



Broken Agreements

3rd Thursday Assembly

Nadia: Dear 3rd Thursday Assemblers: let's do this! Welcome back, or, if it's your first time WELCOME! This is a wild, wonderful format we have been developing where people contribute and discuss a topic on a specific question about creative facilitation.

Today's topic is 'Broken Agreements'.

What we mean by that is: in the PYE Creative Community Model we set "agreements" with a group, which allow the group to decide together how they will behave and treat themselves, each other and the space. It's a way for the group to manage communication and behaviour and for the facilitator to know what the group wants as its "container." Some examples of agreements that we often use are: no put downs of self or other; listen well; be willing to try new things, etc. There is a process that we use to have the group discuss these and others. The agreements are open, meaning that they can be changed as and when the groups needs to change them. Today, we will be discussing WHAT THE FACILITATOR CAN DO WHEN THE AGREEMENTS ARE BROKEN.

Goals:

- 1) To explore best practices and challenges when dealing with broken community agreements in a group.**
- 2) To use case studies (examples) to look at specific instances of broken agreements and brainstorm together how we might deal with them.**
- 3) To share our experiences of dealing with broken agreements so that we can learn from each other's successes and challenges.**
- 4) To connect, reinvigorate and have meaningful fun online**

In order to achieve the goals (posted below), here are some suggestions for agreements to make our time together flow really well. We are still experimenting with this form, so be sure to add what you need or want AT ANY TIME DURING THE PROCESS.

- 1) No put downs of self or others. Keep a positive, lift-up vibe.**
- 2) Share at your level; Everyone is welcome, no matter their level of experience as a facilitator or community organizer. All questions are important, and all answers (or further questions) are valuable. It is also okay and important to respectfully disagree with each other.**
- 3) Show your presence, by LIKING and by responding to keep the flow. Ask questions, make comments, connect. The technical trick for this format is to REFRESH your browser fairly often.**
- 4) Answer any questions in the COMMENTS below the question to keep the conversation organized and readable. Only open NEW questions in new threads.**

5) You can come and go as you please, take as long as you like to respond, and basically enjoy the text-format to make this work no matter whether you are just waking up, just going to bed, or on your lunch break (time zones unite!!) A pdf transcript of the conversation will be provided. Feel free to continue the conversation even after the 90 minute period has ended.

6) Please add any agreements that you feel are missing to this list.

Nadia: Check-in Question for May 22, 2014: If the way you feel today was a home of any kind, what would it look and feel like?

Katie Jackson: My home today would be small and cosy, with a big window looking out on the world outside.

Lis Cashin: Mine would be a tree house - cosy and warm, but feeling some gusts of wind blowing through

Nadia: Mine is a floating house on a green and dreamy river. It has just a little furniture, and a lot of yummy canned goods, and lots of musical instruments!

Lis: I'd like to come to yours please Nadia.

Nadia: Anytime, Lis!

Aisha Charles Francis: One room, in a quiet area...maybe near the water...with a big bed, lots of pillows and walls of bookcases and books!

Nilisha Mohapatra: My home would be roundish in shape, on the mountain top, and would have clouds floating in through the windows. Tons of colour inside, endless serenity outside.

Melody Cat: Mine is a small hut made of warm red earth with a thatched grass roof and some colourful patterns painted around it, tucked away in a grassy valley with a thick forest nearby.

Chatelle Jeram: Mine is a wooden house up in the mountains, lots of pristine snow and snow-covered trees outside. A fire going inside, with lots of cushions and beanbags to laze around on.

MissChristina Klassen: I would be in Italy, on the hillside. White washed walls and almost unbearable amounts of light pouring through every available crack. It feels free and warm, spacious. An open feeling that inspires one to make beautiful food and dance...

Maria Gomez Umana: a hammock near water, in a shaded area, no mosquitoes...

Stephanie Turner: Mine is a bamboo treehouse perched at the top of an oak tree standing in the middle of a highway during rush hour. The windows are closed but they are rattling from the pull of the vehicles below. Inside the one room is 10 spilt tins of coloured paints and I'm walking about the space bare foot.

Nadia: Oh wow! You People are amazing. This check-in question sounds like a poem.

