

## **Session Three: Viewing and discussing the video:**

**Goals:** and ideas ★ to explore and understand the perspectives, experiences presented in the videotape

★ to relate experiences and information in the video to their own lives and work.

**Materials:** 1/2" VCR and monitor, "Women and Diversity" videotape

**Time:** approximately 2 hours

**Note:** See transcript for the names of people who speak in the video.

Before playing the video, review "About this workbook..." on page 7. Explain how and why the video was made and what the Advance conference was.

The following questions were written for you the facilitator to ask your group, so "you" in the questions refers to your group. In order to focus the discussion and have enough time to complete this session, we suggest that you select the questions you think are most relevant, interesting, or controversial. You may not want or need to go through the whole list.

1) We suggest that your group first view the video, which lasts about 30 minutes, in its entirety and then discuss the general questions below.

- What did you like about the video?
- Were there any particular statements that you remember?
- Were there any ideas that seemed particularly relevant to our organization?
- Were there any statements that seemed confusing or wrong?

2) Then re-view the video in sequences, stopping the tape at the points marked in the video transcript. Briefly discuss the following questions for each sequence before going on to the next sequence. The questions are divided into themes, based on the sections and sequences of the videotape. (These sequences are indicated in the script.)

### **Main themes**

As the video begins, the first three statements express its main themes.

★ What does it mean to have a sense of home, and to leave home? What might it mean in the context of helping your organization grow and change? Why does Beth say that she expects everybody to leave home, not just her?

★ How does your organization balance self-examination and getting things done?

★ What does Barbara mean, that there is no position of safety?

★ Who are we, and what are our visions for organizing?

In the next sequence, a number of women from the Advance conference introduce themselves. If your group is new to organizing, it might be useful to expand this discussion with the vignette of Yolanda Sanchez on page .

★ What are some of the different projects identified by the women from the Advance conference? What do these women, or their projects, have in common? What is "organizing"?

Here, you might bring out some of the differences in the issues and approaches of the women in the video. For example, the issues the women are working on include cultural, labor, sexual orientation, academic, and civil rights; some of them are paid staff members while others are volunteers.

★ What are you currently working on and what are you most proud of in your work? (For this question, you might go around the circle, asking each person in your group to respond. You might also ask, what is most difficult in your work? What do you need to do your job better, or to be more effective?)

★ Charlotte Dickson says she's proud of having good relationships with people and being able to organize across differences: what are some of the things that make good working or organizing relationships? Do you find this statement naive, inspiring, or offensive?

★ Karen Artichoker talks about her vision for her work in Sioux country. What are your visions for your work? (You might make a list of everyone's responses to this question, or do a group brainstorm posing this question.)

### **Confronting the "-isms": pros and cons, benefits and fears**

In the next part of the videotape, women talk about some issues that are important to consider in anti-racism work. Their main points are: the necessity of dealing with racism and sexism; the need to respect people's skills, gifts, and priorities; that we all gain from accepting diversity; that doing these things means changing how we work and how we think about our work; and that all of this is hard work.

★ Why might an organization self-destruct or be unable to move forward

because of racism? Have you had this experience? How has this issue affected your group? (To pursue this topic further, discuss the vignette of Stephanie Roth on page .)

- ★ How is embracing diversity in an organization different from charity? (Charity is based on the idea that others "need" something, while the idea behind diversity is that we have shared needs and we all can make contributions.)
- ★ Who gains from combatting racism and other "isms" in our organizations? How do we gain from diversity?
- ★ What does Stephanie Roth mean by saying, "it's really important that you don't bring women in [to your organization] saying, 'work on our issue.'"
- ★ If home is our organization and our way of doing things, how can we "leave home," or open our organization up to difference? (These ideas will be discussed in more detail by Beth Richie in the next section of the video.)
- ★ Does recognizing diversity mean losing boundaries and distinctions, or respecting and even heightening differences, or some combination?
- ★ Why is it important to "learn the things that pain us and to learn how to heal"? What are the dangers of expressing and not expressing anger or frustration? How can we grow from recognizing anger and frustration?
- ★ Why is it important to work against the "isms," even if we are in a homogeneous organizations?

### **One model for multi-cultural organizations**

The next part of the videotape was based on a one-hour presentation by Beth Richie and Stephanie Roth. It is an introduction to a model for developing multi-cultural organizations, which was developed by Beth Richie. Session Four, explores this and other models further.

