

VISION PIVOT | LANGUAGE AS FOUNDATION

ACTIVITY TITLE: Language as Foundation to Vision

OBJECTIVE: To help professionals understand how frequently used words and terms get in the way of deep change.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Pen/Paper

Activity Instructions:

Say: "Our language often reveals how our environment shapes our vision. We take for granted the terms, phrases, and concepts that we gather from our work without questioning them. Yet, these simple terms, words, and concepts shape almost everything we do and the contours of what's possible in our work. The language and terms we take for granted often limit what's possible.

For example, the term Juvenile Offender is very different than court-appointed youth fellow. The first term conveys a system designed to punish young people, and the later term conveys a system that offers opportunities for young people. By simply paying attention to the terms we use, we can begin to reimagine how systems can hinder or promote our deep values. Here is an activity that can help you identify the language you take for granted and the terms you use that may get in the way of deep change."

1. Write down in one paragraph what your organization does and your role in the organization using the common insider language you are familiar with. Here is an example of a paragraph

For example:

I work in a "Non-profit organization" that serves "system-involved " and "at-risk" youth. We aim to "advocate" and "provide support" to youth obtaining employment.

I work for a foundation that addresses poverty in the rural south. My job is to identify grantees who can advance our portfolio in addressing poverty in the region.

2. Look at what you wrote and identify five terms that are taken for granted. For example, you might highlight "non-profit organization," "system-involved youth," "addressing poverty," or "identify grantees."
3. Underneath your initial paragraph, draw a line to separate the rest of the page into two columns. Write these terms in the left-hand column.

4. Reflect on the terms in the left-hand column and think of the opposite term, phrase, or concept. Write this term in the right-hand column.

For example:

Left-hand: "System involved youth"

Right-hand: "Community-supported young adult" or "Family-guided young person."

5. When you've written the opposite word/phrase for the five terms, respond to the following questions:

- What would it take to make the terms in the right-hand column a reality?
- What actions could you and your organization take to move in the direction of creating the vision of the terms in the right-hand column?
- What changes in your normal way of doing business would be required?
- What are 3 things over the next 30 days you could do to make the first step in making this vision a reality?
- How do the terms in the right-hand column feel for you and why does it feel this way?