INSIDER TIPS

for

TRANSFORMING
POWER
STRUGGLES

and

GROWING COMMUNITY

adapted from

FINDING
NEW
GROUND
Robert
Chadwick
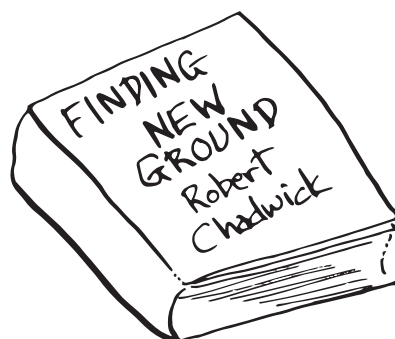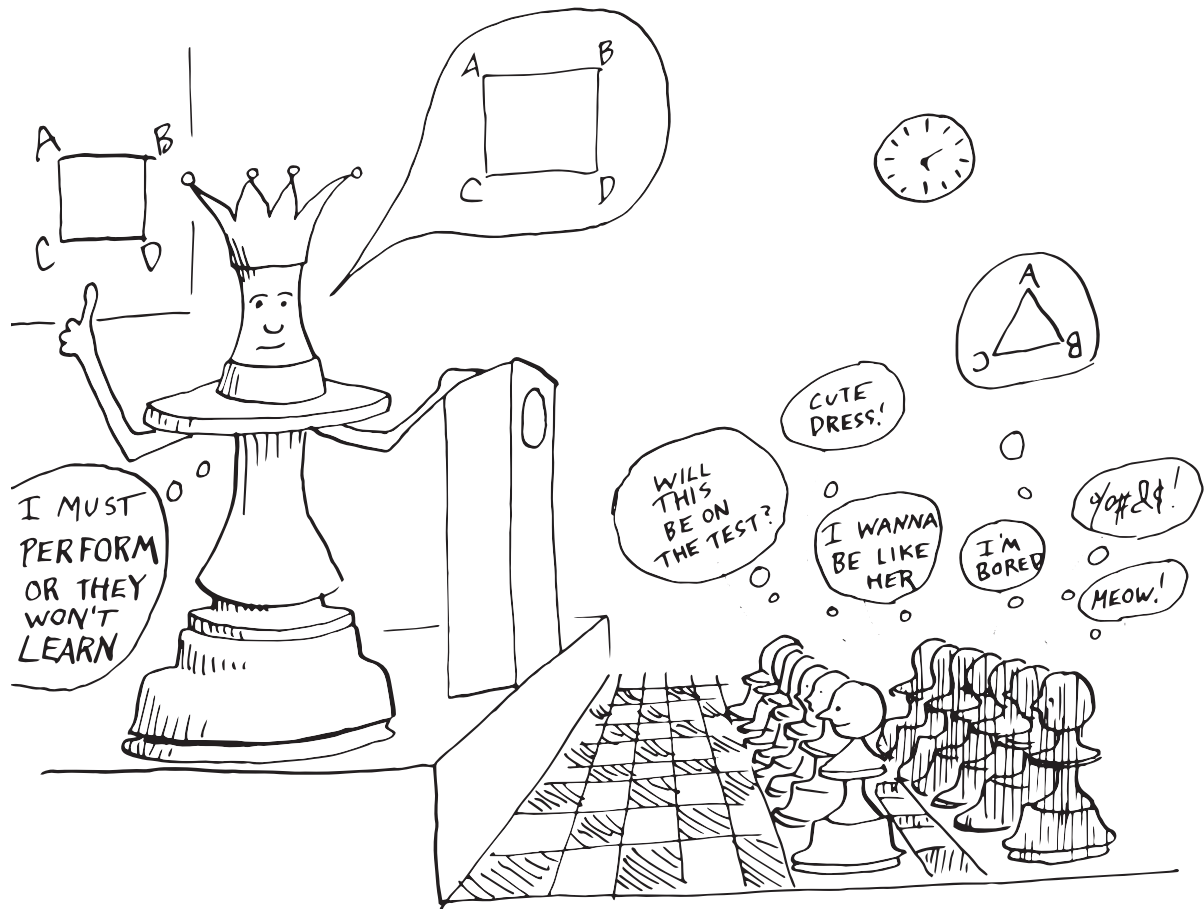
by PETER DONOVAN

A COMMON FORMAT FOR MEETINGS AND GATHERINGS.
An expert or leader stands in front. The audience faces the
"sage on the stage." Some listen for what they need to do
to gain approval from the power figure. But others, who
resent power, will challenge or avoid the leader's information
or task. This will produce a POWER STRUGGLE, a conflict
of interest which takes focus away from the task, and
focuses on the leader rather than the participants as
important persons.

