acquire and transmit new knowledge, identify nascent trends, and emergent strategies. They also utilize human centered design principles to create small experiments that test assumptions leading to better, more effective strategies and, in so doing, can help to reduce uncertainty.

Principle #3: Address Complexity with Collaboration and Coherence

VUCA situations are too complex to be handled by one individual, they require serious people power employing lots of creativity and outside-of-the-box thinking. Bringing together diverse teams and/or groups of advisors with different ways of thinking to explore the VUCA challenge in all its dimensions is a key step. Once the organization engages in sense making — collaboratively exploring the different dimensions of the challenge and possible solutions — the organization must cohere around a strategy and align the people and resources to execute it.



Principle #4: Tackle Ambiguity with Agility and Adaptation

Even when the meaning of events remains unclear and cannot be easily interpreted, organizations need to be sufficiently agile and comfortable to act without full clarity, test strategies, and then course correct as new information and analysis becomes available. This requires organizations to create a culture that is open to experimentation and strategic risk taking. It requires organizations to develop flexible structures that can rapidly align people, resources, and processes to take advantage of key opportunities as well as learn quickly and adapt and course correct as needed.

Exercise 6.1: Leading in a VUCA World

To what extent is your organization equipped/prepared to lead in a VUCA environment?

Consider the following:

- Specifically what are the VUCA conditions your community/constituency is facing?
- What is your vision and set of strategies for leading in this VUCA environment?
- As a leader, what skills and strategies do you need to strengthen to better navigate these particular VUCA conditions?
- What are the key steps you can take to help your organization become better at handling VUCA situations?
- What are the unexpected opportunities in this moment?



Chapter 7: Deepening YOUR Leadership Practice

"Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."

Paulo Freire

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

We've covered some major leadership themes in this workbook and hopefully we have helped you gain some new insights along the way. Now it's time to put all the pieces together into an integrated leadership development plan. Here are a few final recommendations and exercises as you continue your leadership journey:

♥ Loving Reminders:

- ***Make Space for Self-Reflection:*** Understand that the practice of self-reflection is not a luxury or privilege but a responsibility. Without it, leaders can become frustrated, stagnate, or burn out and your organization and the movement you care about will suffer. Understand that leader self-reflection is part of your job and can yield extraordinary results for you, your organization, and the movement.
- ***Foster a Continuous Learning Mindset:*** Be as passionate about learning to become a better leader as you are about the cause you are working on because they are intertwined. Courses and books can be great but daily practice is

paramount. Consider asking questions like: What could I have done better or differently today? Did I act with integrity and authenticity today? What did others teach me today?

- *Actively Seek Out Feedback:* Learning to be a better leader is not an isolated process; create ongoing opportunities to secure feedback from staff, board, allies, etc. Build a strong and lasting network of mentors, peers, and coaches who can share their own experiences and strategies to help you see your blind spots.
- *Decide on What's Important and Make a Plan:* Just as organizations should have staff development plans, strategic plans, and fundraising plans — you need a leadership plan to help you prioritize and measure progress.

Using a 360° Leadership Assessment

Using a 360° assessment tool is one of several strategies for assessing your leadership skills and identifying those skills and attributes you want to develop further. Start with your own self-assessment and invite board members, senior staff (direct reports), and allies to participate in the feedback process.

Most 360° assessment tools designed with social justice organizations in mind cover a wide range of leadership skill sets and attributes including:

- vision and values
- strategic thinking
- management skills
- communication skills
- relationship building and collaboration
- decision-making
- change management
- fundraising
- developing others, and
- team building, among many others.

You can access a [free 360° Assessment template here](#) or create your own. We recommend using an online survey program such as Survey Gizmo or Survey Monkey to disseminate the survey and collect the data.

As you approach the assessment process consider the following:

- *Utilize an Appreciative Inquiry Approach:* Leaders can be highly self-critical which can zap the energy needed for positive growth. Start with celebrating your gifts, talents, and hard work. Acknowledge your growth as a leader, it will motivate you to further develop your skills.
- *Be Mindful of Internalized Oppression and Other Gremlins:* Recognize that internalized oppression and other negative self-talk is a common experience among many leaders. Seek to understand how these specifically operate to undermine your leadership and take active steps to develop your emotional intelligence and manage your triggers.