Shilpa Setty: A home with a nice cozy place to just sleep and warm hearted people around to let you sleep without disturbing you. And nice fresh lychees to eat when you are hungry

Shalini Menon: Late as ever, but I am excited to dive in! A tree house - natural, simple, earthy yet a clear view of all the beauty around me.

Nadia: Discussion Question #1: How do you set agreements in the groups you facilitate? What are your tips, tricks and best advice?

Katie Jackson: Great question. This is such an essential piece of setting up a good workshop. I would love to hear people's suggestions.

Nilisha Mohapatra: Lovely start! While facilitating agreements I always like using an analogy or imagery to make it vivid and real. My favourite is the analogy of 'Titanic' where I say it is the agreements that will keep our Titanic afloat. Groups are usually amused since the Titanic sank! But it is powerful to watch the groups keep it afloat and make it their reality.

Nadia: That's powerful Nilisha.

Olusola Adebisi: Hashima People I'll often use humour to keep a lighthearted feel about the agreements

Nadia: Nice Olusola. Thank you!

Olusola: The thing I really focus on is participation. I want everyone to feel as though the agreements have really come from them and to have a sense that people are committed to them...

Nadia: Olusola, what are some techniques you use to help everyone to participate? It connects to Aisha Charles Francis's challenge in Discussion Question #2.

Lis Cashin: • Ask participants to focus on one of the most important questions of the week: "Why are they here?" you have an option of writing answers on Post-it notes

- Ask participants to feedback answers and stick their Post-its on to the flipchart
- Ask them to answer "How do you need to be to get the most out of the programme?" Give an example (yourself) to help e.g. "I need to be present"
- Ask participants to feedback their suggestions
- Explain that team success is dependent on a clear idea of how we will work together / peoples boundaries
- Facilitate a brief discussion on ground rules. Pop these on a flipchart
- Ask participants to share their suggestions and get group agreement

Nadia: Oh I love this, Lis. It's a great way to bring more voices, and especially quieter voices, into the discussion...Thanks for sharing such a detailed process, Lis. I really like the idea of post its. Get's everyone in!

I also like telling the group that agreements are a work in progress and it only starts when we create them. I always invite them to check in with themselves constantly w.r.t agreements. This mostly has helped me keep the 'rules' idea at bay. Katie, this is possibly an option to avoid agreements being rules.

Maria Gomez Umana: An example of broken agreement for us happened when I forgot that the agreements needed to be refreshed at the beginning of the session. It is harder to go back to previous sessions to retrieve the agreements to find solutions.

Melody Cat: Wow these are all great ideas!

Shilpa Setty: I feel the group finds it easy to come up with agreements when they understand the goals well. As each one of us have different perspectives of the same goal and at different levels, just letting them think of what do I need to achieve this goal will be helpful.

Nadia: Shilpa that is a very important point. I think that really is what makes the agreements relevant to the group...

Maria: I like the idea of agreements as a process. And understanding the goals gives a good context. Thank you both for your comments.

Shilpa: Nilisha I loved your analogy of Titanic! I am going to use it at my next training.

Nadia: Maria one metaphor I sometimes use is if the goals are the place we are going, the agreements are the vehicle we will use to get there...

Maria: yes, great metaphor!

Shilpa: Nadia this is Wickedddd.. I was just thinking of this, as Pavithra KL uses the same metaphor and I use it after seeing her do that.

Nadia: Yes, Shilpa, it's a bit of a PYE classic I personally first learned it from Peggy Taylor, doing an Earth Arts Camp in Victoria, BC, Canada in 2005!!

Nilisha: Love it!

Shalini: I use the egg as a metaphor - Inside the egg or outside the egg... even a bus as a metaphor - I ask them what kind of passengers would you like in this bus? ... even something call missing person - You draw a person - either with a rope or on a flipchart. Then I ask them, if this person was to join this workshop - what kind of person do you want him/her to be?

Nadia: Hey! I've never heard of missing person...I love that!!

Nilisha: Haha that is brilliant, Shalini. Can't wait to try it out.

Christine Castigliano: Adding to the Car/Bus metaphor, does this resonate? Everyone present is encouraged to 'drive' themselves, meaning they are responsible for their own learning and experience. As facilitators we are guides, organizing the trip, pointing out the sites, etc. but we don't drive them (or fix - like a back-seat driver attempts to do)

Nadia: Oh nice addition Christine!