- ★ What are the three kinds of organizational action that Beth Richie recommends in this model? (She recommends: doing outreach, establishing a multi-cultural atmosphere, and acting against oppression in the larger society.)
- ★ What are some of the elements of outreach and why are they important? (acceptance -- changing the appearance of the organization to make it welcoming; real interest -- letting people know what the organization has to offer to them; curiosity -- getting the organization educated about the groups to whom you're reaching out.)
- ★ What kinds of outreach has our organization done? What are some ways

our organization could do outreach in the future?

★ How can we create a multi-cultural atmosphere? (Possibilities range from changing the cultural environment, such as what the organization looks and sounds like; structural changes like affirmative action policies for hiring and promotion, and changes in decision making structures.)

★ How can our organization act against oppression in our community and the larger society?

### **Problems and solutions**

The next part of the video presents excerpts of a discussion by Heather Booth and Charlotte Bunch, as they talk about the problem of conflicting goals: that of embodying a diverse, anti-racist society, and that of helping people with their immediate needs or the concrete tasks of an organization.

★ Why are each of these goals important?

★ How do they suggest balancing these goals? (Charlotte says to "constantly keep the vision and figure out what you can do to move toward it" and Heather says that even things that don't work might provide a base for future change.)

★ What are the pros and cons of the solution in the example Stephanie Roth gives about the organization that decided that their annual conference should be for women of color only? (For more information about this example, see the case study, pages\_\_.)

★ How did the carefully constructed diverse slate that Laura Unger's union ran help address some of the divisions she talks about in her union? (Some of the divisions to overcome that she mentions are wage disparities between men and women, divisions between clerical vs. plant workers, "racial" issues, union members having often stronger ties with their community organizations, such as churches, than with the union.) (For more about this example, see the case study, pages\_\_.)

### **Celebrating the work we do**

The last section of the focuses on appreciating and celebrating the work we do, our long-term goals, and our perseverance.

★ What are the main things that the women recognize and celebrate in this last section of the video? (They celebrate that they are organizers; that they do share bridges and connections; that it is possible to persevere)

★ Why is it important to recognize our strengths and accomplishments?

★ Barbara Joseph says that envisioning and theorizing can help us

understand the conflicts we are facing, help us confront them more efficiently, and help us see the larger context of our particular struggles. How can our organization give us the opportunity to come together to develop our understandings and plans for our work?

The video ends with a closing ceremony. The role of this and other group activities and celebrations are explored in Session 6, beginning on page .

# Organizer's stories

These vignettes expand on the the issues and experiences that Yolanda Sanchez, Stephanie Roth and Laura Unger raised in the videotape. They are based on interviews conducted by Diane Williams. Questions for discussion follow each vignette.

## **What is organizing? How and why does someone become an organizer?**

*Yolanda Sanchez* (Current President, National Latinas Caucus; Executive Director Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA))

In the 1950s, Yolanda Sanchez, a young Puerto Rican caseworker from East Harlem, first started organizing. There was never a day when a light bulb went off in her head, Yolanda explained. Instead becoming an organizer was a gradual process that started to make sense with time and through many experiences. Initially she was asked to join a group of fellow middle class, professional Puerto Ricans who had decided to work together on common issues and problems that affected them as a stateside community. Though unaware of it at the time, she was being drawn into a lifelong profession of organizing and advocacy. So while she had been doing organizing for years, it was not until the early 1960s that Yolanda began to get paid for doing organizing work. This was when her mentor, Dr. Antonia Bonita asked her to become the first social worker at ASPIRA ("aspire" in Spanish). Her first assignment was to organize leadership development programs for youth.

### *Defining her identity*

For the first twenty years of her professional life, Yolanda identified herself as Puerto Rican. Out of this concern with nationalist issues, she helped create the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA) and the New York City Chapter of the National Conference of Puerto Rican Women. But in the 1970s Yolanda redefined her sense of identity. "I've always operated as a Puerto Rican. I never applied race to myself, because I was a Puerto Rican and what I was up against was the general community versus Puerto Ricans. However, over the years, it became clear I was facing other things, too. With the consciousness of the Black movement also working on me, I began also to see race [as also affecting me]. I began to realize that another way I am defined is by my color. I am a Black woman within the community."

### *Gender issues*

Yolanda was also involved in and greatly influenced by the women's movement of the 1970s. As her feminist consciousness was raised, her belief in the need to organize Puerto Rican and other Latina women grew stronger. When the National Puerto Rican Women's Caucus, which she helped to organize, didn't survive due to internal conflicts, Yolanda felt there was still a critical need for a viable feminist group of Latina.

