



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Facilitative Leadership: Concepts Every Wildland Fire Leader Can Use

December 2018 ~ Boulder, Colorado

by Wendy Fulks, Fire Adapted Communities Partnerships Director

Twenty members of the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net) and Fire Learning Network (FLN)—experts in prescribed burning, ecosystem management and community wildfire adaptation—gathered in Boulder, Colorado, in December 2018 to learn a different kind of skill: how to create the conditions for people to move together from vision to action. The Facilitative Leadership for Social Change workshop, designed by the Interaction Institute for Social Change, helps leaders make it “easy for others to offer their unique perspectives and talents, speak up when they have problems, take initiative, make appropriate decisions, work with others, and share responsibility for the health of the team, organization or community.”

This was the third time the FLN has offered this training to members. Unlike the first two workshops, which were landscape-based, participants in this offering self-selected based on interest and availability. The result was a diverse group, with representatives from a dozen organizations and 13 states, adding richness to the experience.

It Was Magic

Over the course of two days, the Interaction Institute’s Curtis Ogden led us through an exercise-rich agenda that also allowed ample time for reflection.

It just so happened that our workshop began a mere 10 days after the devastating Camp Fire in California had been fully contained. As a result, the mood was somber as we trickled into the meeting room on the first day and took our seats. To begin, Curtis helped us calm and open our minds, encouraging us to “luxuriate in this time together”—which we did!—and consider how our work was addressing the larger, timely need to promote *healing* for both people and landscapes.

He talked about other, seemingly very different groups he was working with, and how our fire networks are part of a bigger story. And he spoke of connections, courage, innovation and systems built on social agreements and interactions.

Curtis was grounding us in the notions that, job titles notwithstanding, all of us in the room were in the business of effecting social change, and that there are some common realities and challenges that all social change agents constantly grapple with. The group seemed reassured to hear that they would leave the workshop with some practical concepts, tools and behaviors to help them be more successful change agents. And that was, indeed, the case.

Powerful Lessons

While it’s impossible to share the full impact of this workshop in a brief document, some key take-aways are worth highlighting—and exploring:

- One’s approach can change after realizing that **it’s impossible to “empower others.”** It’s better to think in terms of “**creating conditions for self-empowerment.**” A discussion about this brought to mind Jana Carp’s asset-based community development work, which took place in a part of rural Northern California threatened by wildfire.
- If you haven’t tried taking a **systems thinking** approach to your situation, give it a try. Then ask yourself, “How do I change myself to help change the system?”
- The importance of listening (aka “deep listening” and “listening as an ally”) can’t be overstated. You can **learn to be a better listener.**
- Have you ever thought about the importance of space when designing a meeting or a social change effort? Just the **right amount of space** is important. (The blog post “Change Is About Letting Go, Creating Space ... and Connecting” explains.)
- Do you agree with Curtis, who said, “**Busyness is oppressive**, especially when one is trying to work with an equity lens”? How might you address this in your world?
- How might you do things differently if you thought about your professional role as simply working to **create shared meaning**?



What People Said

“Probably the most helpful workshop I have ever participated in. The tools presented I feel I will use not only in my work but in my personal life as well.”

“Our long-term success depends on all of us becoming better facilitative leaders, and this training lays the groundwork and opens up the tool box that will allow us to live up to our true potential.”

“Provided a new way to think about being a leader by supporting and encouraging opportunities for others to lead themselves and be successful.”

“An excellent survey course that integrates meeting facilitation best practices with a focus on relationships and conditions that support them. It is a facilitation training with heart, not a presentation of clinical checklists common to other training courses.”



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What Next?

I suggest we all make a point of honing our facilitative leadership skills in 2019. For me that will include focusing on **relationships** and **process** as much as—or more than—**results**, and practicing my deep listening skills. As social change agents, what are your most vexing problems? And how might you change your thinking and behaviors to address them?

Explore Facilitative Leadership and More

Visit the Interaction Institute for Social Change website:
<http://interactioninstitute.org/training/facilitative-leadership-for-social-change/>

Follow Curtis Ogden on Twitter:
<https://twitter.com/curtisogden>

Links from the lessons section —

Read Jana Carp's introduction to asset-based community development (ABCD): <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/NetworkProducts/Pages/ABCD.aspx>

Watch a video introduction to systems thinking:
https://youtu.be/A_BtS008J0k

Learn how to be a better listener:
<http://interactioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Listening-as-an-ally-page.pdf>

Consider the importance of space:
<https://medium.com/@curtisogden/change-is-about-letting-go-creating-space-and-connecting-b4c407a39b93>

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<http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/USFLNPublications/Pages/Index-FLN-Notes-from-the-Field.aspx>

Sign up for the FLN Networker newsletter: lrnk@tnc.org

The Fire Learning Network and Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network are part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information about PERFACT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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