(Caring for the Labour Activists - Module 1)

Labour Community Advocate
Training Program[1]

Activists Caring for Ourselves

Participant Manual and handouts

National Capital Region
Région de la capitale nationale

[1] Formerly the Union Counsellor Training Program

December 2008 (revised 2011)

Session 3LCAskills-2, Document 1

My Activism – Part I

Activism, in a general sense, can be described as intentional action to bring about social or political change. This action is in support of, or opposition to, one side of an often controversial argument.

1. What community, social, political, union initiatives are you active in? (List everything, e.g., city committee, peace, union, environmental and so on)

2. Why are you an activist?

3. What do you enjoy about your activism?

4. What have you achieved or helped achieve through your activism?

5. What don't you enjoy about your activism?

6. What sacrifices do you make for your activism?

7. How do you feel about the sacrifices you have made?

8. Do you expect to be an activist in ten years? 20 years?

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

Burnout is the act of **involuntarily** leaving activism, or reducing one's level of activism.

Burnout looks like and feels like:

1. feeling tired all the time/exhaustion
2. diminished interest in things you were passionate about/ don't care
3. lowered immunity/ get sick
4. feeling pessimistic/ cynical
5. becoming inefficient/ do a bad job
6. inability to focus
7. increased absenteeism (from work and/or from activities)

Compassion fatigue

Many activists are sensitive and compassionate people who have chosen, through their activism, to constantly look suffering in the face and to confront the seemingly unvanquishable powers that cause it. Many activists are also exposed, day after day, to some of the worst aspects of human nature.

Compassion fatigue is a **traumatizing situation** in the psychological sense. Its symptoms include fear, dissociation (disconnection from the immediate environment), unduly noticeable daydreams, disrupted sleep patterns and hypersensitivity. It affects activists and other "frontline" workers, including social workers, nurses and so on. Compassion fatigue can also afflict family members or friends of those who are traumatized.

Anyone who feels they may be suffering from this condition should seek prompt help from a psychologist who specializes in treating it. Burnout is a symptom of compassion fatigue, which is much more serious.

Drawn from *The Lifelong Activist,* by Hillary Rettig

Uncomfortable Truths

When you begin to think about your activism, you may discover some uncomfortable truths.

- You're not as committed as you thought. (e.g., you have other priorities right now such as a child with a disability or you're exhausted)
- You are more committed than you thought. (e.g., you want to do more but don't know how to balance it with other priorities in your life, like family)
- You want to have more fun. (e.g., you want to take a few nights off, but the members need you!)
- You are an activist because you are "selfish". (e.g., it makes you feel good about yourself, it bugs your family or impresses your partner)
- You have questions about the validity of the cause you're working for.
- You no longer feel committed to the cause you're working for.
- You don't like the approach of your group/organization or the people involved.
- You're not as good an activist as you thought. (e.g., You're not good at certain key skills, such as representing members or talking about a cause without annoying people.)
- You haven't really done as much activism as you thought. (What have you been doing all this time?)
- You don't want to donate so much money to the cause. (I want to buy

a new car, hockey equipment for my kid and so on)

- You are over your head in what you've set as a goal and can't possibly succeed

You can refuse to think about these things, or others that might make you uncomfortable, but they will just come back and push you closer and closer to burn-out.

Instead:

- ✓ Congratulate yourself for confronting a truth that is uncomfortable. It takes guts!
- ✓ Don't judge yourself harshly. People feel the way they feel. We get into trouble when we ignore our feelings.
- ✓ If something makes you extremely uncomfortable at a personal level, seek out community resources that can help you work through your feelings.

My Activism – Part II

Review the activism you outlined in question 1 of My Activism – Part I. Select an area you would like to focus on and answers the following questions. Then select your second choice and answer the questions. You can use this tool to think about any area of activism in which you are involved.