In 1984, Yolanda decided to have a dinner party, but this was to be no ordinary dinner party. She sent out invitations to eleven women activists, not all of whom were Puerto Ricans. The invitation explicitly stated her intention to form a Latina women's caucus. Seven women showed up. The two question agenda began, "Do you think there is in existence a feminist, progressive women's organization for Latinas?" Most of the women answered no. The second question was, "Are you interested in helping me organize one?" Five of the seven women present decided to give it a try, and the organization they started became known as the National Latinas Caucus.

The group decided on a Latina as opposed to an exclusively Puerto Rican focus because it was clear to them that there was going to be increased immigration into the United States from other Latin American countries. They believed that strength comes with numbers. Their philosophy of inclusion meant that as long as someone believed in feminism and the need for economic and leadership development among Latina women, they could join. The National Latina Caucus has an activist agenda. It has been involved in issues such as housing development and youth empowerment that affect the Latino community. While it is a non-profit, the Caucus has created a Latinas Political Action Committee to fundraise and promote Latina political candidates.

Yolanda recently reflected that, "It was not the creation of the National Latinas Caucus which generated and sparked feminist ideology and thinking in me. It was years of being on the fringes of the women's political movement in Manhattan. I was living in East Harlem in those days and responding to women's organizations like NOW. You would be the only woman of color in the group -- or one of the few. But you're in the room and you're listening. You also begin to read and then you become much more knowledgeable on public issues. But being at those meetings, unless you just Black out completely, you do hear, you do absorb. Whether it has an impact on you at that moment or not, it's there somehow."

"I was working with other women, some that were real feminists, others that were not into the movement at all. All of that, the life experiences played a role in raising my consciousness: trying to grasp a greater understanding of feminism, trying to redefine for myself, trying to understand what makes feminism in the Latina community slightly different from feminism in the general community"

## **Questions for discussion**

- ★ What do you think it means to have your feminist consciousness raised? Through what life experiences has your consciousness been raised?
- ★ Are there times when an exclusive or separatist group is necessary? What are some specific examples?
- ★ What could make feminism in the Latino community (or African American, Asian, etc.) different from feminism in European American communities?
- ★ How do you currently identify yourself? How have you identified yourself in the past? Has your identity been redefined in the past?

## **Why might organizations self-destruct because of racism?**

*Stephanie Roth* (Consultant and trainer with nonprofit development organization on fundraising, organizational development, and racism and multiculturalism. Activist in women's and lesbian organizations.)

In the late 70's at a Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) Conference, the Women of Color Caucus decided to leave R2N2 in mass because they felt that the organization was too racist. Shortly after this incident R2N2 folded. This was very upsetting to the remaining members of R2N2, including Stephanie Roth, then a paid staff member of the Committee for Abortion Rights and Sterilization Abuse (CARASA) one of the members of the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2). They wondered how this could happen in an organization that explicitly focused on a race and class analysis of these issues. For example, they fought against sterilization abuse and worked diligently to keep abortion legal and accessible to women who couldn't afford to pay for them.

Stephanie and other woman from R2N2 began to reflect on what went wrong. How did R2N2 fail? One explanation for the network's self-destruction lies in who started it and why. R2N2 was founded by white, progressive, politically left women who were interested in a class-based analysis of reproductive rights. The founding members, who set the organization's agenda, decided that in addition to working on abortion rights issues they would also concentrate on sterilization, child care and women's health issues.

R2N2 made sincere efforts to diversify their organization through outreach, such as trying to hook up with reproductive rights organizations that were made up of mainly women of color. These efforts worked on a small scale. The network grew from a predominately white organization to one that included a few women of color. These women began to feel unified and strong enough to begin to challenge organizational issues, such as the lack of leadership of women of color within the organization and R2N2's resistance to exploring different perspectives of their issues.

Issues came to a head at one of their conferences in which there was a session where women of color and white women met separately. The task for each group was to talk about "racial" issues within the organization. The two groups reported back very differently. The white women's report was vague. They were unsure about how to begin to address the issues and seemed resistant to taking responsibility for "racial" tensions within R2N2. In contrast, the women of color came back with a list, saying, "These are the problems that we've experienced with R2N2, and this is what we need to have happen."

Like many predominately white organizations the white women weren't prepared to deal with this kind of crisis. The majority of the women of color decided that it would be too time consuming and frustrating to continue to work to change the organization, so they decided to leave.

