

I Can Do It!

Advance Preparation:

Prepare 2 posters, one saying “I can do it!” and the other saying “I don’t think I have any influence” - and place them on the wall at opposite ends of a room.

Activity Instructions:

Begin by sharing perspectives by Parker Palmer, from the book *Healing the Heart of Democracy: the Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit*. (2011, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA).

According to Palmer, we must find ways to bridge our differences and we must seek patches of common ground on the issues we care most about. He emphasizes ‘habits of the heart’ which are necessary for public discourse. These are...

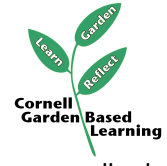
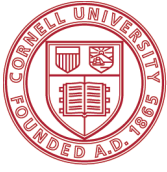
1. **An understanding that we are all in this together.**
2. **An appreciation of the value of “otherness.”**
3. **An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways.**
4. **A sense of personal voice and agency.**
5. **A capacity to create community.**

(Details about these habits follow at the end of this document).

The food system might be viewed as a microcosm of our democracy! There are issues related to how food is grown, by whom, how far it goes to get to where it’s going, how much fuel that requires, how people are treated as farmworkers, who doesn’t have enough to eat – and that can get overwhelming pretty quickly. And yet, as with many things in our lives, the more we learn and the more we genuinely engage with one another, the greater the sense of personal voice and agency, and the greater the capacity to create community – and make positive changes in our food system and our lives.

In this exercise we aim to surface a sense of where young people feel they have influence. We encourage lively discourse and in particular, the ability to influence and inspire one another. Rather than focus on “right and wrong” we want to focus on personal agency: is this something you believe you can impact? If so, how? If not, what more do you need?

- Explain that you are going to read out a series of statements.
- Point out the posters stating “I Can Do It!” and “I don’t think I have any influence.” Explain that the group will be asked to stand along an imaginary line that runs between these two statements and that everyone should try to position themselves along that imaginary line based on their own sense of their personal agency.
- Explain “The Power of Two Feet.” This means participants are encouraged to influence and encourage one another by offering their ideas, and help move others along the



spectrum from having no influence, to believing that they could have an impact.

- Encourage specific examples. For example, with “I have the ability to feed people on the planet” – what are specific ways? Having a home garden or helping a grandparent by picking up something at the farmer’s market ‘count!’ Inspire creativity and imagination in responses.
- Read out the statements one at a time. Do not rush! Allow for back and forth discussion and emphasize positive discourse.
- Stimulate reflection and discussion. Ask those at the end-points of the room to explain why they have chosen those places. Ask someone near the center to explain why they are neutral.

Statements:

“I can live well while reducing my impact on the environment.”

“I have the ability to feed people on the planet.”

“I have important influence through my food choices.”

“My choices impact people around the world.”

“I have influence in my own community.”

“I could play a small part in ending hunger.”

“I could play a small part in influencing what gets served in my school cafeteria.”

“I could play a large part in modeling what food system leadership looks like.”

Activity variation:

Ask youth to come up with their own statements and then one at a time, say them out loud to encourage discourse and positive influence.

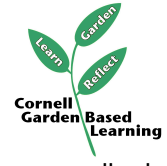
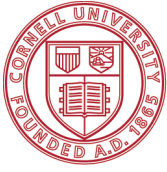
Debriefing:

When you have gone through the statements, bring the group back together to debrief.

Begin by reviewing the activity itself and then go on to discuss how people felt.

Did some feel as if they had more personal agency than they thought?

Were there any surprises?



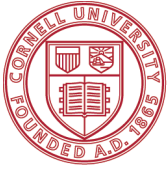
Background: Habits of the Heart (by Parker Palmer)

1. An understanding that we are all in this together. Biologists, ecologists, economists, ethicists and leaders of the great wisdom traditions have all given voice to this theme. Despite our illusions of individualism and national superiority, we humans are a profoundly interconnected species—entwined with one another and with all forms of life, as the global economic and ecological crises reveal in vivid and frightening detail. We must embrace the simple fact that we are dependent upon and accountable to one another, and that includes the stranger, the “alien other.” At the same time, we must save the notion of interdependence from the idealistic excesses that make it an impossible dream. Exhorting people to hold a continual awareness of global, national, or even local interconnectedness is a counsel of perfection that is achievable (if at all) only by the rare saint, one that can only result in self-delusion or defeat. Which leads to a second key habit of the heart...

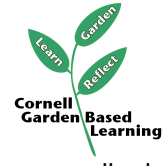
2. An appreciation of the value of “otherness.” It is true that we are all in this together. It is equally true that we spend most of our lives in “tribes” or lifestyle enclaves—and that thinking of the world in terms of “us” and “them” is one of the many limitations of the human mind. The good news is that “us and them” does not have to mean “us versus them.” Instead, it can remind us of the ancient tradition of hospitality to the stranger and give us a chance to translate it into twenty-first century terms. Hospitality rightly understood is premised on the notion that the stranger has much to teach us. It actively invites “otherness” into our lives to make them more expansive, including forms of otherness that seem utterly alien to us. Of course, we will not practice deep hospitality if we do not embrace the creative possibilities inherent in our differences. Which leads to a third key habit of the heart...

3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways. Our lives are filled with contradictions—from the gap between our aspirations and our behavior, to observations and insights we cannot abide because they run counter to our convictions. If we fail to hold them creatively, these contradictions will shut us down and take us out of the action. But when we allow their tensions to expand our hearts, they can open us to new understandings of ourselves and our world, enhancing our lives and allowing us to enhance the lives of others. We are imperfect and broken beings who inhabit an imperfect and broken world. The genius of the human heart lies in its capacity to use these tensions to generate insight, energy, and new life. Making the most of those gifts requires a fourth key habit of the heart...

4. A sense of personal voice and agency. Insight and energy give rise to new life as we speak out and act out our own version of truth, while checking and correcting it against the truths of others. But many of us lack confidence in our own voices and in our power to make a difference. We grow up in educational and religious institutions that treat us as members of an audience instead of actors in a drama, and as a result we become adults who



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treat politics as a spectator sport. And yet it remains possible for us, young and old alike, to find our voices, learn how to speak them, and know the satisfaction that comes from contributing to positive change—if we have the support of a community. Which leads to a fifth and final habit of the heart...

5. A capacity to create community. Without a community, it is nearly impossible to achieve voice: it takes a village to raise a Rosa Parks. Without a community, it is nearly impossible to exercise the “power of one” in a way that allows power to multiply: it took a village to translate Parks’s act of personal integrity into social change. In a mass society like ours, community rarely comes ready-made. But creating community in the places where we live and work does not mean abandoning other parts of our lives to become full-time organizers. The steady companionship of two or three kindred spirits can help us find the courage we need to speak and act as citizens. There are many ways to plant and cultivate the seeds of community in our personal and local lives. We must all become gardeners of community if we want democracy to flourish.

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