Love, Power, and Liberation

"Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice. One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love.

What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community



"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

Alice Walker
Activist and Author

Standing in Your Full Power

Social justice leaders often have conflicting feelings or discomfort with holding power. This can result in indecision or backpedaling that can hinder the strategic impact organizations seek to achieve. In our coaching practice we remind leaders that there is a fundamental difference between exercising "power with," versus "power over." Practicing "power with" leadership means that you are acting from a place of love, not control. While sometimes you may be taking a vanguard role and making certain decisions, you are also consulting the folks most impacted, tapping into the collective wisdom, and facilitating the leadership of many others along the way — staff, community members, allies, etc. Below are a few final reflection exercises to complete before the final step of writing out your leadership development plan.

Exercise 7.1: Standing in Your Power

Quick Brainstorm: Take a few minutes to envision standing in your full power.

What does standing in your full power look like...

- For you as a person?
- For you as the leader of your organization?
- For you as a movement leader?



What is Your Leadership Vision?

To fully stand in you power, you need to have a clear leadership vision grounded in purpose, values, and long-term strategy. To strengthen your leadership vision, consider the following questions:

- What is the leadership role you need to play given the context and needs of your constituency/community, your organization, and the broader movement?
- What are you uniquely positioned to accomplish?
- What core values and beliefs should guide the way you lead?

- How will you develop others? What do you want to model as a leader at this stage of the work?

- What's the legacy you want to leave behind?

"People are aware that they cannot continue in the same old way but are immobilized because they cannot imagine an alternative. We need a vision that recognizes that we are at one of the great turning points in human history when the survival of our planet and the restoration of our humanity require a great sea change in our ecological, economic, political, and spiritual values."

Grace Lee Boggs
Activist and Author

Your Role As A Movement Leader

It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day operations (and sometimes drama) of your organization. However as an organizational leader, you also play an important role in advancing the goals of the larger movement. The long-term success of your organization is inextricably tied to the larger movement's ability to cohere, build power, and actualize a common agenda for social change.

As you create your leadership plan, it will be important for you to think about your specific role as a leader within the movement. How will you and your organization contribute to building a healthy, sustainable, and impactful movement that can achieve social transformation? As you begin thinking about your leadership plan, take time to reflect on the questions in the next exercise.

"Because by definition it can never be static; to be radical is to constantly live in the territory yet undiscovered, the liberation yet unknown."

Rev. angel Kyodo williams
Radical Dharma

✦ Exercise 7.2: On Being a Movement Leader

Where are we in the trajectory or evolution of this movement? What are the lessons that have been learned and the common goals of the movement?

What is the movement moment calling for? What's needed to better align and strengthen this movement?

"We are continually undergoing micro-evolutions of the self."

James Clear
Atomic Habits

✦ Exercise 7.3: Putting It All Together

We are nearing the end of this workbook. We hope that by taking the time to engage in reflective leadership practice, you have gained some insights and set some intentions for how you want to stand fully in your power and exercise leadership that is authentic, values-centric, inspiring, and sustainable.

Based on your reflections thus far, articulate the key elements of your leadership vision moving forward:

What are your goals for personal transformation and leadership development?

What are your goals for collaboration and movement building work? How can you best position your organization to influence the movement at this time?

How will you know if you are successful?



Now you are ready to draft your Leadership Plan!

✦ Exercise 7.4: Drafting Your Leadership Plan

Use the template below to draft your Leadership Plan.

Goals	Action Steps	Complete By	Resources	Progress/Notes
Daily Practices: <i>What daily practice will help you embody the insight, skills, energy and courage to advance your vision?</i>				

Hey Fam, We Could Really Use Your Help!

Our team at Strategies for Social Change, is always looking for ways to improve on our work to support social justice leaders. Will you take 5-10 minutes and give us your feedback [here](#) on this workbook?

We are hoping to do a series of workbooks, so please tell us which chapters or exercises you found helpful and which were not helpful. What was missing? What topics do you want to know more about? Also, please share your favorite resources with us, so we can share it with our community of social justice leaders. We know they will benefit from your wisdom, so please help us pass it forward.

