



Dealing with Broken Agreements

3rd Thursday Assembly

Nadia Chaney: 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. We did take a look at this topic in May 2014, but we have had a number of requests to do it again, so here we are. If you didn't make it to the May Assembly you can see a link to it in the next window.

Setting agreements (sometimes called guidelines or group rules) is a very common practice for facilitators of all kinds. Agreements 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 at PYE are: no put downs of self or other; listen well; be willing to try new things, etc. Different agreements will work for different groups. Some facilitators like to present their agreements, others like to ask the group what agreements they need. This depends on many factors, like how long the group has known each other, how much time they will spend together, their intention for gathering, safety concerns, cultural priorities, or the personal preference of the facilitator.

Today, we will be discussing WHAT THE FACILITATOR CAN DO WHEN THE AGREEMENTS ARE BROKEN.

Below you will find: A Check-in Question (please answer!), Goals and Agreements for today's session (please add anything you need/want to the agreements, and hit "like" if you agree), 3 discussion questions (answer in any order) and 3 case studies that we will use to talk about different ways that "community agreements" are broken and different ways we might deal with them. Katie Jackson and I will be facilitating this experience for 90 minutes. There will be a pdf transcript posted in a few days. Have fun!

Nadia Chaney: 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.. LIKING IS EXTRA IMPORTANT SINCE FACEBOOK HAS CHANGED AND WE CAN NO LONGER SEE HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE READ A POST.

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.

Virtually Ally: I'd like to suggest the agreement, "Outrageous suggestions are encouraged!"

Nadia: :)I like that Virtually Ally. Do you have an outrageous suggestion for us?

Kitty Jackson: Great idea Virtually Ally!

Virtually Ally: I promise to bring my outrageous on before the end of this!

Nadia: Looking forward to it, Virtually Ally!

Livier Ayon: When I see an agreement broken by a member of the group, I like to say "let's remember (this specific agreement) we had on the first day"

Virtually Ally: Livier, that language "let's remember" really resonates with me. Non-violent communication!

Livier: For me, that is also about trusting their process. I like it because it implies that we all make mistakes, but inherently, we all want to collaborate and do well as a group - as social beings that we are

Check-in Question for Jan 15 2015: If the way you feel today was a book, what book would you be and why?

Kitty Jackson: I love books so I love this question. I think I would be Alice's Adventures in Wonderland as I feel like many adventures are just beginning for me!

Virtually Ally: I'd be a children's Choose Your Own Adventure book because there are so many possibilities! ~
Virtually Ally

Stephanie Turner: Today I am Johanna Macy's Active Hope, grieving the loss, facing the mess and acting on my hopes for the future.

Nadia: Hello Katie, Ally and Steff! Great to see you, and thank you for your thoughtful check ins. Check out the Goals and Agreements, I'm posting the first question now...

Amanda Milson: I am feeling Alice in Wonderland and Chronicals of Narnia. Adventure sparked from mundanity.

Nadia: btw I would be Mary Oliver's amazing book on writing metric poetry, Rules for the Dance, because I feel like I could use a little extra structure and rhythmic beauty to ride on today!

Arindita Gogoi: Waaaaaa! Tough one! If I were a book today, I'd definitely be Far from the Tree by Andrew Solomon...searching for an identity that is my own and is not assumed because of my gender, lineage, race...

Aimee Aubin: I would be Shrunk and White's The Elements of Style - illustrated by Maira Kalman, because I'm feeling like I need a little structure (with a little silliness) today!

Nadia: Hello Arindita Gogoi and Aimee Aubin! Great to see you here!

Arindita: Thanks! Looking forward

Nadia: tangent/taking advantage of the written facilitation : Aimee I didn't know there was an ILLUSTRATED Struck and White!!

Aimee: Nadia: do they ever!

Stephanie: Ah! This is cool. I have to leave now, but hopefully I'll find some time to catch up with the rest. Wow, its hard to keep up, Nadia and Kitty you two got brain yo!! Peace, Love and Sticking to the agreements!

Shilpa Setty: I feel like "Constant Remembrance" its our Missions Quarterly magazine because today I reflecting on the months gone by, and also organized a few things.

Nadia: Shilpa! I was wondering if we'd see you here today!

Nadia: here's a [link to the conversation on Broken Agreements](#) from May 2014.

