Crossing Boundaries

There are many stories in the Bible about God's people crossing boundaries. There's Ruth, who crosses the boundary of cultural norms and remains with her mother-in-law following the death of her husband, despite knowing that it was quite likely that her future could be bleak. There's the Good Samaritan who crossed the wide ethnic boundary between Samaritans and Jews to help a wounded man in a ditch. There's Mary, who anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume, crossing the boundary of what would be seen as appropriate. There's Peter who has a vision where God calls him to kill and eat animals that would have been considered ritually unclean in his tradition. He realizes that God is calling him to go and meet with Cornelius who was a Gentile whom, in the Jewish tradition, Peter would not be allowed to associate with. The example of Peter and Cornelius is one of many similar instances, in the book of Acts, where the first Apostles, who were Jews, met and ministered to Gentiles.

What boundaries exist in your church or between your church and the community? Sometimes boundaries are easy to name. Sometimes they are not immediately obvious. First of all, boundaries need to be named. Once they are named, we can begin exploring the differences that can cause division, with the ultimate goal of finding ways to cross the boundaries that separate us from "the other".

Dialogue with Difference
Adapted from © 1984 Delete D. Frost, Ph.D.; revised 1996

Assumptions of the "Dialogue with Difference" Model

1. Difference is fundamental.

…. It is all around us.
…. It is a cornerstone of creativity.
…. Difference is profound.

2. Difference can be positive if I meet it.

…. Is always negative if I negate it.

3. To understand someone different than me requires that I move across a line or boundary which defines that difference.

…. To move across a line or a boundary of difference requires a struggle.
…. I can anticipate and prepare to be competent in this struggle.

Successfully engaging in dialogues with difference leads to new awareness and mutual understanding – a pattern of exchange emerges. Specific behaviors move the dialogue toward increased understanding while other behaviors blocked or stopped by that movement are reduced or eliminated. These sets of successful behaviors form the model: Dialogue with Difference.
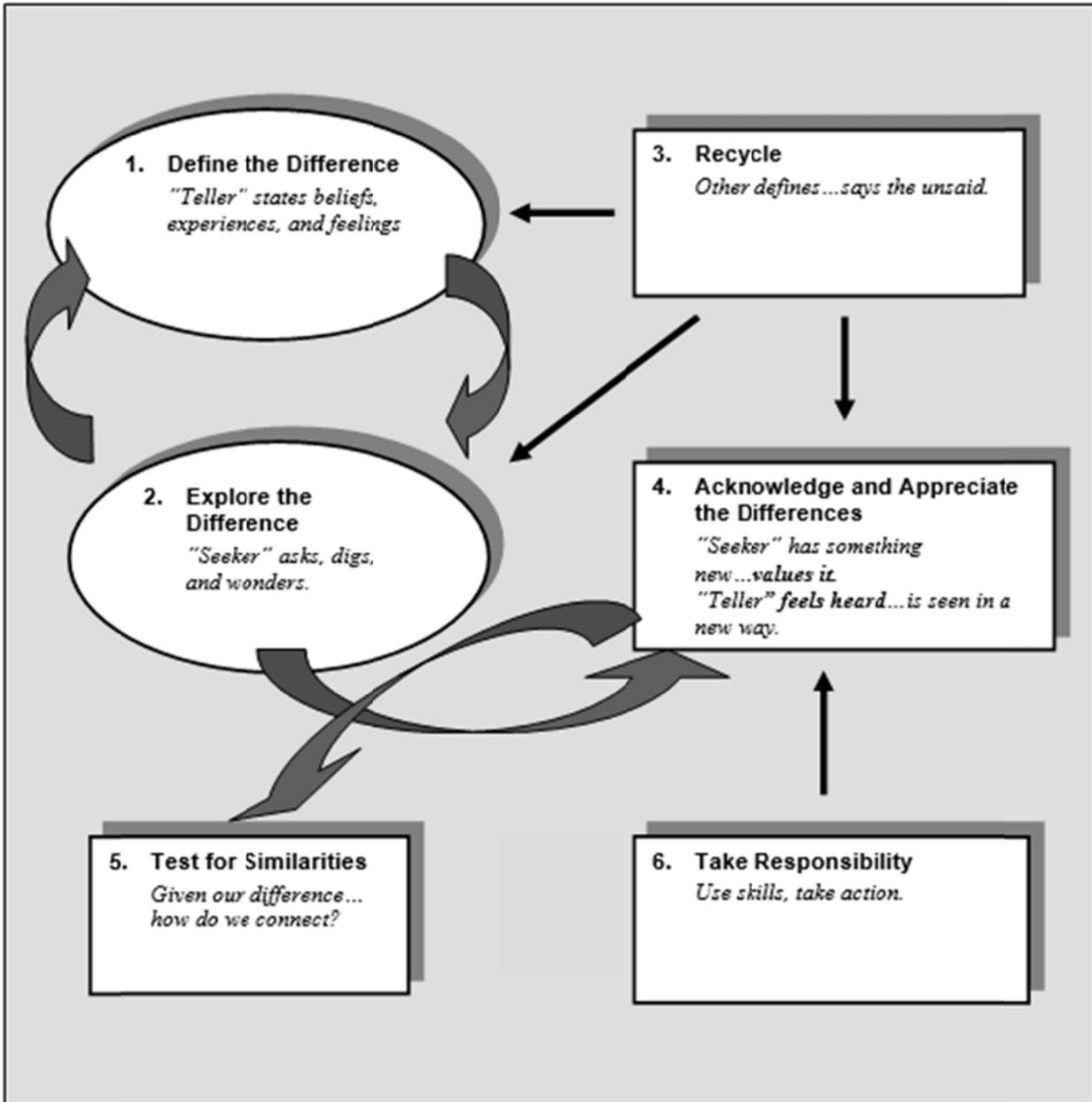
The model involves six steps or sets of skills necessary to effectively cross a boundary between individuals and a boundary between dominant and subordinated groups. At each step, those behaviors which block or move the dialogue are noted.

The steps in the Dialogue with Difference model are a differentiation/integration process. To bring people who are different together and allow them to work effectively together, the steps of differentiation and integration must not be ignored. Before similarities and points of agreement can be seen with difference, it is essential to first fully explore and know the separate and unknown aspects of the other. It is essential to be open to possibilities not previously considered. Only after clearly seeing how we are unlike can we seek how we are alike.

The Dialogue with Difference model is best used with the spirit of an explorer – the sense of adventure that something new is waiting to be discovered.

Outcomes I can expect when I can execute an effective dialogue:

- When I value difference, I can use it as a resource.

- I learn to anticipate difference – seek it out, expect it, move toward it. I stop blocking myself with my avoidance of difference.

- Completing a dialogue with someone different from me gives me more options and choices for initiating and responding to that person.

- I have more awareness of how and when I prejudge situations and people.

- I trust my abilities to deal across a line of difference.

- I increase my personal power and influence when I define and accept difference.

- I more fully know my dominant and/or subordinated group memberships.

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1. Define the Difference
"Teller" states beliefs, experiences, and feelings

3. Recycle
Other defines...says the unsaid.

2. Explore the Difference
"Seeker" asks, digs, and wonders.

4. Acknowledge and Appreciate the Differences
"Seeker" has something new...values it.
"Teller" feels heard...is seen in a new way.

5. Test for Similarities
Given our difference... how do we connect?

6. Take Responsibility
Use skills, take action.

Do's and Don'ts

Step	Do	Don't	Example
1. Define the Difference	• Use "I" • Use examples • Be specific	• Use "we", "you," "they" • Be general	I am planning a community event to encourage all kinds of people to get together and have a good time. . . .
2. Explore the Difference	• Be open to new data • Wonder about • Be curious • Play; exaggerate	• Assume: "Yea, but…" • Defend what you know • Bluff	I am wondering what type of event would be most attractive to a broad variety of people . . .
3. Recycle	• Dip down to feelings • Say the unsaid	• Press my point • "Yea, but…" • Work to convince	I am pretty comfortable with thinking up ideas for the folks I know, but I am worried about what might good for others, and I want everyone to be comfortable and have fun . . .
4. Acknowledge and Appreciate the Difference	• Paraphrase • Admit to new insights	• Fake it; bluff • Persuade	I just don't want to offend anyone because I am not aware of others customs, or even what might be appealing . . .
5. Test for Similarities	• Check for common experience • Suggest areas of agreement	• Assume • Bluff	For example, I think having a meal and everyone bringing a dish might be fun, what do you think? What are your ideas?
6. Take Responsibility	• Get concrete • Suggest next steps • Say "What I will do …"	• Demand • Place "shoulds" on others	(after hearing response) Oh, you are saying that xyz might be a good idea. Right? OK, then I think that the first thing that I will do is . . . .

Crossing Boundaries Exercise

Introduction: What role am I playing? What hat am I wearing?

We all play different roles and wear different hats through the course of a typical day.   We are all people, and some of us are mothers, fathers, young, old, men, women, pastors, teachers, and so forth. We are interested in different things: gardening, reading, riding horses, camping, singing. You get the idea.

Step 1: (10 Minutes)
- Gather in circles of 10-12 people.
- Explain that this exercise is about identifying difference.
- Each person takes a turn standing in the center of the circle.
- Each person names aloud a particular role they have, one at a time. For example, I am a teacher, I am a sister, I am a gardener, etc.
- Then, all the people who also have that role step into the middle of the circle.
- Everyone takes a moment to notice who has joined the individual and who has remained in the outer circle. The person who started in the middle pays special attention to who has not joined them in the middle.
- This process is repeated until everyone in the group has had a chance to name one or two roles (depending on time constraints) they play, and for everyone who shares that role to join them in the circle.

At the conclusion of the exercise, individuals are asked to pair up with someone who has named a role that they do not share, and are curious about.

Step 2: Pair Up (20 Minutes)
- Give pairs a chance to sit together. Give them time to review the Do's and Don't handout.
- Give each person a turn at engaging the other in a Dialogue across Difference.

Step 3: Group Reflection (15 Minutes)
- Have everyone return focus to facilitator
- Facilitator asks for comments, reflections, insights gained