

Getting AHEAD IN THE WORKPLACE

BUILDING STABILITY AND RESOURCES
FOR A BETTER LIFE AT WORK AND HOME

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For All Getting Ahead Facilitators:

We appreciate your interest in doing this work. We want you and the investigators you are facilitating to be successful by following the proven model.

This edition of *Getting Ahead in the Workplace* should be accompanied by *Facilitator Notes for Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World*, fourth edition.

We strongly recommend that all prospective Getting Ahead facilitators first attend a foundational Bridges Out of Poverty workshop before attending a Getting Ahead training (offered either online or in person).

Please visit www.ahaprocess.com for information about training offerings, participating in national research, and our community of practice so that you can take advantage of the support that is available to you. Thank you.



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Introduction: Orientation Session

You have been invited to join this group by the sponsoring organization because they want to learn from you and engage you in solving problems that are important to you, the organization, and the community. Think of the group as a focus group and yourselves as investigators. Investigators because you will need to examine situations, dig for underlying causes, and develop solutions. Investigators are like detectives or journalists; they don't settle for the obvious or first answer, they work until they get to the truth.

The workbook *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life* was originally written for people in poverty and near-poverty. Most of the thousands of people who have used *Getting Ahead* were working people—sometimes working more than one part-time job or a series of temp jobs, often using supports such as food stamps.

Since it was first written in 2004, a lot more people have felt the pain of economic downturns. The jobs that were lost during the Great Recession were replaced with jobs that pay much less. And now people who were once in secure middle class and working class jobs are struggling to get by.

According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) study “Focus on Inequality and Growth December 2014,” the bottom 40% of earners are slipping behind, not just the poorest 10%. *Getting Ahead* is for the 40% whose futures are becoming less and less certain.

The one theme that seems to capture the feeling of working people who are struggling to make it is instability and insecurity. People are often worried, tired, stressed, doubtful, and disconnected. It could be that the last thing they want to do is talk about it or take time away from dealing with their pressing problems to try to change it.

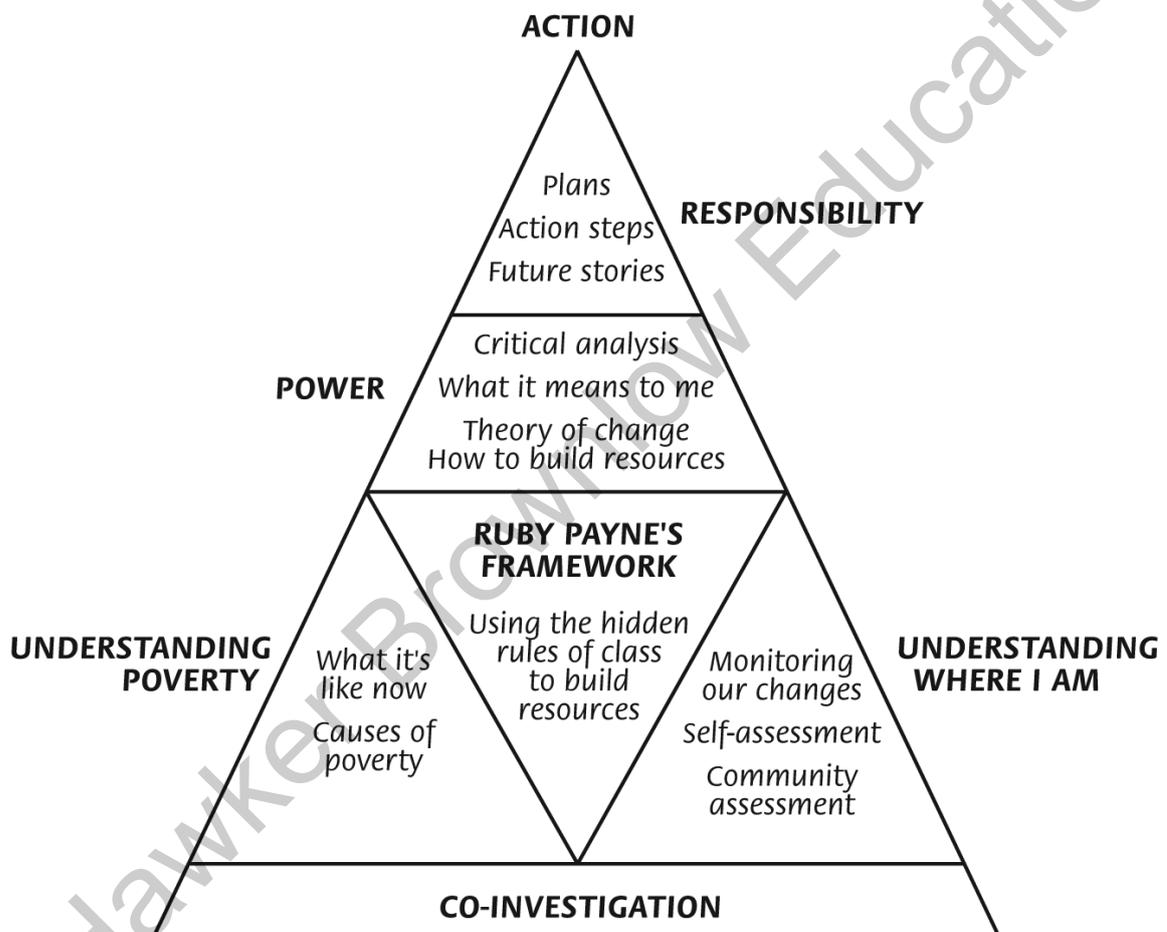
We don't want to add to the stress by using terms that might be offensive. Terms like *poverty* or *lower class* may not apply, even though most people who are statistically in poverty are working and need some support from the government. But terms like *instability* might be a better description of the condition people are experiencing. That term and others like it will be used to describe the situation.