Nadia Chaney: Discussion Question #1: Have you ever experienced broken agreements in a group session? Can you give us a quick example? What are the most commonly broken agreements in your experience? (Please feel free to comment on each other's stories)

Stephanie Turner: I find the put down agreement broken a lot and the listening well. Depending on the context, its easy to manage during workshops. I struggle more with put downs of self especially when facilitating writing and poetry workshops. The put downs agreement is broken a lot during camps and I don't always know how to deal with it especially when its during a cross over, or the young people are playing a sport, particularly with young men, I think its often such a normality and they brush it off as harmless banter.

Kitty Jackson: I so agree Stephanie! That rule is often easy to break and I find myself letting it go, unsure if I should interrupt the group to point it out. It is so ingrained with so many young people today!

Nadia: Stephanie It's a bit of a different agreement in that way, isn't it? It almost asks for a cultural shift. When it is working...it's magic. But when it's broken, it requires empathy and gentleness...sometimes when I offer this agreement I admit to the group that it's more of an orientation, a direction to head in, than a rule or a goal.

Virtually Ally: re: 1) No put downs of self or others. I've noticed while folks are drawing or doodling alone that they may say, "this sucks" or "I should have done this differently" or "I'd don't like this" or I can't do this."

Vicky Stonebridge: Not quite sure what this could be, someone at a committee meeting not doing what they said they would? or in a workshop session? I suppose i am usually facilitator/ leader/ tutor in group/ community work, rather than say a therapuetic / exploratory group where all participants set the thing? so struggling to think of what a broken agreement might look like.

Nadia: Virtually do you intervene when you notice this?

Kitty: Hi Vicky - great question. At the beginning of workshops that are run on PYE's Creative Community Model we tend to ask people to agree to certain ways of being in the group. They are in place of rules - we create them together as a community and we ask everyone in the group if they can agree to them, so we call them agreements. We don't start until everyone has verbally agreed.

Nadia: Vicky when you facilitate do you have "group guidelines" or "rules" of any kind? Like around participation, lateness, communication...?

Kitty: These are the agreements Vicky - exactly that sort of thing!

Stephanie: Yea I witness that a lot Virtually. Its so common.

Nadia: Stephanie and Virtually - To me, that's the place where the participant is asking for a kind of support, but there's a part of them that will resist it. That's where I want to check my level of risk...maybe take it down a little and celebrate little success on the way to writing or drawing something the participant is really proud of.

Vicky: sorry I'm being slow folks, couldn't see previous comments when i posted!
Certainly do a lot of agreement things with young people reinforcing all the time & they agree & determine, and yes break them all the time ! much less so in adult work, its all in the sign up sheets & quickly focus gets onto practical tasks or whatever, much easier to manage

Kitty: I've also been on a camp where we allowed a couple of youth to keep phones with them as they made a special request. We had a technology free agreement, but because we hadn't kept the agreement fully, it quickly broke down completely. I think that is a theme - if you don't work hard at first to maintain the agreements, then you risk losing the group trust on a much deeper level

Vicky: here is another daft question, what is PYE ?! i am in so many groups & yet with FB being the way it is miss most of everything. I'm working 1 to 1 these days with some teens on Autistic spectrum, very difficult to stick to plan of activities for each session, but i guess the agreement also includes flexibility to go off on tangents, as long as they turn up & do something!

Nadia: Great question Vicky PYE stands for Partners for Youth Empowerment. You can see the website at www.pyeglobal.org . It's a training organization for creative facilitators and social artists.

Stephanie: yes, for sure Nadia. I feel that too. Oh you starting with the phones Kitty. Woo I had some long resolution dialogue around phones last year and keep bringing it back to the community, the agreement and the cost of keeping them. I felt the participant just needed some reassurance and attention as it was the beginning of camp and they were settling in.

Vicky: ahh thanks! that narrows me down some, from all the crazy adult group community work i also do, youth work is much clearer & defined & less likely to spiral off for me!

Aimee: I find that speaking from personal experience can get lost sometimes in conversation, specifically "I statements" - in a program we ran with rising 9th graders, they would try to use an I-statement but would end up turning them into generalizations very quickly, i.e. "I believe that all girls feel X about this."

Vicky: I find that the broken agreement situations & more challenging sessions are the ones where good work gets done, because it allowed revisiting or basics and working our what is causing conflict and barriers

Nadia: Vicky I do notice lots of broken agreements with adults, too. Especially around communication. Sarcasm, or putting themselves down. It's a little tougher for me to catch sometimes, because adults

sometimes have more subtle ways to communicate, but I find it can still disrupt a group's ability to get to a place of real depth/traction...