Peggy Taylor: Imagine that when you leave here, you have gained more than you ever thought possible and you've really surprised yourself with what you've done. What do you need in order for that to happen? Or what can we do for ourselves and each other to make sure that happens.

Nadia: Peggy! Great to see you!

Peggy: Checking in from Vancouver.

Christine: Peggy I love what that questions asks of them. I often ask "what do you need to feel safe," which suggests danger. This Q leads with joy.

Peggy: Good point Christine. I think focusing on safety can be a slippery slope. It encourages them to look outside of themselves for their power.

Nadia: Discussion Question #2: What are some of the challenges you have experienced when setting agreements in a group?

Aisha Charles Francis: Some people are very vocal or aggressive with their position while others are not out of fear or other reasons. Sometimes those who are very vocal and aggressive can seemingly 'bully' the group...or not be entirely open to listening to the other POVs

Nadia: Thank you, Aisha. That is very frustrating. Does anyone else experience this (I certainly do) and how do you deal with it?

Nilisha Mohapatra: One challenge I face with facilitating agreements: In groups which I meet more than once, they know the language and say what we need. My challenge is to see a new level of ownership or the next edge in the same agreements. Making it real.

Katie Jackson: I find it challenging to approach the agreements as it feels close to the territory of rules which can be tough for some people.

Nadia: Katie and Nilisha I think both of your challenges might have to do with the presentation and tone of the goals. Does anyone have any specific suggestions as to how Agreements can be set in a way that people feel engaged and like they have ownership of the process?

Chatelle Jeram: The Thai school year started last Friday for us. This is the first time I have introduced Agreements into the 4th, 5th and 6th grade classes. So time will tell how effective it is. The biggest challenge has been checking how seriously the students take it as they are not used to this concept. English is their second language and I don't speak Thai so it is a challenge to highlight importance of a new concept, and to ensure all students understand it.

Nadia: Chatelle that is an interesting challenge. I wonder if there are ways that you can embody the agreements, using maybe music or dance to help them cross a language-barrier?

Chatelle: Thanks Nadia, that gives me an idea. We'll turn the agreement into a "cheer" with actions, so we can embed it further - the students love singing and dancing!

Nadia: Chatelle that is very cool. Will help your participants internalize and remember the agreements, too.

Nilisha: Nadia I agree with the facilitation tone bit. I wonder if it helps to give the groups a recap of our previous experience, and then creating agreements which can help us take the experience to the next level.

Nadia: Nilisha...I find the best moment where the agreements "get real" is when they get broken, or when the group finds something is missing. That's where the next level of commitment becomes important, because the group gets a felt sense of WHY they need them.

Maria Gomez Umana: Drama works great with kids too. You can create the situation of what happens when an Agreement is broken (if it is funny it works better) and then another skit showing what happens when the Agreement is respected.

Lis Cashin: I think it's really important to have done some ice-breaker type warm ups/name games to create a safe container before starting to talk about agreements. If the young people don't feel safe and in a trusted space then it will be very difficult to get them to agree to how they want to support/be with each other. In my experience this first step helps to prevent any challenges in the setting of the agreements themselves.

Nadia: Yes, Lis! I think you're right. And, I think this connects to Katie's question about what makes Agreements feel too much like rules.

Aisha: Really appreciating all of the tips! Each one banks on establishing some form of trust, no matter how little, that creates a feeling of safety. This is key!

Shalini Menon: When the 'top management' takes over the conversation - confusing agreements with rules. The group sees them in a position of power, so follows that thought process. This has been my struggle many

times. Now when I take a client brief, I make them aware that the workshop is for staff/participants - therefore, their voices have to be heard the most. It still doesn't work sometime!

Nadia: Discussion Question #3: When dealing with agreements that are broken in a group, do you have a particular tool or process that you often use?

Nadia Chaney: I'm going to get this Question started: I often use something called "The Clean-Up Process" when a major agreement is broken. I learned it from Hanif Fazal at [Step Up](#) in Portland, OR, USA. It goes like this: you have a private discussion with the person who broke the agreement, and find out what is going on for them in the group and in their life as it regards the agreement. You work with them to help them answer these questions: WHAT HAPPENED? HOW DID IT AFFECT THE GROUP? WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME? Then, you stand with them, and have them tell the group those three things. It "cleans up" the broken agreement with no guilt or shame.

