



SEED'S TIP OF THE MONTH:

NOVEMBER

Have You Identified Your "Strategic Who?"

Years ago I was blessed by a three-year fellowship to explore approaches to social transformation in different parts of the world. For example, in South Africa I was exposed to people who had been on different sides of Apartheid, at a time when young, ANC street revolutionaries, recently victorious, were positioned to create new systems and scrambling to figure out governance. In Belfast, Northern Ireland, I stayed in the homes of both Protestants and Catholics and tried to fathom the painful trauma that made people shift every conversation -- even the most mindless chatter about weather -- back to the topic of "The Troubles."



From the hope to hopelessness of my glimpse into both moments in time, I learned ways to practice cultivating empathy with people who had vastly different viewpoints. Many of SEED's first offerings emerged from that experience.

One pearl came from a mountaintop outside Boulder, Colorado, where a small group of Kellogg fellows were thrilled to spend a weekend learning from Jean Paul Lederach-- a long-time scholar and practitioner in war-torn parts of the world. (Lederach coined the term "conflict transformation" in a field previously focused on mediation and negotiation.) I've since shared his "collective social change" framework and seen many apply it to get unstuck and break through conflicts of all types.

A 60-minute, interactive workshop will do more for you than this quick tip. But here's the kernel -- I hope you can run with it:

For Lederach, the "'Strategic Who' is the smallest, most diverse group of people who, if assembled and set in motion as a team, has the capacity to set a lot more in motion." Think of a gas syphon: If you're trying to get gas from a small can into your tank, the trick is to draw just enough into the hose such that other forces take over and all the liquid is immediately, effortlessly transferred.

How can you apply this to a challenge you are facing? Keep in mind, your strategic who may not be your closest allies. Don't look for them in the grassroots of your work culture, and don't look for them at the highest levels of leadership, where decisions are made behind closed doors. Your strategic who are your bridge people; they work from the middle out. They speak the language of the community you aim to serve, and they also get invited to the table at the top of the pyramid. They harness power cross-sector and maximize diverse viewpoints. Identify a select few who appreciate the value of your work. Bring them together. Set them in motion, and support whatever is waiting to unfold.

Please share the magic -- we'd love to share your stories to inspire others!