WORKBOOK

Who Gets to Arrive With Nothing

A four-part audit of belonging, the second domain of spiritual emotional intelligence.

Belonging is not fit, and it is not comfort. The test in this workbook is narrower and harder: can a person be among you, getting things wrong, with nothing to offer, and still be one of yours? Most groups never find out, because almost nobody in them is ever that exposed. This is a way of finding out before circumstances do it for you.

Set aside an hour. Parts One and Two you can do alone. Parts Three and Four require other people, which is the point.

PART ONE — The time you had nothing

Most people have had at least one stretch — an illness, a redundancy, a bereavement, a move, a season of failure — when they could not contribute and had to be carried. Bring one to mind and answer four questions about it.

1. What was taken, or what stopped working?
2. What could you no longer prove about yourself to the people around you?
3. Who showed up? Name them. Not the category — the names.
4. What exactly did they do? Be specific. Most people remember one concrete act far more clearly than any words that were said.

If nobody showed up, write that down too. It is the more common answer than people admit, and it tells you something true about the group you were in at the time.

PART TWO — The two offers

There is a difference between an offer that helps and an offer that performs helping. The test is who does the work.

Let me know if you need anything hands the work back: the person has to work out what they need, decide whether it is fair to ask, find the words, and risk the no.

What do you need first assumes a list, assumes it is long, and asks for one item.

1. Think of the last three times you offered someone help. Write down the actual words you used.
2. For each one, mark who the words left holding the work — you or them.

3. Rewrite each as a question they could answer in four seconds.

PART THREE — The exposure audit

This part is about the group you lead or belong to now, not about you.

1. Who in this group has been visibly struggling in the last three months?
2. What did the group actually do — not what it felt, what it did?
3. Who in the group is currently coasting on past contribution, and would they still be welcome if they never contributed again?
4. Who would notice first if a quiet person stopped showing up as themselves? If the answer is nobody, that is the finding.

PART FOUR — Getting it wrong on purpose

Belonging is most visible in how a group treats incompetence. Not malice — ordinary getting-it-wrong.

1. When did someone in your group last make a visible, harmless mistake — a wrong name, a misread custom, a question that revealed they did not know something everyone else did?
2. What happened in the three seconds after?
3. What would it cost your group to be gentle there instead?

Gentleness is not the same as low standards. The Italians who looked after us were not indifferent to their own language and customs. They were simply unwilling to make us pay for not knowing them yet.

What to do with what you find

One thing, this week. Find the person in your group who is currently underwater and ask them what they need first. Do not offer. Do not say let me know. Ask the question, wait for the answer, and then do the one thing they name. That is the whole assignment, and it will tell you more about your group than any survey.

"Identity is what you can prove. Belonging is what happens when you cannot prove anything and are received regardless." — What Do You Need First?