Nilisha Mohapatra: Wow. This got me thinking. The first think I like to remind myself is that I am a part of the group and it helps me have an honest and inclusive conversation. Because I am the one holding space. This was a struggle when I had just started facilitating. I love the idea of a private discussion!

Nadia: That's a beautiful reminder, Nilisha

Nilisha: I use the 'Revisiting Agreements' section a lot, where I have used 'Hope and Fear' chits to maintain anonymity and still bring out voices. This has allowed groups to share safely and sometimes is an eye opener! The questions for 'Hope and Fear' is always related to the group.

Nadia: Nilisha, people might not know what you mean by Hope and Fear chits...maybe you could share a little more?

Nilisha: Sure! Gladly so! 'Hope and Fear' is a check-in activity where each participant is given two chits of paper. And they have to write one hope on one sheet and one fear on the other sheet, without writing their names.

For eg, Write about one hope you have from this group regarding maintaining community agreements, and one fear you have in this group regarding maintaining community agreements.

The hope chits and the fear chits are then collected in two different boxes and kept in the center. Each person is then invited to pick up one chit from each box. The beauty is that no one knows whose chit it is, and everyone's voice is heard!

The hopes and fears are then read in two rounds. Participants are invited to read them as if it their own hope and their own fear. The facilitator can then pick themes and have a discussion if needed.

Shalini Menon: I would just facilitate an individual conversation with them. Then revisit the missing person/community agreements.

Christine Castigliano: I really like this Hope/Fear chits idea. Thank you!

Nadia Chaney: Case Study #1: You are facilitating a 5 day residential gathering for teen youth. On the third day something that has personal sentimental value to one of the youth is stolen. The group has made an agreement to “respect yourself, each other, and the group.” What do you do?

Lis Cashin: This happened to me! A mobile phone was stolen from a young person who was on a residential youth programme I was leading. I got the group together and facilitated a group discussion on what had happened and how everyone was feeling about it. The young person who had their phone stolen was able to talk about how she started to now mistrust everyone - and the others shared that a lot of them felt the same. It was such an in-depth discussion between staff and young people and hugely valuable for everyone. We talked about assumptions and judgements and jumping to conclusions and how we could all feel safe with each other moving forwards. It was very powerful

Katie Jackson: Was the situation resolved Lis?

Nadia: Thanks so much for sharing this example, Lis . Did you focus at all on finding the phone; what was the experience of the participant who stole it? How did you handle that aspect?

Katie: Yeah that's really interesting Nadia - I wonder about how to really engage with the person who broke the agreement and how to really hear from them in a way that allows others to feel safe and doesn't condone what they did but doesn't imply that they are in any way beyond forgiveness at all.

Lis: Yes we did initially do a complete search of the camp and surrounding areas. We did not go and search through individual bags but we did go around. We knew where it was last seen and was left charging up. Unfortunately the phone did not turn up. I spoke to the girl first on her own to see how she was feeling and what she would like to happen. She was really angry and she felt let down and that she had been stupid to have been so trusting. She said that she wanted a group discussion so that she could speak to the group and share how she was feeling. She got a lot of support but the camp did become divided at first with fingers pointing at various people. This enabled the more in-depth discussion to take place about making judgments/assumptions etc

I did ask for the person who broke the agreement to come and speak with me privately if they felt they could not speak in front of the group, but no-one came forward. it was a little more complicated as there were young people from a different youth organisation camping next to us and it could have been someone from there who took it

Nadia: what a sensitive and empowering was to deal with a tough situation.

Shilpa Setty: Thanks a lot for sharing the situation Lis I feel challenged when situations like this come up at a camp, and this has given me an insight in to one of the ways that I can look in to the situation.

Shalini Menon: Wow! This is a tough one. I have never been in a situation like this. It's great to read your experience Lis.

Melody Cat: I'm with Shalini on this one, but am volunteering at a Lifebeat camp this summer so may well get to experience something like this!