Feedback Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SJLoveNotes>



More Resources



Article



Book



Podcast



Toolkit



Video



Website

Resource Hubs



Ideas to Action Field Guide by Up With Community - <https://upwithcommunity.org/turn-ideas-into-action/>



Mind Tools - <http://www.mindtools.com>



Move to End Violence - <https://movetoendviolence.org/resources/>



Racial Equity Tools - <https://www.racialequitytools.org/>



The Management Center - <https://www.managementcenter.org/>



Resonance Network - <https://resonance-network.org/>

Trauma, Healing Justice, and Conflict Transformation



Healing Justice Toolkit by Dignity and Power NOW! - <http://dignityandpowernow.org/category/healing-justice/>



Healing In Action by Black Lives Matter
https://blacklivesmatter.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BLM_HealingAction_r1.pdf



Irresistible (formerly known as the Healing Justice Podcast) - <https://irresistible.org/podcast>



My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies by Resmaa Menakem



Brass Tacks: Exploring Organizational Trauma with Arabella Perez by Up With Community
<https://youtu.be/i09dQhWhuGI>



From Trauma to Transformative Futures: Four Dimensions by Interaction Institute for Social Change
<https://interactioninstitute.org/from-trauma-to-transformative-futures-four-dimensions/>



Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators by Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan



Tools for Addressing Chapter Conflict by Black Lives Matter
https://blacklivesmatter.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BLM_ChapterConflict_r1.pdf



We Will Not Cancel Us And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice by adrienne maree brown



Interview with adrienne maree brown about *We Will Not Cancel Us* - <https://youtu.be/ggcBSWFAV6E>



Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement edited by Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha



Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love and Liberation by angel Kyodo Rev. Williams, Lama Rod Owens and Jasmine Syedullah, Ph.D.

Emotional Intelligence



Strengths Finder 2.0 by Tom Rath



Working with Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman



EQ-i 2.0: Emotional Intelligence Assessment For Leadership by The Myers-Briggs Company
<https://ap.themyersbriggs.com/overview/EQ-i-20-8>



"10 Steps To Effective Listening" by Dianne Schilling
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/?sh=32383f253891>



"The Four Parts of Accountability: How to Give a Good Apology" by Mia Mingus
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability/>



Unlocking Us and *Dare to Lead* podcasts by Brené Brown
<https://brenebrown.com/podcasts/>

Community Care









21-Day Challenge (to a More Impactful You/Movement) by Move to End Violence
<http://movetoendviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Resources-Packet-12.22.15.pdf>







Self Care for Sustainability and Impact Workbook by Move to End Violence
<https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Self%20Care%20Workbook%20FINAL.pdf>



Leadership Development

-  360 Leadership Assessment by Strategies for Social Change - <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KikwIZohvcQh8oxCJs3WltTiBwaUSoactEMEjqRPXg/edit?usp=sharing>
-  Building Leadership for Social Impact by Strategies for Social Change - <https://strategiesforsocialchange.com/resource/>
-  Coaching Skills for Nonprofit Managers and Leaders by Judith Wilson and Michelle Gislason
-  The Personal Compass from Grove Tools
<https://grovetools-inc.com/collections/all/products/the-personal-compass>
-  Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds by adrienne maree brown
-  "How to Regain the Lost Art of Reflection" by Martin Reeves, Roselinde Torres, and Fabien Hassan
<https://hbr.org/2017/09/how-to-regain-the-lost-art-of-reflection>

Building Strong Organizations

-  Building a Strategic Thinking Organization by Strategies for Social Change - <https://strategiesforsocialchange.com/resource/>
-  Managing Organizational Growth & Change by Strategies for Social Change - <https://strategiesforsocialchange.com/resource/>
-  "How Your Organization Can Routinize Reflection" by Beth Kanter for GuideStar
<https://trust.guidestar.org/how-your-nonprofit-can-routinize-reflection>
-  Chapter 12 of *The Innovator's Way: Essential Practices for Successful Innovation* by Peter J. Denning and Robert Dunham

Endnotes

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