Vicky: find younger groups (9 - 12) particularly prone to lapse into generalisations always looking to reinforce in-group out -group divisions

Nadia: Vicky I'd love to hear what you think about case study #1, which I just posted

Virtually: Do I intervene? At the university, the students feel such pressure to be "perfect" - they may not realize as Gertrude Elion (nobel prize winner in BioChem) shares, "Every failure is a step forward, an opportunity to explore new things." When I introduce the agreement "Honor this safe space; don't criticize ideas - including Your own" I remind them of my favorite improv teacher...when you messed up Dave would throw his hands in the air (and you would mimic him) and have to jump up and down and scream, IT JUST DOESN'T MATTER! IT JUST DOESN'T MATTER. So, if I happen to catch a student who mutters under their breath, "this sucks" I might smile and whisper IT JUST DOESN'T MATTER

Shilpa Setty: I find "putting down of self or others" agreement is broken in a few sessions that I do with teachers, specially when this training is new for the group, and the activities are new.

Nadia: Virtually I love that~! I want to come on of your writing workshops! Shilpa how have you managed those kinds of put downs, especially early in the session? Do you intervene?

Vicky: the putting self down can depend, some do it from habit, some because they need positive feedback, but i've also had say, a very popular and talented young person, be asserting dominance by " ooo i';m so terrible at this" wherein the less dominant ones all fall into praising mode. so i'll try & work out what the dynamic is, & in that example re-focus the group on the task or the quieter members

Livier Ayon: i find that the broken agreement situations & more challenging sessions are the ones where good work gets done, because it allowed revisiting or basics and working our what is causing conflict and barriers - I liked this comment. I think it will all depend on how we address the situation. It can be a great opportunity to learn, or it can be a disaster. I believe that's the point here how can we handle it in a way that is constructive?

Vicky: I tend to work a lot on my own initiative in many settings, very little supervision & support- so this group discussion has sprung me by surprise today, but is very helpful & stimulating, it is easy to get rusty or loose the vocabulary to articulate what i do. so i need this ! I have to go off now, but will read up what you all say later, many thanks & see you later !

Livier: A broken agreement that was of greatest concern to me in a group happened long time ago in my first workshop in violence prevention for adolescents in a Community at very high risk. One of them hit another boy when I wasn't looking and they were in the middle of the whole group, so it wasn't easy to see. But we evidently soon realized something wrong had happened.

Nadia: Livier how did you handle it? Is there anything you would have done differently today?

Livier: I stopped the whole activity. I asked what happened. Only those who were near them from the rest of the group explained what had happened. The rest of us didn't even see it. I explained to them that I couldn't tolerate that in the group that the purpose of our workshop was exactly to learn how to deal with aggression. I may have gone into preaching mode a little moment. I asked the boy how he was doing, he said he was fine. I explained that I was there for that exact reason, and that I was inviting them to change that in the community. Then I talked to the boys individually

Nadia: That's awesome, Livier! I love how you spoke your truth so clearly. And thank you for sharing your early experience. Especially as a facilitator who was new to the material (I assume it wasn't your first facilitation gig ever?) I might have even used it as an example, asked the group to break down the violence into the steps of its escalation (and taught them the principle of escalation), and looked at what different choices could have been made at each step. Slowed it down...turning it into a learning opportunity...

Livier: I like that Nadia, I remember I addressed topics around self-regulation and self-control with activities (not like a lecture). But I believe that it would be very helpful to stress more that issue of escalation

Nadia: Violence prevention is such important work. Do you know a great organization in Vancouver called [Safeteen](#)?

Livier: I didn't know about it. Thanks for sharing; I'll watch it out!

Nadia Chaney: Discussion Question #2: Have you ever had an agreement broken in your group that you chose NOT to deal with? Could you tell us a little about your experience? (Please feel free to comment on each other's stories)

Stephanie Turner: Yes. Last year I was on camp and there was a large group of boys from a football academy. We were all playing football and they were putting each other down, in a way. I chose to ignore it because it was a constant with this group and a habitual thing. It was discussed in staff meetings and addressed later with the entire community.

Nadia: I think that's so key. The timing of addressing the Broken Agreement can be the difference between creating conflict with a participant (or having them shut down) and turning a Broken Agreement into a transformative learning experience.