   For delivering information, teaching a curriculum, or
certifying professionals, this format offers speed, efficiency,
and convenience. Hierarchical organizations and
institutions are typically loyal to it.
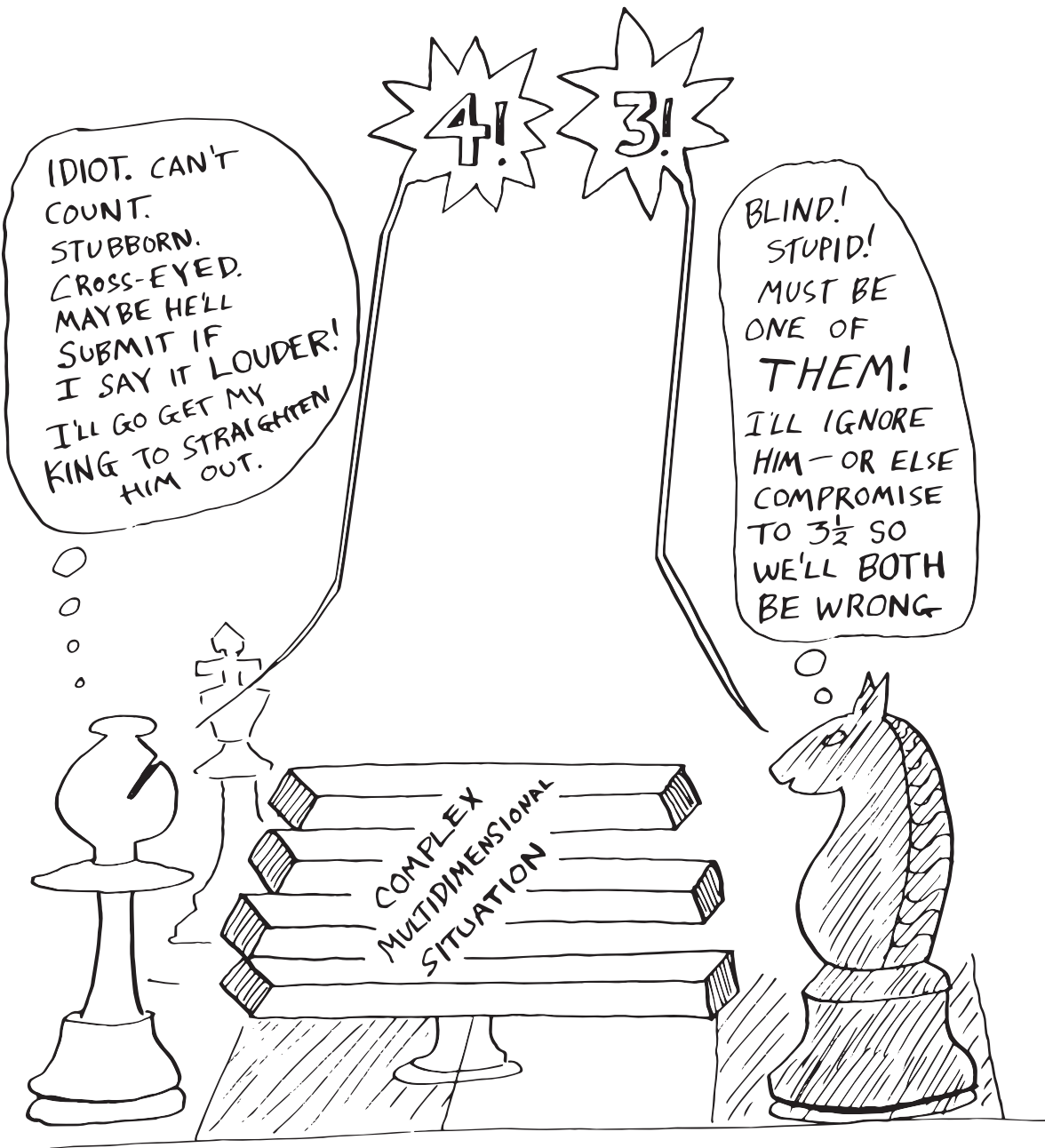
When we listen to reply, criticize, dominate, or submit to one another, curiosity can instantly harden into judgment, and we defend our POSITIONS or abandon them. In complex situations with multiple interests, the need to win MULTIPLIES power struggles.