Stephanie says of the incident:

"I think this was a historical period in the women's movement where there was a lot more organizing going on separately among women of color, and a lot more challenging of white women. And white women clearly didn't have a sense of what to do. ... The women of color leaving was the first step in the demise of R2N2. Their leaving was not a vote to destroy the organization. I don't think they even had an idea one way or the other whether R2N2 would continue to survive or not. The white women felt so devastated and so clearly overwhelmed by what it would mean to have a network made up of all white women at that point that they just decided to close down."

### **What were the pros and cons of organizing an annual conference for women of color only?**

In 1983, Stephanie Roth joined New York Women Against Rape (NYWAR) as one of two paid staff. NYWAR was the only citywide Rape Crisis Center in New York. When she arrived it was a very white organization in terms of staff, board and volunteers. Being aware of racism and the problems of white dominated organizations from her past experiences, Stephanie felt concerned about NYWAR's commitment to anti-racism. She raised her concerns to the other members and they agreed that action must be taken on this issue.

The first thing they did was to make a commitment to hire a woman of color for a co-coordinator position. This meant that the two staff people would have equal power and responsibility in the organization. About six months after Stephanie arrived on staff, NYWAR hired a Latina woman who was committed to developing leadership of women of color within the organization. She and Stephanie served as co-coordinators and worked closely together.

Later, Stephanie and another Latina colleague worked together to organize the NYWAR's annual conference. The focus was on issues of race and class and how they were linked to violence against women. This conference turned out be one of the most diverse conferences NYWAR ever had. Their organizing efforts were

successful, Stephanie believes, because they did a great deal of outreach and tried to get women of color involved in every step of planning and implementing the conference. For example, a large number of women of color ran workshop sessions. As a result of the conference, a women of color caucus was formed. NYWAR seemed to be entering a new era regarding diversity within the organization.

But Stephanie and her colleague felt a stronger commitment needed to be made to women of color and proposed that the next conference be organized by and for women of color only. Their arguments were that NYWAR had a long history and reputation of being predominately white and that not enough resources in the organization had been devoted to issues of women of color.

The board approved the proposal, but the conference plan also caused some tension in the organization because the white women felt excluded. It became apparent that NYWAR had to grapple with helping the white women in the organization deal with this change. NYWAR began, during the period that the conference was being organized, with two day-long consciousness-raising discussions with the white women regarding racism. The purpose was to help them deal with any concerns they might have regarding the conference and to talk about responsibilities that white people have to address racism in an organization. There were a few disgruntled women who left the organization but the majority of the women stayed.

This conference was an important step for NYWAR in honoring its commitment to women of color and to anti-racism. It displayed the organization's serious commitment, and began a period of organizational growth concerning multi-cultural issues. Within a few years, NYWAR had a diverse board and staff. A critical mass of women of color started to form who no longer felt isolated and who continued to challenge what they perceived to be racism within the organization.

## Questions for discussion:

- ★ Do you know of any organizations that folded because of racism? What do you think caused them to fold? Do you think R2N2's decision to fold after the women of color left was a good one?
- ★ Members of R2N2 weren't prepared for racism's divisive effects. How can an organizations prepare organization themselves for "racial" conflicts?
- ★ What are the pros and cons of having a women of color only conference?
- ★ Why do you think that when the white women were challenged by the women of color on issues of racism, they felt hesitant to challenge these accusations?

## Healing Divisions and working together

*Laura Unger* (Current President, Communications Workers of America (CWA), Local 1150, in New York. Activist and speaker on women's leadership in trade unions, ... )

Laura Unger is not the type of person who believes in working only for herself. So when she decided to run for President of CWA Local 1150, it was only natural that she run as part of a slate. The slate [for the Board of Directors of the union] turned out to be a very diverse one that reflected the membership of the union. The slate included a white women President, a Black man as Vice President, a white man for Secretary/Treasurer, a Black woman as NY Area Director and a white man as NJ area director. This board formed as a natural outgrowth of who the membership was and who had similar beliefs and principles.

Laura commented,

"I think by just going out and trying to find the best person it ended up being a diverse slate. I think had it not happened that way ...I would have noticed it. It wasn't like I said, 'Oh, I have to get a Black woman for a particular Local because that building is mostly Black.' What happened was that a Black woman ran (though she wound up getting laid off, so we replaced her with an Hispanic man). If people are allowed to use their skills and talents and there's a conscious effort to develop membership, then Black and Hispanic members will come forward. It's only in places where there's a conscious effort to keep them down, keep them out of the structure, that they're out of it. I think it's because we do things right, the natural things happened, that the board is going to be diverse."

