

## ACTIVITY 1

# Personal Introductions

### 🕒 TIMING

This exercise takes **6–8 minutes**/person. At NLN this exercise takes the majority of the first afternoon.

### ★ EXPERTISE

**None.** As long as the group has spent time establishing confidentiality and “community agreements,” this exercise is one that is created for and by the community.

## PURPOSE

To disrupt how leaders get to know one another by sharing deeply personal stories, giving empathic feedback, opening to vulnerability, and accelerating the level of trust in the group.

## USE

Any time leaders are entering into a collaborative change process, especially if they are coming from different sectors, perspectives, communities, etc.

## FACILITATION

**Pre-work:** Prior to gathering, leaders receive instructions to prepare a 3-minute talk introducing themselves to the group by focusing on their inner values and motivations rather than their resume. They are asked to answer a deeply personal question: *Why, at the deepest level, do you do the work that you do?* For inspiration, we use the Mary Oliver poem “Summer Day,” which ends: *“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”*

**What’s needed:** A comfortable room that can hold chairs for the participants, set up in a U or semi-circle. Post-its and pens should be circulated before the exercise begins.

### Instructions:

- 1 Reintroduce the purpose of the talk. Remind leaders that we aren’t interested in their resume, but what’s *behind* it.
- 2 Remind the group of community agreements (confidentiality, etc.) and let them know that strong emotions are OK.
- 3 Choose the speaking order by drawing numbers and give people the opportunity to trade if they want.
- 4 Introduce the concept of “love notes.” Hand out small pads of paper and ask everyone to write a short reflection or affirmation in response to each talk. (They should wait until the speaker has finished to do this).
- 5 Instruct each speaker to stand at the front of the group (not on a podium), where they will be the focus of attention.

### Instructions (continued):

- 6 For each leader's talk: (6-8 min/person):
  - Start timer with 3 minutes on the clock. Facilitator gives a quiet warning at 2 minutes and a 30-second reprieve if needed.
  - Afterward, the speaker remains standing while participants write their notes.
  - Speaker then receives 1–2 minutes of verbal reflections from the group.
  - Collect the love notes and give them to the leader to read later.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- ✓ Monitor the energy of the group. We've found that groups typically need a short break every 60–90 minutes; movement, caffeine, or short walks outside are all good ways to renew the group's energy.
- ✓ It's important that leaders receive brief feedback after they have shared their story. This builds the group's empathic capacity and helps people see how they impact others.
- ✓ Love notes are important to help leaders avoid any regret over what they have shared. In our experience, leaders tend to say things that they rarely or never say in public. This risk needs to be rewarded.

"TELL ME, WHAT IS  
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PRECIOUS LIFE?"