After experiencing gatherings and meetings on complex issues
that usually resulted in a combination or balance of resistance
and acquiescence, I began to experience with Bob Chadwick
and Jeff Goebel an art of finding new ground — of
addressing and resolving conflict, of participatory learning,
of sharing power, that they learned by working with people
and groups in conflict, urban and rural, literate and non.
Bob's book shares this subtle art with transparency,
not as a proprietary system, but as a gentle introduction
to a pathway that you can begin to explore immediately.

Our present beliefs and behaviors are designed either
to AVOID conflict or to engage in aggressive ways
that make the situation worse. These behaviors reflect
the basic belief that conflict is harmful, and contrived
peace and harmony based on power and control are
good at any cost. They are based on the need to
please or win, rather than the need to resolve.

Many of our challenges today involving complexity, the relations between knowing and doing, are not technical problems, not just problems of compiling and delivering information or best practices. They are *people* issues: growth, change, participation, power, scarcity, conflict, and the need for community.

OH NO! DOES THIS MEAN I HAVE TO SPILL MY GUTS?
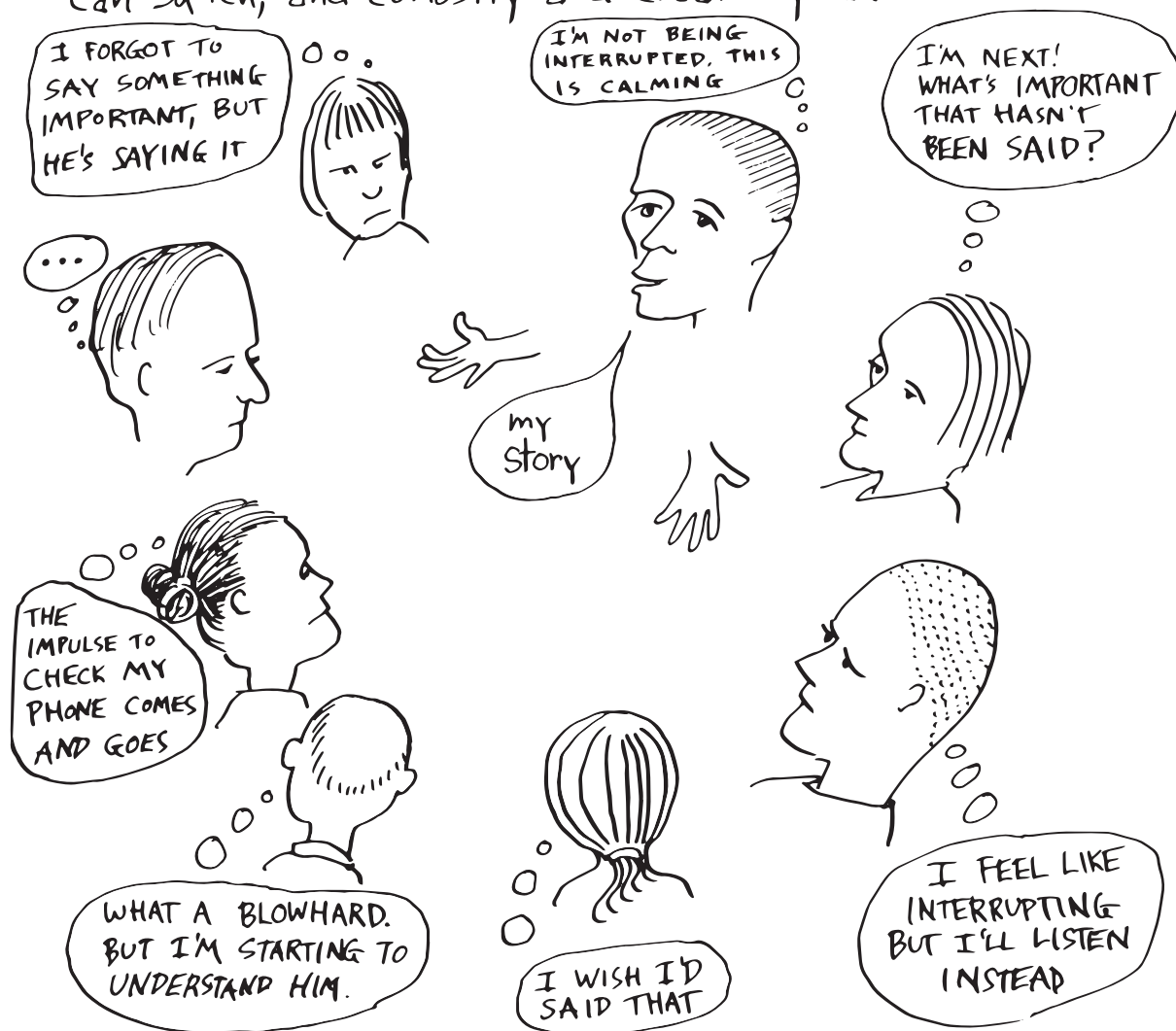
NOT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.