One right thing that she did was to chose to run on the same slate as Ron, a former Chief Steward, who was running as the Vice Presidential candidate. Laura always admired Ron's perseverance and integrity. He quickly moved up the ranks while earning the respect of those who worked with him. He was known as the kind of Chief Steward who would find out every detail of a grievance so that he could

mediate in the best way possible. Laura knew that they would make a great team, pairing his attention to detail with her visionary approach to social change. She believes that within every individual there is the ability and strength to make change. Ron takes a more task-oriented approach, with the determination to see tasks through to completion and the ability to draw out people's strengths.

Laura, Ron, and Bob, the candidate for secretary/treasurer, all agreed that the best type of union membership is one that is educated, organized and empowered. They began to act on this belief even during the campaign; their first step as candidates was to educate union members on the history of the labor movement. This helped to raise consciousness about past struggles and victories and to motivate members to action.

Then, Laura, Ron and Bob wrote a militant program that encouraged people to stand up against their employer, AT&T. Solidarity and protection was emphasized. Their slate promised to stand behind anyone that decided to back them. These strategies worked; Laura and her slate won impressive victories. Laura won as President in a five way race against four men, winning on the first ballot with over 50% of the vote. Ron was challenged by a white man who ran a nasty campaign that tried to insult Ron's intelligence. Many believed that this man counted on what he thought was the racism of some members of the union; he was proven wrong by Ron's landslide victory. As Chief Steward, Ron had helped a broad range of people and his hard work and loyalty to union members was repaid on election day.

### **Winning was only the beginning**

Winning the election was only the beginning. Maintaining a diverse slate takes a lot of hard work. One of the largest obstacles is dealing with a membership demoralized by huge lay-offs. Laura keeps people motivated by focusing on their strengths. Second, she knows that union members need to know what their elected officials are doing; they need to be kept up-to-date. Laura's board continues to stay in close contact with their membership by putting out a members newspaper, taping a bi-weekly news message on the Local's phone system; leafletting in front of the worksite; holding frequent meetings with shop stewards so stewards can report back to people they work with; organizing lunch-time information meetings, and making office visits. Though it is still difficult to get large numbers of people to membership meetings, the slate has been able "to get the committed to become more committed" for example by increasing the number of shop stewards.

Another way to keep morale up is to develop good relationships with other board members. While it is important to maintain professional boundaries, seeming aloof or unapproachable is not helpful. Going out to eat, inviting fellow organizers to your home, and just being a good friend all can be important to create harmony on the Board.

### **Don't avoid conflict!**

One mistake the slate made was trying so hard to avoid internal conflict that they ignored problems that should have been addressed immediately. For example, one of the Chief Stewards had a drug problem. Instead of confronting this problem head

on, other members were asked to take over some of her grievances. The leadership was criticized with the insinuation that white liberalism was protecting the women, who was African American.

The diverse group of officers then began to address some of the divisions in the union between clerical and plant workers. Before Laura and her slate took office, the union had a plant Vice President who dealt exclusively with plant workers and an administrative Vice President who dealt only with clerical workers. This system allowed a disparity of conditions between plant and clerical workers because the two vice presidents didn't communicate with each other enough. Laura's slate broke down the walls between the clerical and plant members of the union by changing the bylaws to divide local areas geographically. In this way, both Vice Presidents would be in charge of clerical *and* plant workers in a building. Now the greater awareness of conditions, and exchange of ideas has resulted in more equitable conditions and much less sense of division between the two kinds of workers. This makes organizing together much easier.

The union's officers continue to develop new leaders through giving constant support and encouragement to people who have decided to take on leadership responsibility. For example, a new shop steward is given training and backup: Ron has been known to go over to a building ten times in one day to help a shop steward who doesn't feel confident enough to talk to a boss on his or her own. Several once-hesitant shop stewards have begun thinking of running for office themselves.

### **Questions for discussion:**

- ★ Think about who has influenced the development of your own leadership abilities. What did this person do to increase your leadership potential? (For example, did she or he offer encouragement, serve as a role model, etc.)
- How can you help to develop leadership in others?

- ★ How does the structure of your organization increase or decrease divisions in your members, staff or constituency?
- ★ How would you define white liberalism? What types of conflicts can it cause within an organization?
- ★ What mechanisms does your group use to address problems before they become crises?

