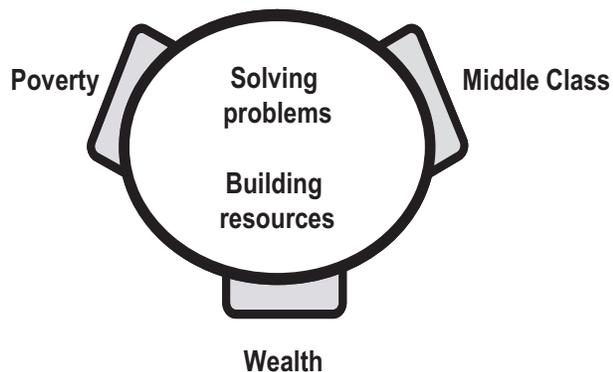


4. Three Classes at the Table

How things are now: People in poverty are very rarely at the planning and decision-making tables, even when poverty is the issue. The middle class and wealthy have normalized their role as decision makers so thoroughly that invariably they default to taking charge automatically. This entrenched rankism is sometimes seen even in Bridges initiatives.



Source: Terie Dreussi-Smith, Jodi R. Pfarr, & Philip E. DeVol, *Bridges Trainer Certification Manual*, 2006.

Context: People in poverty have information that is vital to planning. They have concrete knowledge of the environment of poverty, the barriers that they encounter when they navigate the systems set up by institutions, and the barriers to upward mobility that exist in the community.

Core ideas: Organizers seek out, invite, and listen to people in poverty. Room must be made at decision-making tables; work, decisions, and leadership must be shared. Everyone is viewed

as a problem solver and a co-creator, sometimes playing the role of a coach, sometimes of a challenger. Images of “teaching a man to fish,” or “giving someone a hand up” represent the hierarchical structures of class. A more fitting image would be “working shoulder to shoulder.” Mike Saccocio of City Mission in Schenectady tells of the day that he was traveling with a Getting Ahead graduate to present to two New York Supreme Court judges when he realized that the roles had reversed: She was the leader, and his role was to drive her there.

Everyone around the table will benefit from examining their own experiences with class structures. And, if need be, recognize that they may have normalized and benefited from their societal status. Becoming conscious of rank and rankism can help people build healthy authentic relationships.

How to use the tool

- Utilize Getting Ahead as an engagement tool. Begin engaging investigators when deciding when and where to conduct the classes. Share the work of making it a successful learning experience. Plan the graduation together and design the follow-up programs and problem-solving strategies together.
- The percentage of people from poverty at the planning table should be at least 25%.
- Provide to the people from poverty the same opportunities that you offer to anyone else to attend leadership courses, board trainings, and national conferences.

Learn more: Read *From Vision to Action*, Jesse Conrad & Dan Shenk (Eds.), 2013, and *The Power of TED—The Empowerment Dynamic*, David Emerald, 2005.