



Choosing Hope: A Garment, A Ripple, and A Button

Workshop Description: For many in America today, hope is a relatively limited commodity. Instead, it seems that a lot of us inhabit a dark landscape where fear, despair and hopelessness appear rampant. How can this be? How can we brighten our landscapes? How can we regain hope and set the stage for positive change where we get beyond “Us” versus “Them”?

For fifteen years, I've travelled the country meeting people and sharing ideas on how we can be compassionate and kind to each other, even as all of us collectively strive to survive the human condition. In that time, I have found that almost everyone is hard-wired for empathy, even for altruism. As I like to say, ninety-eight percent of humans have good empathetic hearts and want to do the right thing; it's just that many aren't paying attention to do that, or don't know what the “right thing” is, or they're afraid to engage for a variety of reasons.

To be bravely human necessitates pushing past our fear, including the fear of “Other.” It also requires a steadfast commitment to compassion and kindness—even when those things seem impossible to offer.

This unique workshop—much needed in the second half of the 2020s—incorporates a discussion of historical figures such as Dr. King, Robert F. Kennedy, Sr. and Rosa Parks, along with reviewing an essay by a contemporary writer, Tony Hoagland. The discussion focuses on the ideals they embody relative to facing fear, engaging in allyship, and being respectfully curious about “Other,” while empowering listeners to believe that they can ripple within their communities to foster positive change where everyone has a seat at the table.

Underlying this workshop is my belief that positive, lasting change can occur not through ordering, but instead only through inspiration. The goal is to empower audience members to walk out of the room seeking to spread compassion and kindness to everyone, regardless of where they are on the spectrum of human existence.

Why This Workshop Works: Most people feel the need to have hope—both in their personal lives and collectively for America. It is hope that underlies our ability to weather challenges and adversity. Thus, talking about how hope can set the stage for positive change is the kind of thing that many will respond to with great positivity.

By using historical figures (Dr. King, Robert F. Kennedy, Sr. and Rosa Parks) and an incredible essay about changing one's perspective about those who are “Other” by poet/writer Tony Hoagland, audience members are reminded about other instances where we've overcome challenges to propel America forward. Additionally, the workshop involves an exercise using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to demonstrate that each of us is attempting



to survive the human condition—and as a way of showing how basic needs (safety, family, employment) must first be met before compassion for others is possible. (Audience members particularly like the Maslow exercise!)

A segment of the workshop involves sharing about allyship, the action form of being an ally to another person or group of humans. This includes instructing on the need to self-educate about the group or groups for which one is an ally.

The workshop also provides ideas on how to foster greater community involvement/discussion around compassion for others and getting past one's fear of "Other."

Learning Objectives:

1. Reinforcing that hope is an important element of surviving the human condition/of being able to weather emotional and/or physical challenges.
2. Reminding about how hope helped foster strength during the Civil Rights Movement and how various historical figures overcame personal fear to challenge injustice and oppression.
3. Educating about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and providing audience members with meaningful engagement where they are reminded they're not alone in attempting to survive the human condition.
4. Understanding how allyship is the action form of being an ally to another person or groups of humans. The workshop offers various tools to foster allyship, including an exercise around the need to self-educate about the historical challenges various marginalized groups have faced.
5. Reinforcing that most people have good empathetic hearts and seek to help others in need, regardless of whether someone is "Other" or not. The workshop repeatedly incorporates the word "compassion."
6. Providing strategies and tools for how to make one's community more compassionate and willing to take risks to get past "Us" versus "Them."
7. Discussing the role of perspective in challenging the status quo and the importance of understanding that positive, lasting change cannot occur without a change of one's perspective.

Handout: Attendees are presented with a multipage handout and other documents. (Unless otherwise arranged, the Sponsor will bear the cost of copying/distributing the written materials.)

Audience Size: This workshop can accommodate any number of attendees, from ages ten on up. Seating can be with rounds/squares or theater.

Technical Needs: The workshop requires AV equipment for a PowerPoint and short videos. (Ellie can supply the PowerPoint and videos via email or by connecting to her laptop.) Ellie also doesn't utilize a podium and asks for space to "roam" as she speaks. For the discussion of Maslow's Hierarchy, Ellie will hang signs on the training room walls with blue painter's tape (she supplies both the tape and the signs).

Duration: 90 to 120 minutes, depending on audience size and desired level of engagement. The workshop has the potential to expand to a half or full day that could include a broader discussion about inclusivity, microaggressions, and courageous conversations.

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