Stephanie: Yes, its difficult to know sometimes too, when you don't know the relationships between groups. Its difficult too if you are trying to get a group from A to B, or are preoccupied with something else. I find this is when I can let things go.. I also fear that undermines the program in some ways..

Nadia: Stephanie I know what you mean. Sometimes I just mention it, so that I don't undermine my own agreements. I'll say, "that sounded like a put down." Sometimes it will open a conversation "no it wasn't," or elicit an acknowledgement, and sometimes it just give me a bookmark to go back to at a good time.

Stephanie: yea true

Nadia: The tough part is getting the tone right. If I'm triggered by the put down/broken agreement the group hears it in my voice/body and then I can't really create the transformative environment.

Arindita Gogoi: Sometimes agreements are broken in the presence of a middle party; I once had a group of students accompanied by their teachers. Much to my disappointment, it was the teachers who encouraged the breaking of the agreement. It was a historical journey where we had agreed to discuss various view points without taking an absolute side and not treat myths as historical facts. One of the teachers (who was History teacher) actually continued to reinforce various myths and beyond a point I decided not to disagree with her because this was derailing the experience for the kids.

Nadia: Oh that's an interesting dynamic Arindita. Did you speak with the teacher about it afterwards? I'm so curious about what was going on for them. Did they not understand the topic or were they just in total disagreement about the facts...

Arindita: Yeah. But she was so confident of her education (which certainly had flaws) that she'd refused to agree with me and started finding unfounded flaws in our logistics. Sometimes it is difficult when you've less time and high resistance.

Nadia: It really is, Arindita That's why I posted Discussion Question #3, below. It's about when we have to adjust or change the agreements to suit elements like time and resistance

Nadia Chaney: Discussion Question #3: Have you ever had to change or adjust the agreements in a group? Could you describe a little what happened? (Please feel free to comment on each other's stories)

Vicky Stonebridge: Often working with Young Carers, we will consult with them about how their behavior tells us that they're not interested/ engaged in the activities on offer so negotiate a new plan for session

Nadia: Vicky that is a great example. It's so important to remember that often we don't KNOW what messages our behaviour is sending!

Vicky: aye rather than saying "OY stop throwing things and yelling!" "we'll be more supportive, "okay your throwing & yelling me tells me that you don't want quiet time or to focus, perhaps you need to talk 1 to 1 or do you need to play an energetic game? " etc

Nadia: ah. sometimes it comes as a real surprise to participants, doesn't it? To just have someone work WITH them like that, instead of trying to control or work against their behaviour. Thanks for sharing that.

Nadia Chaney: Case Study #1: You are facilitating a corporate training on creative team work. You have an agreement about being honest, but it is clear that these employees are nervous about sharing personal stories in front of their bosses and colleagues. The stakes are very high, and you realize that some of your activities require a lot of personal sharing. At the same time, you feel like your activities could really benefit this team in its stated goals. What might you say or do?

Vicky Stonebridge: gently coax people out of shells into trusting situation by sharing some stuff myself to start with? and being very positive with anything that they shared, allowing them to feel safe. could also use tricks to open them up., like moving around the room, smaller groups, creative play while talking etc

Virtually Ally: I find that if you can get the boss involved early on it sure can help. If the boss is seen taking a creative risk and being vulnerable it can shift the energy. I got buy in early with one boss and announced to the team that "He was a world famous Gibberish Poet" and then he said a line of Gibberish and I interpreted it. Then I invited others to interpret his poetry. Everyone was laughing so hard. The employees were literally putting words in their boss' mouth and it reduced nerves and built team...and opened up the room for deeper discussion

Nadia: haha! Virtually that's outrageous. I love it!! Brilliant reversal of power dynamics without the boss losing face!

Arindita Gogoi: A lot depends on the amount of time we have. I would refrain from opening a wound I cannot stitch back. At the same time, I'd take help of anonymous feedback and opinions to begin with.

Vicky: Did a bizarre course once, with mega bosses, in massive nationwide org, and people in news/political level of things. I was only female, and from rank & file in org. (oh oh profile pic probably gives it away) it was hilarious watching trainer dismantle egos and some got it & shared eventually & learnt, others stayed very closed & resistant.

