



ACTIVITY 4

Gatekeeping

🕒 TIMING

Approximately **2–2.5 hours** total. The demonstration takes 30–40 minutes. The small group activity will take about 1 hour for each group of 3 leaders. We tend to follow that with 30 minutes of journaling.

★ EXPERTISE

This session requires a strong facilitator who is unafraid to make visible the unspoken challenges facing leaders. It's also important that the facilitator is comfortable holding the group through a truly honest and vulnerable baring of their challenges.

PURPOSE

To help leaders examine the role of internal protective voices or “gatekeepers” that emerge when they begin to take greater risks in their lives or careers.

USE

This exercise deepens the interdependence within the group and allows individual leaders to work transparently on what is inhibiting their own leadership with trusted colleagues.

FACILITATION

Prior to this exercise, each leader has revealed his/her individual story and community issue. Now, they will dig into more details about their own journey as leaders.

What's needed: A comfortable room that can hold a circle of chairs for participants. The room should be closed to outside interference (external observers, catering, etc.) during this exercise. Facilitators should solicit a volunteer in advance to demonstrate the exercise in front of the group.

Instructions:

- 1 Set up the room so that the full group is seated in a semicircle with three empty chairs as the focal point.
- 2 Introduce the concept of “gatekeeper” (aka the “inner critic or protector” or “voice of judgment”) as the internationalization of doubt, fear, shame, or racism/sexism/homophobia that can prevent leaders from stepping into greater power.
- 3 Explain the role of the three chairs. The first chair represents the higher self (i.e., the individual's vision for their own leadership). The second chair represents the leader's gatekeeper. The third chair represents the leader's inner cheerleader, friend, or more supportive self.
- 4 Invite the volunteer to sit in the first of the three chairs. From that chair, ask the leader to express his or her vision for leadership to the group for 2–3 minutes.



Instructions (continued):

- 5 Now invite that leader to sit in the chair that represents the gatekeeper. Ask the leader to now speak to their visionary self in the voice of their inner critic for 1–2 minutes. A facilitator should encourage the leader to dig into what those inner voices may be saying.
- 6 Ask the leader to go back to the visionary chair and describe how it feels to hear the gatekeeper attack their vision for leadership.
- 7 Now invite the leader to sit in the third chair, which represents the friend or cheerleader. Ask the leader to talk to the gatekeeper, which makes the inner wrestling between the cheerleader and the gatekeeper voices visible. Ask if there is anything that the friend wants to say to the gatekeeper in appreciation of its work. Ask the friend to speak directly to the visionary self to offer words of support. Offer additional support as the facilitator.
- 8 Finally, invite the leader back into the original visionary chair to express the vision again. This time, the leader’s voice should be more centered and determined.
- 9 Invite the group to offer brief reflections on the process they just observed (5–7 minutes).
- 10 Divide participants into small groups of three. Each leader takes a turn going through the full exercise with their small group for 15 minutes, rotating through all 3 chairs. The facilitator should provide written instructions with indicated timing for the small groups to use.
- 11 After the group reconvenes, give leaders 30 minutes to journal. Ask them to capture what they’ve learned about their own leadership and an intent for their own learning.

WHAT WE’RE LEARNING

-  This exercise plays multiple roles in the life of the group. For the volunteer, it’s often the first time they have articulated their gatekeepers. The act of publicly acknowledging them creates an opportunity to shift from shame to an appreciation for their gatekeeper. For the group, the honesty and vulnerability required in this exercise deepen the connections already growing between the leaders.
-  This exercise has allowed the NLN facilitators to begin to connect the internal gatekeepers to different forms of internalized oppression. Framing the internal negativity as reflections of inequitable societal expectations is often empowering for leaders to consider.

DIG INTO WHAT

THOSE INNER VOICES

MAY BE SAYING