Number 1, set up and use a circle. No front, no back. No stage or podium, not even tables. Everyone is important. A circle is appropriate when the purpose or task is to:
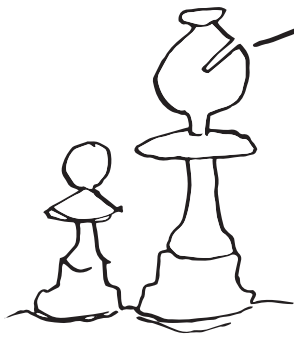
- make a *collective decision* where emotions, values, or conflict are involved
- grow relationships, trust, or community with honesty and integrity

The circle helps engage the whole person—thoughts, feelings, fears, and hopes.

Facilitator's #1 job: make sure everyone has a turn to speak, without interruption, one at a time around the circle. A facilitator can't MAKE people listen, or listen with respect, but he or she can LET it happen, firmly yet gently maintaining ENABLING CONDITIONS. Everyone gets their voices in the room, which helps equalize power. With open questions, listening with respect, and time, judgment can soften, and curiosity and creativity can bloom.

I FORGOT TO SAY SOMETHING IMPORTANT, BUT HE'S SAYING IT

I'M NOT BEING INTERRUPTED, THIS IS CALMING

I'M NEXT! WHAT'S IMPORTANT THAT HASN'T BEEN SAID?

...

my story

THE IMPULSE TO CHECK MY PHONE COMES AND GOES

WHAT A BLOWHARD. BUT I'M STARTING TO UNDERSTAND HIM.

I WISH I'D SAID THAT

I FEEL LIKE INTERRUPTING BUT I'LL LISTEN INSTEAD

By listening and participating, one can become a WITNESS to one's own attitudes and thinking.

COMPLEX

COMMUNITY

ECONOMY

CARBON CYCLE

WATER CYCLE

BUT WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR ALL THAT, SO WE'LL JUST DO IT MY WAY!

BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T LISTEN TO US, WE WILL IGNORE, RESIST, AND SABOTAGE YOUR EFFORTS.

Is TIME the problem? Or is the PROBLEM the problem? We often have time to apply quick fixes that don't work, trainings that don't take, over and over. READY-FIRE-AIM. The costs are incalculable. It takes time to include people's perspectives, to grow trust with listening, to confront festered conflicts, to get past shoot-from-the-hip groupthink, and to grow understanding, a shared knowledge base and intelligence on complex issues.

GO SLOW

TO GO FAST

For real participation, use the circle with OPEN QUESTIONS loosely adapted to the task or issue.

INTRODUCTION.

Introduce yourself. What is your relationship to the task or issue? What are your expectations of this meeting, and how do you feel about being here?

This is appropriate for all groups and situations. It brings people into the here and now. It models cooperative behavior, and allows people to listen to and experience everyone else.

The following sequence (1 through 5) can be adapted to any issue or challenge, including personal decisions.

1 SITUATION.

What is the situation, how did it get to be that way, and how do you feel about it?

This helps create a common knowledge base, beyond people's individual views, perceptions, or perspectives.

THE CIRCLE

If you listen with respect
    understanding
        trust
            learning
A new perspective
    growing
        resolving
            adapting
will result.

2 WHAT ARE THE WORST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES
OF THE ISSUE, TASK, OR DECISION?

In every situation we have in mind feared FUTURE outcomes, based on PAST experience, that affect PRESENT attitudes and behaviors. The child chases a ball into the street—and HE'LL GET HIT BY A CAR! Acknowledging these lizard-brain, survival-mode fears lessens our tendency to enable or enact them, and helps us understand one another.

← THE CIRCLE →

reverse direction for balance and equity
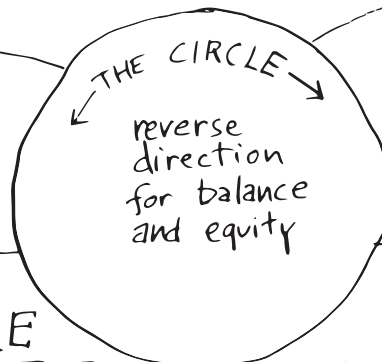
take a break

3 WHAT ARE THE BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES?

These are imagined FUTURE outcomes, sometimes not previously experienced, that affect PRESENT attitudes and behaviors. Like the worst, these are not FACTS, they are BELIEFS, and tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies when strongly held and acted upon.

— POSSIBILITY THINKING —

FIRST, ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WORST OUTCOMES ARE POSSIBLE.

THEN, AFFIRM THAT BEST OUTCOMES ARE POSSIBLE.

→ Allows movement toward desired outcomes →

4 WHAT ARE THE
BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS
(if there is need to go DEEP)
AND STRATEGIES
AND
ACTIONS
that will foster or
enable the
BEST
POSSIBLE
OUTCOMES
?

As with the
Best Possible
Outcomes, let
people chart the steps and
missing links by themselves.
They will usually take
responsibility, with internal
motivation, to make these happen.
FOR LATER: What is the
EVIDENCE that our best
outcomes are happening?

At closings or endings, ask:

5 WHAT DID YOU
LEARN THAT WILL MAKE
YOU SUCCESSFUL, AND
HOW DO YOU FEEL
ABOUT IT?

IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU KNOW...

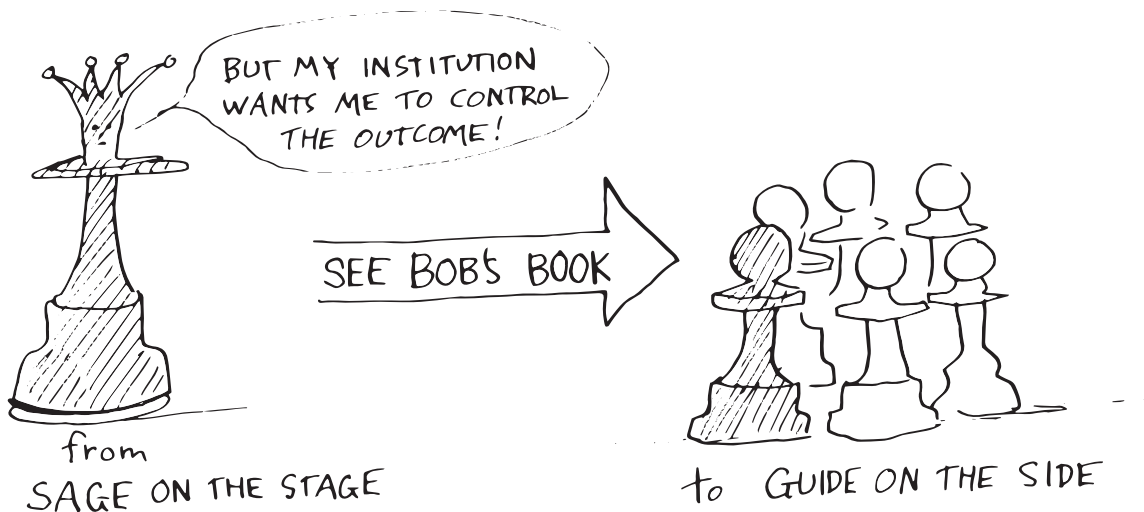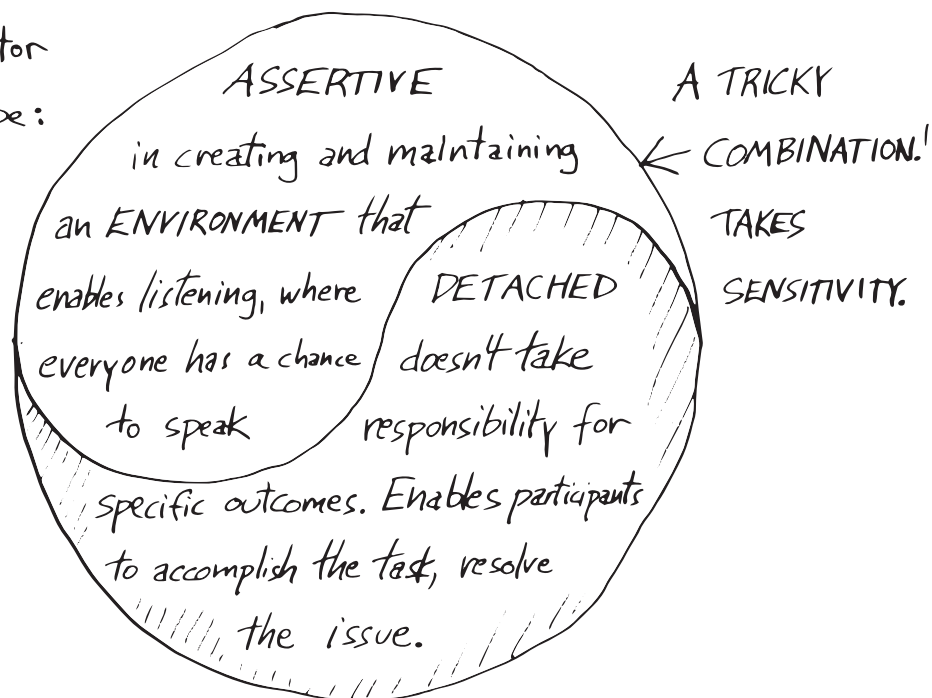DIAMETER OF UNIVERSE