Question	**Activism Area One**	**Activism Area Two**	**Activism Area Three**
Which activist movement would you like to focus on?			
What type of activism would you like to focus on? (elections, representation, lobbying, outreach, education and so on)			

Question	Activism Area One	Activism Area Two	Activism Area Three
What goal would you like to see result from your activism in this area? (be concrete – what and by when; be realistic – don't say world peace)			
What type of organization would you most enjoy working with (e.g., collective, well-funded)?			
What role would you like to assume?			

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My Life Goals

A goal is a dream with a deadline.

Think about the things you'd like to focus on in the following categories. Be concrete, specific and name the behaviour you want to aim toward. Don't say "eat better", instead say "stop drinking soda". Don't say "stop going to MacDonald's for lunch, instead say "bring a health lunch from home". Finally, identify the most to least important goals within each category.

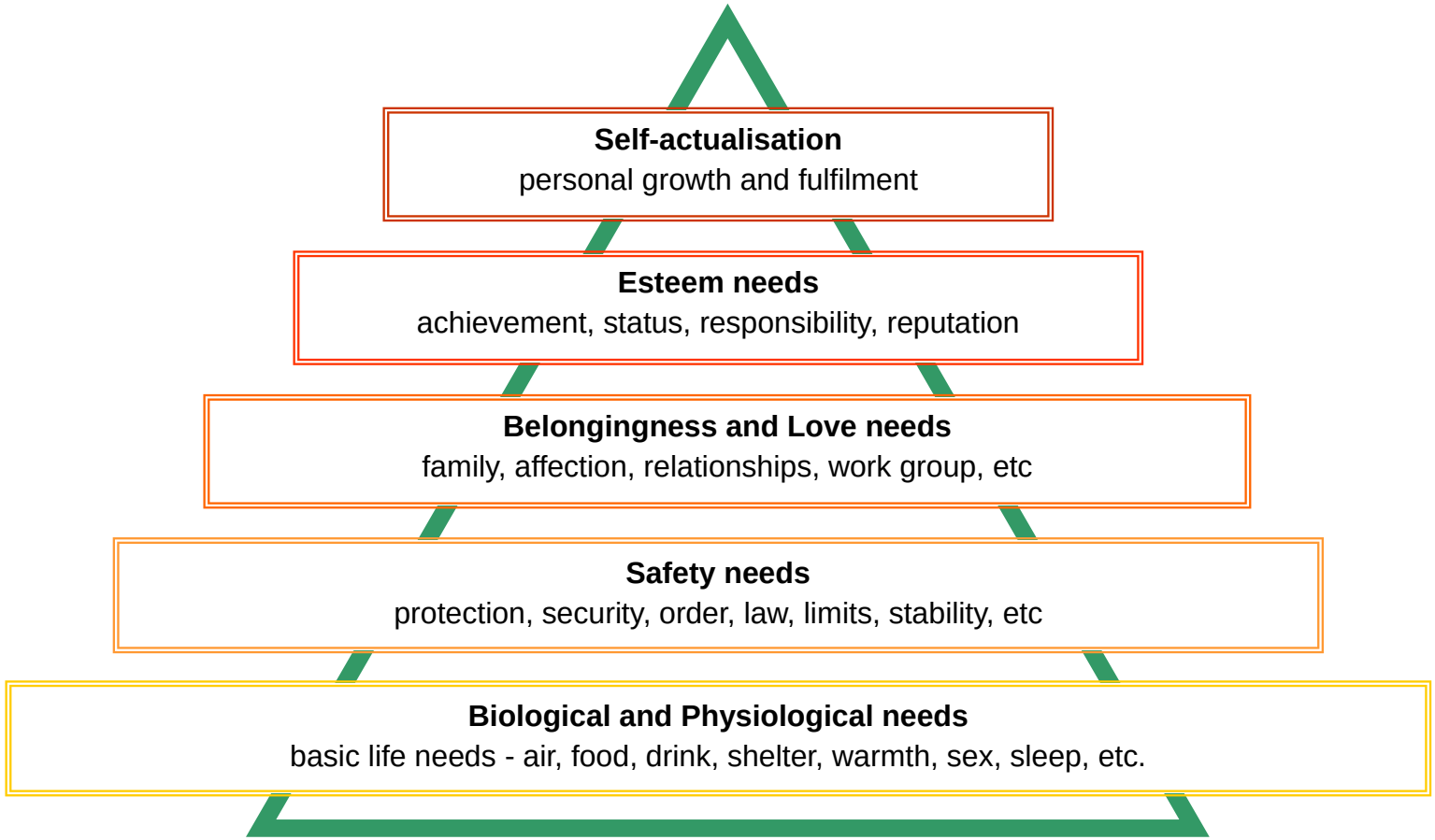
Health and Fitness Goals (don't forget nutrition, exercise, sleep, medical checkups, emotional health)