Christine Castigliano: I had a similar experience in my weekly Teen Circle, when a phone belonging to a parent host was stolen during an evening campout. It led to many incredible discussions, with the girl who did this - about why we take things, the feelings we often have of not enough, what happens inside us when these feelings are triggered, as well as class/status and economics. She apologized directly to the family, and trust was rebuilt to a degree. Ultimately that girl's needs were beyond the scope of our circle, but I was grateful for the places it led us all to.

Nadia: Case Study #2: You are facilitating a two-day training for adults. The group has an agreement that says “no put downs of self or other.” Some members of the group are using a lot of sarcasm, and you suspect it is because they are feeling nervous. What do you do?

Nilisha Mohapatra: Ah! I would dive into what 'No put downs of self or other' means, and how it takes different forms for different people. I would acknowledge how some people might be feeling, and how I have felt on such occasions. I would share examples. I would also give the tool of saying 'Ouch' to the group, where at any point during discussion if they feel put down, the call out 'Ouch' and we take up that discussion at an opportune moment. I love the PYE Analogy of the Inner Critic Turtle voice which needs to be thrown out of the window. Or even throwing out our own Cool Cards.

Shilpa Setty: I feel personal stories work wonders, like Nilisha said I would share an example from my own experience, and how it felt to just be present and give my best.

Nilisha: Always love stories!

Shalini Menon: The Missing person again - I build a story - The person who joined us today, is feeling nervous. What kind of behaviour do you think they will demonstrate? With processing, I get into details of body language, verbal and non-verbal language.

Nadia: (the late, great)Case Study #3: You are facilitating a group visioning session for teen activists for four hours on one evening. You want to use activities that use music and dance, but the participants are very quiet/shy. You have an agreement to “be willing to try new things.” What do you do?

Maria Gomez Umana: I have begun with a quiet exercise (art or writing) and then I invite to share in pairs to introduce some participation. Usually that breaks the ice for some participants. Others take hours to warm up, and others never do.

Nadia: That's such a great way to ease people into a creative risk. Does anyone else have any ideas on this one?

Shilpa Setty: Nadia when you say it is a visioning session, is it creative visualization on how they would work for their cause?

Nilisha Mohapatra: Changing group sizes gradually moving towards pair or solo performances might work. And maybe even starting with a relaxing visualization process. I love the pair introduction idea by Maria.

Nadia: Shilpa I meant they were visioning how they would work together towards a common purpose...

Nilisha: Oh how about a Sound Circle?


Shilpa: That's a great idea Nilisha such great way to open up and hear from everyone

Nadia: Maybe even a sound circle where they give each other the sounds in pairs...to lower the risk level a little more?

Shilpa: And they can do this activity where each one choose a partner and one person starts creating a story and the other person has to act it out. This will create space for more imagination and thinking out of the box.

Shalini: My approach: While an agreement is great, I might pause as a facilitator and ask myself have I really broken the ice and used a few de-inhibitisers. Most of the time, I find myself returning to work on this area and then proceed.

Christine Castigliano: I do an opening sound circle that eases people into expression. First, we all take a deep breath, and release it with "AHHHH." Then another breath, and for all the things that didn't go great, we do a group "WAHHHH". Next, for all the things that are delicious, "MMMMMM," then for when we get mad, "GRRRRR." then back to "AHHH. You can add 'Hold your breath for fear, or any other emotions'. Everyone laughs when we do it together.



Nadia: Okay good people. This has been a deep, resonant, and highly practical discussion. Thank you for your wisdom, experience, compassion and all your hard work and big love in the world.

Here's something to think about: We have reached the end of our "pilot series" of 3rd Thursdays. Which means we will be preparing a new list of topics to take us through to the end of 2014. We have some ideas but would love to hear from YOU. What kinds of topics would you like to have us discuss in these Assemblies? We are thinking about: Scaling activities for different ages/abilities/needs; Using dance and embodiment in groups; Working with drop-in or inconsistent groups; the Life and Livelihood of a Social Artist...there's so many options! We will post the next list in a week's time...all suggestions must be received before then, please.

Also, please fill out [this short, anonymous evaluation](#) so we can improve these assemblies.

Again, you are a wonderful group of inspiring people.

Thank you! With big love and respect, Nadia and Katie