Livier Ayon: On the trainings I have given to staff of three organizations, and even from those that I have witnessed, only one organization's boss participated in the training. Here it is very usual that they don't want to get involved in the staff training, which is very unfortunate. As far as this case study question, I would go very slowly if that is possible. I would invite them to take Little risks at a time

Nadia Chaney: Case Study #2: You are facilitating a youth group where you have brought in a guest dance teacher. The teacher is not used to the culture of the group, and is forcefully telling the youth to be quiet and listen up. The participants are reacting by becoming resistant and even rude to the dance teacher. You have agreements with this group about respect and no put downs of self or other. What do you say or do?

Arindita Gogoi: I had recently attended a workshop with Michael Gass and Simon Priest who encouraged us to ask an intervention question. I would ask the group, what is their vision for today...or what would they like to achieve for themselves today. And what behaviour of ours could derail that process. And then we could have a small talk/reminder about our little agreement that we made.

Nadia: That's a nice one. I'd love to get the dance teacher in on that conversation, too.

Arindita: Absolutely! If the dance teacher was being authoritative then s/he was breaking an agreement as well! We could also do a fun filled ice breaking session to both lighten up the situation and well, break ice.

Virtually Ally: Dear Nadia and Arindita - I wish I could turn you both upside down and pour all your amazing knowledge into my newbie facilitator head

Amanda Milson: One option would be to Acknowledge to the group that the guest is unfamiliar with the group agreements, and ask the youth to explain how activities and communication usually work.

Nadia: Oh yes, I like that Amanda! It really gives the dance teacher the benefit of the doubt.

Arindita: I think that's a very workable idea!!

Livier Ayon: Yeah I like to lead an icebreaker for the whole group. I think is important to get them familiar with The new member. And I would say after that the same agreements apply for every new individual who joins later. Maybe we'll do pop up style in remembering what the agreements were

Mariko Ihara: Press Rewind...inviting all members to articulate, but more importantly, demonstrate what respect looks and sounds like, so she or he catches on and deepens their practice through the experience.

Nadia Chaney: (last but not least) Case Study #3: You are facilitating a group of adults in a personal memoir writing workshop and there is a complaint about sexual harassment that comes to you during the break. You hear about it from a participant who witnessed this happening. They are very upset and tell you that the group is not safe. You have a general agreement about respect with the group. How do you a) respond to the participant b) respond to the person accused and the person who was allegedly harassed c) communicate with the group?

Kitty Jackson: I would still love to hear some thoughts on this...

Arindita Gogoi: I'd acknowledge that some pertinent issues have come up which I'd like to discuss later. However, I will not publicly deal with it without understanding all sides of the story. Being very closely associated with the Sexual Harassment Redressal Forum in our organization, I do recognize the severity of the issue, but at the same time I also understand that it is subjective in many cases, and I have had cases in which people have framed others not realising the repercussions. But choosing the right forum to address issues is important.

Nadia: I think that's really the key here, Arindita. That discernment about timing is everything, especially when the stakes are high like in this example.

Arindita: I'd keep my approach neutral during the course of the particular workshop...but certainly deal with it later.

Nadia: What would you say to the participant who brought it to your attention?

Arindita: I'd ask him or her if s/he feels safe to continue or is there anything that would help him/her feel safer. Removing the accused without probe would be unfair too. I could also separately discuss with the person allegedly harassed if s/he wants to bring any untoward incident to my notice...if s/he feels safe to sit through the rest of the day. If either's response is no, I'd like to extend the break and pass the case to the concerned body/forum. Because unless both these people feel safe in an environment, they're not going to be receptive to the workshop anyway. And if it's a genuine and active case, then it requires intervention.

Nadia Chaney: 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. Katie Jackson will soon post the transcript.

Also, please fill out this short, anonymous evaluation so we can improve these assemblies:
http://pyeglobal.force.com/timbasurveys__survey...

Again, you are a wonderful group of inspiring people. Thank you! With big love and respect, Nadia and Katie

Virtually Ally: Thank you, Nadia, Katie and ALL!...So many wonderful gems to ponder, harvest & share. ~
Virtually Ally

Nadia: Thank YOU Virtually Ally! Hope to see you next time

Vicky Stonebridge: Thank you! very useful I think I am suffering unconscious competence & as I have a new job starting soon I'd realised I needed to brush up a little, then this discussion appeared! hurrah, Thanks !

Nadia: Wonderful, Vicky Stonebridge! Glad the timing worked for you!



Livier Ayon: This is a great tool to have as a facilitator. I appreciate all your wisdom.