Relationship Goals (think about: family, intimate relationship, friends, neighbours, bosses, other activists, those you're trying to reach with your message, your opposition, those who are neutral)

Financial Goals (lifestyle and material goals for the next year, in five years, ten years, twenty years and so on)

Whole Life Goals (other important things not included above, think about: creative, cultural, intellectual, spiritual and so on)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (original five-stage model)



© alan chapman 2001-4, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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The Conscious Activist

Activism Area One (see Document 4)**:** _____

1. For each of the following, write one sentence that describes your overall goal as outlined in Documents 4 and 5.

   Activism -

   Health and Fitness -

   Relationship -

   Financial -

   Whole Life -

2. Considering these goals, how does your activism in this area fit in with the rest of your life?

3. What are the highest priority challenges you face to your activism at this time?

4. What concrete and specific things can you do to begin developing a better fit between your life goals and your activism goals?

Caring for Each Other

- Allow each other to say no
- Don't compare commitment (who does more)
- Value each and every contribution
- Support activists to work in areas they enjoy and with their strengthens
- Encourage activists to learn new skills
- Practice and defend respectful interaction
- Value others' families and relationships
- Incorporate health and fitness into our activism (e.g., healthy snacks)
- Support other activists taking a "time out" before they need it
- Share the work equally (or change the goal)
- Encourage people to ask and discuss the "hard questions" about your movement and organization and support them when they do
- Allow for uncertainty
- Celebrate what you achieve
- And...

- **Session 3LCAskills-2, Document 8**

The Rules for Being Human

1. **You will receive a body.** You may like it or hate it, but it will be yours for the entire period of this time around.

2. **You will learn lessons.** You are enrolled in a full-time informal school called LIFE. Each day in this school, you will have the opportunity to learn lessons. You may like the lessons or think that they are irrelevant and stupid.

3. **There are no mistakes, only lessons.** Growth is a process of trial and error – experimentation. The "failed" experiments are as much a part of the process as the experiment that ultimately "works".

4. **A lesson is repeated until learned.** A lesson will be presented to you in various forms until you have learned it. When you have learned it, you can then go on to the next lesson.

5. **Learning lessons does not end.** There is not a part of life that does not contain its lessons. If you are alive, there are lessons to be learned.

6. **"There" is no better than "here".** When your "there" has become "here", you will simply obtain another "there" that will - again – look better than "here".

7. **Others are merely mirrors of you.** You cannot love or hate something about another person unless it reflects something you love or hate about yourself.

8. **What you make of your life is up to you.** You have all the tools and resources you need. What you do with them is up to you. The choice is yours.

9. **Your answers lie inside of you.** The answers to life's questions lie inside of you. All you need to do is look, listen, and trust.

10. **You will forget all this.**

11. **You can remember it whenever you want.**

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Session Evaluation

1. Session name:

2. Facilitator's name:

3. Was the material provided clear?

4. Was the material provided useful?

5. Were the discussions helpful?

6. Were the discussions on topic?

7. Did the facilitator help the group move through the material?

8. Overall, how would you rate this session?

_____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Needs improvement Okay Excellent!

Comments: