FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

[1-2 HOURS]

OVERVIEW
The purpose of this workshop is to give your group a chance to reflect together on how you want to show up as leaders in this time. Together, you will consider:

• What values or practices have we learned or inherited about leadership?
• What does society value, and what do movements value?
• How do we want to think about leadership?
• How can we step collectively into more effective leadership, and how will we need to transform to make this possible?

In Truth or Dare, Starhawk writes that there are “two myths about leadership: The first is that someone must always be in charge or nothing will get done. The second is that leadership is always oppressive. Although both myths contain kernels of truth, each is based on an essential confusion between power-over and power-with...Power-over is decision-making power, control. Power-with is influence.”

GOALS
• To have small and large group discussions about values and principles
• To consider different types of leadership
• To discuss leadership practices and postures

TIME NEEDED
1 - 2 hours

MATERIALS NEEDED
• Flip charts, sticky notes, and audio if you will play Danez Smith piece
• Handouts: Feminist Leadership (p. 16) & Feminist Leadership Reflection (p. 17)

READINGS/RESOURCES
• Ella Baker ‘Strong People Don’t Need Strong Leaders’
  • Do you agree? Disagree? Why or why not?
• Truth or Dare by Starhawk; Leadership Archetypes exercise on page 276
• SONG Code of Conduct
• Responsive Leadership in Hierarchical Organizations

WHO ARE YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE?
We’re going to spend the next hour and a half talking about leadership and what is needed in this time. We’re thinking about leadership primarily in the context of what is needed to move forward collective work, so we’re focusing on groups, teams, and organizations. We are concerned with how leadership functions communally, not just as traits or practices of individuals.

Yet, of course, organizations are made up of us: squishy people! So this is also about how we work to grow, evolve, and deepen our relationships to ourselves and to others.

We are approaching this conversation open to transformation. After all, if we want something different, we’ve got to be prepared to be different. And this requires practice. As adrienne maree brown explains in *Emergent Strategy*, “It takes three hundred repetitions for muscle memory and three thousand repetitions for embodiment. What do you need to practice?” (p. 188).

Invite people to find a comfortable spot to listen to a poem (or include this as prep work for the session), and listen to or reflect on Danez Smith’s performance of ‘Principles’. Hold some time to discuss/hear reflections.

As Grace Lee Boggs used to say, “What time is it on the clock of the world?” This is a question we will revisit multiple times and from multiple angles over our time together. *What time is it for feminist leadership?* In this session, we’ll move from a full group conversation about trends and patterns in leadership through some reflection about why leadership looks this way in this time. Then, in pairs and quads, we’ll scheme together about the kind of leadership we need and desire.

**What is the leadership we see & practice?**

**Full group question:** *What are some patterns or trends we see and experience around leadership now?*

Scribe up a list of patterns as folks are naming them. You can make offers from this list if folks don’t name them:

Consider:

- We honor the front-of-house, public work more than the back-of-house, sustaining work
- The leadership we celebrate is often glossy, glamorous, and optics-centered
- We are ‘followers’ obsessed, and social media fuels this
- We’re still moving from a framework of power-over not power-with
- We cultivate leaders or desire leadership because we think it means visibility or affirmation
- Broadly, we have a politically fraught relationship to power: *Do we want it? Do we trust ourselves to hold it? What will our comrades say and do if we get it?*
- We are anxious about reproducing patterns that have damaged us: *Is it ok to be the boss?*

**Follow-up questions** *(to offer as folks are naming trends and/or as the list is nearing completion):*

- Why are these trends prevalent, do you think?
- Where do they come from?
- How do you feel about this list?
- Are you as sick of these dynamics as I am?!
WHAT IS THE LEADERSHIP WE NEED & DESIRE?
Divide folks into pairs and discuss the following question. Ask that they write their answers on sticky notes; then, that they decide together on their top three stickies and put them up on the wall.

Pairs question: What type of leadership do we need in this time? Put another way, what do we need our leadership to embody, and why?

Consider:
• In this time, we need leadership that is deeply grounded in legacy and lineage.
• As leaders, we need to embody and model courage and humility.
• The leadership we need in this time counters our cultural conditioning and hegemonic training, and will therefore require active struggle to embody!
• We need to be praxis-based. We need to try things and be willing to experiment.
• We must learn to be direct and non-competitive. The leaders we need are not neutral.
• We need more leaders, and more leaderful movements.

Next, invite the pairs to link up with another pair to form a quad and discuss the next question: What are the obstacles to the feminist leadership we need and desire? How might we creatively transform or bypass these obstacles?

Consider:
• The barriers are internal (inside ourselves and our groups) and external (structures and systems).
• Hidden leadership means we don’t have a shared understanding of what’s really happening, or we’re not willing to acknowledge collectively what we all know is going on.
• Loyalty and friendship are often prioritized over principles. What is this protecting?
• Some of us are power hoarding, and some of us are power averse. These are both obstacles.
• Patriarchy especially teaches women an indirect and manipulative relationship to power.
• Folks who have been socialized towards leadership, power, and supremacy won’t recognize it.
• There’s a lot of denial, and a lot of fear, pain, and grief we don’t want to look at or deal with.
• For whites, there are mixed messages and often guilt; some folks are afraid to contribute.

CLOSING SKITS
Quads can then develop a short skit in which they play out a scenario twice: first, highlighting some of the challenges and obstacles around feminist leadership, then transforming the scene with some of the qualities of feminist leadership we’ve named. Each quad performs their two skits for the whole group. Afterwards, debrief the skits. How does it feel in our bodies, as performers and audience members, when we change forms of leadership? Congratulate all the groups on building muscle memory by practicing new postures!

FOLLOW UP
Invite participants to use the following pages to reflect even more deeply on the qualities of feminist leadership they value, desire, require, and aspire to. This can be done in the full group setting or on people’s own time.
WHAT DOES LEADERSHIP GROUNDED IN FEMINIST VALUES LOOK LIKE, AND HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT THAN OTHER VALUES AROUND LEADERSHIP?

- SHOWS UP HUNGRY FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AT EVENTS, MEETINGS, RALLIES, ETC.
- FOCUSES ON PITCHING IN TO GET THINGS DONE, RATHER THAN PICKING APART PROCESS
- TAKES ON TASKS THAT OTHERS FIND BORING OR TOO DIFFICULT
- COMES TO AN ORGANIZATION WITH AN UNDERSTANDING THAT THEY HAVE MUCH TO LEARN & ALSO A LOT TO GIVE
- DOESN'T STRIVE TO BE THE STAR OF THE ROOM & DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SELF-CENTERED
- IS DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY ISSUES A GROUP IS WORKING ON
- SHOWS HUMILITY & COURAGE
- IS CONSISTENTLY DIRECT, NOT MANIPULATIVE OR PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE
- ACTIVELY WORKS TO SUPPORT OTHER NEW LEADERS, NOT BRING THEM DOWN
- PROBLEM SOLVES, EVOLVES ON ISSUES & DOESN'T GET BOGGED DOWN BY SHORT-TERM
- IS RELIABLE (BECAUSE EVEN PEOPLE WITH REALLY LIMITED TIME AND CHAOTIC LIVES CAN GIVE US A HEADS UP ON WHERE THEY ARE AT)
LEADERSHIP Reflection

How do we practice and strengthen the traits and values of feminist leadership we think are needed in this time?

Consider this quote from Adrienne Maree Brown:

"It takes three hundred repetitions for muscle memory and three thousand repetitions for embodiment."

- Emergent Strategy, p. 188

What do you need to practice differently, both individually and collectively?