IT'S WHO YOU KNOW IT WITH

Learning happens
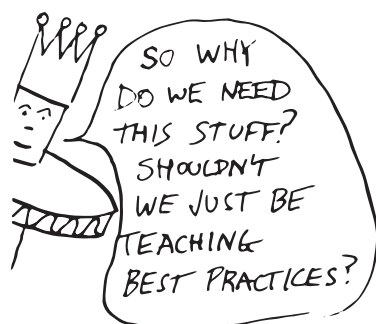when we consciously
set out to make
it happen.
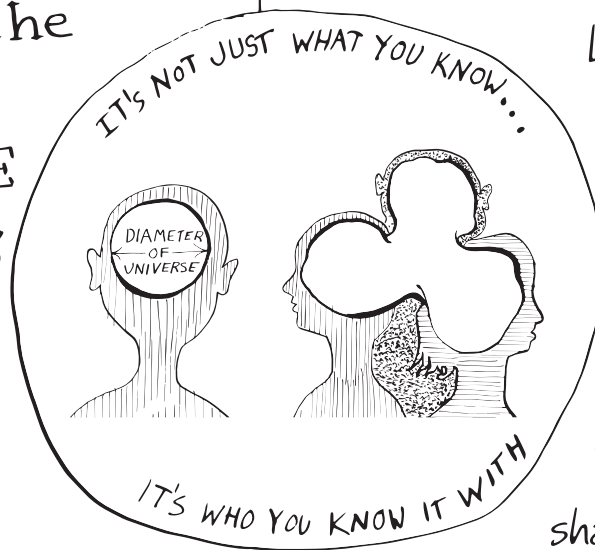
When people
share what they
are learning, when
we witness the learning
of others, we become a
LEARNING COMMUNITY.

The adaptable—and even modular—finding new ground circle and questions help address and resolve conflicts and power struggles. They help with issues of change, with the need for decisions to be more participatory and inclusive, and where there is need to build trust, or facilitate shared learning on complex topics—where even introductions and closings can contribute.

A facilitator needs to be:

ASSERTIVE in creating and maintaining an ENVIRONMENT that enables listening, where everyone has a chance to speak

DETACHED doesn't take responsibility for specific outcomes. Enables participants to accomplish the task, resolve the issue.

A TRICKY ← COMBINATION.! TAKES SENSITIVITY.

BUT MY INSTITUTION WANTS ME TO CONTROL THE OUTCOME!

SEE BOB'S BOOK

from SAGE ON THE STAGE

to GUIDE ON THE SIDE

POSTSCRIPT
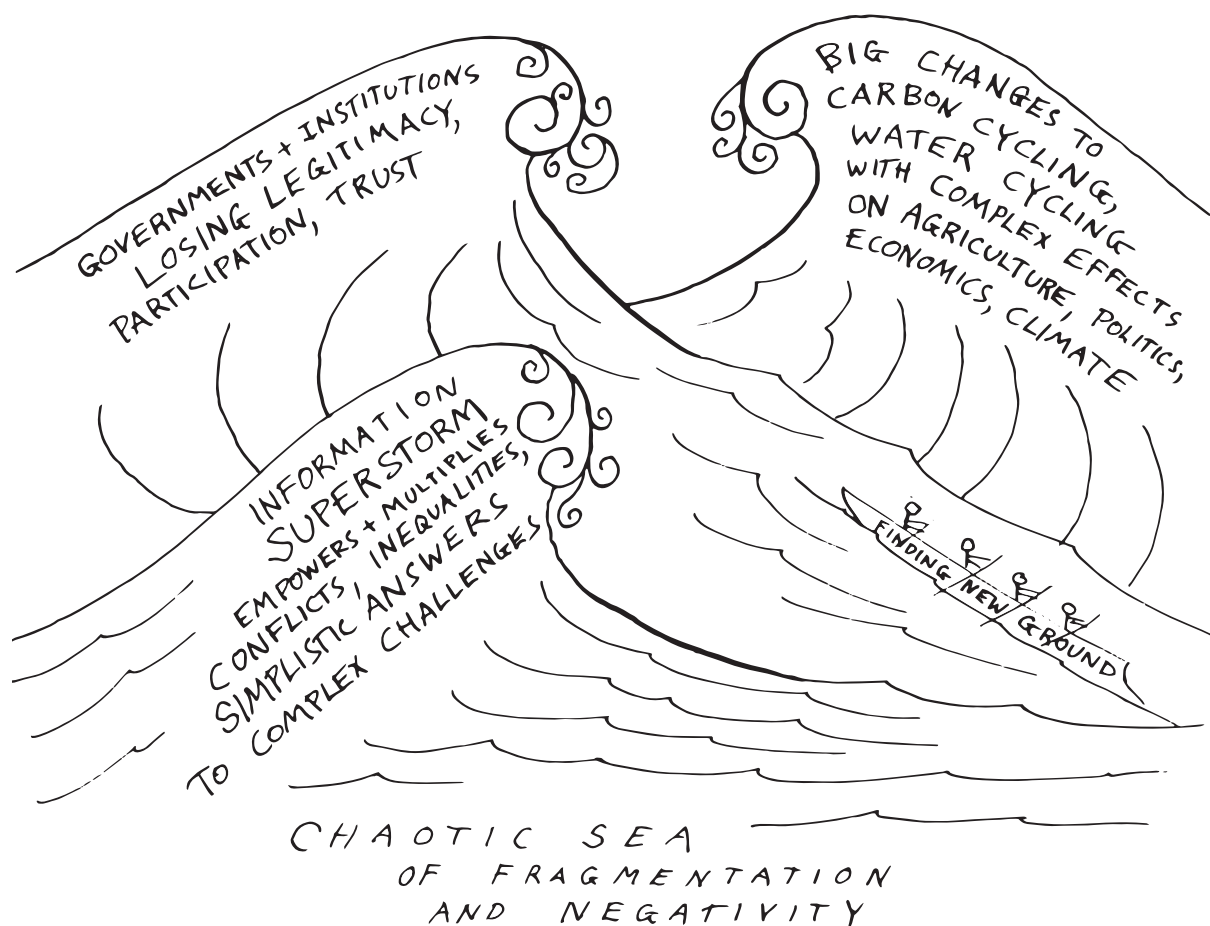
So why do we need this stuff? Shouldn't we just be teaching best practices?

Finding new ground is not an end in itself, or some kind of cult. It's a HOW-TO, a means to an end that people can define for themselves.

SITUATION: Long-breaking, _mutually_ _accelerating_ forces that channel us into lives of opposition, according to our fears and hatreds.

GOVERNMENTS + INSTITUTIONS LOSING LEGITIMACY, PARTICIPATION, TRUST

BIG CHANGES TO CARBON CYCLING, WATER CYCLING WITH COMPLEX EFFECTS ON AGRICULTURE, POLITICS, ECONOMICS, CLIMATE

INFORMATION SUPERSTORM EMPOWERS + MULTIPLIES CONFLICTS, INEQUALITIES, SIMPLISTIC ANSWERS TO COMPLEX CHALLENGES

FINDING NEW GROUND

CHAOTIC SEA OF FRAGMENTATION AND NEGATIVITY

The finding new ground circle and questions enable us to NAVIGATE TOWARD what we need and want (acknowledging fears and risks), based on local situations, willingness to participate and engage, and an inclusive knowledge base.