In *Getting Ahead* we study instability through the *lens of economic class** to better understand how our society and the economy work. In groups of 8–12 people, we investigate the impact that living in vulnerable, high-stress, unpredictable conditions has on us and what it takes to move from a just-getting-by world to a getting-ahead world. The idea of “getting ahead” means action and movement—getting ahead of where we are now toward a future that we really want.

* NOTE: All asterisks in this workbook refer to vocabulary words and phrases that will be defined at the end of each section—this Introduction and the 10 modules. Some of these words and phrases may already be familiar, but a number of them have special meanings in the context of this work.

Getting Ahead in the Workplace is part of a complete model that can be used by employers and business leaders to improve their own businesses and lead a community-wide effort to create stable communities. The complete model includes Ruth Weirich's *Workplace Stability*, a book for business leaders and management that offers foundational information corresponding to material found in this book. In addition to training and consulting services, the model creates collaboratives between businesses and community organizations, offers common data collection and evaluation systems, and encourages public/private partnerships.

Note to investigators: If you like creating art, volunteer to make a colorful version of this on flip chart paper.



Getting Ahead is almost certainly going to be different from any other educational experience you've ever had. In Getting Ahead you will be the expert regarding your life, the person with information that others need, and a problem solver in your own life, as well as in the community. No one is going to tell you what to do or think. No one is going to "assess" you, evaluate you, or hand you a plan.

Getting Ahead is about your future story. We're all living out the stories of our lives. Part of each person's story comes from the past, from where and how we live, from the people in our lives, from history, and from world or national events. Just as who we are

today was decided by what we did yesterday, who we'll be tomorrow is decided by what we do today. Whether we know it or not, we're all creating our future stories right now. Getting Ahead is one tool you can use to help create your story.

In 1999 Ruby Payne, Terie Dreussi-Smith, and I wrote *Bridges Out of Poverty*. It was for people who work in social services, healthcare, workforce development, criminal justice, and community development. We spent most of our time presenting our ideas to people in those organizations. In 2001 I began meeting with the working poor and people in poverty to see what they thought of our ideas. It was by listening to them that I developed and wrote *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World*. The people who have gone through Getting Ahead changed our understanding of poverty and showed us what to do about it.

This book for employees uses the learning approach of Getting Ahead, but the content has been modified for the workplace.

Getting Ahead is going to be hard work. No one will be lecturing or teaching in typical ways, which means the learning has to be done by you and the group.

The triangle you see on the previous page is a symbol that includes, in capsule form, everything we'll be doing. The facilitator will make a large copy of the triangle so the group can refer to it as we move through the workbook. Once you've learned what each section of the triangle means, it will be a quick and easy way to tell where we've been, where we're going, and how it all fits together. To understand what we'll be doing, let's start at the bottom of the triangle and work our way to the top.

Bottom of Triangle: Co-Investigation

Everyone in Getting Ahead is an investigator. That includes the facilitator, who doesn't have all the answers and will be learning along with everyone else. The facilitator is guiding the group but is also part of the group. Together, the group will co-investigate every part of the triangle. Sometimes the group will study big issues that affect all people, while at other times we will focus on our own unique experiences.

The idea of co-investigation has been embraced by sponsors (the agencies that organize and host Getting Ahead workgroups) and community groups. Many, like the Bridges steering committees, work closely with Getting Ahead investigators after they graduate. The Getting Ahead grads might say, "We are co-investigating the barriers to employment related to the high cost of childcare." By this they mean that all economic classes are involved in the work.

One of the unique features of Getting Ahead and Bridges initiatives is that the members solve problems by acting as co-investigators. In this way people from all classes have something to offer, and everyone is a problem solver. Co-investigation is the foundation of Getting Ahead work.

Bottom Left of Triangle: Understanding Poverty

We'll spend quite a bit of time investigating economic instability, what it's like for us personally, and what it's like for our community. The investigations will be guided by the following modules:

Module 1—My Life Now

We'll define what poverty is like in our community in great detail, and we'll draw a mental model titled "***Mental Model**** of Economic Instability." And after investigating our personal situations, we'll each make a mental model called "My Life Now."

Module 3—The Rich/Poor Gap and Research on the Causes of Poverty

To better understand economic instability, we have to understand it from different perspectives. This section introduces areas of research that tell part of the story. We'll learn that instability is about much more than just the choices individuals make. Plans made by individuals, organizations, and communities need to take into account all the causes of economic distress.

Center of Triangle: Ruby Payne's 'Framework'

This section of the workbook is based on a framework for understanding economic class that was first described by Dr. Ruby K. Payne in the mid-1990s. Her work has been helping teachers do a better job so that children from poverty do better in school. Payne's hidden rules of economic class can be used to build relationships of mutual respect, help us navigate new environments, and build resources.

Module 4—Hidden Rules of Economic Class

The wealthy, the middle class, and the poor—every group has its own hidden rules. If we decide to take steps to build economic stability, we have to know and be able to use the hidden rules of middle class. If a person wants to get out of the middle class, that person has to know and be able to use the hidden rules of wealth. In short, if we want to understand people from different classes, we need to be able to understand and use their hidden rules when the situation calls for it.

Module 5—The Importance of Language

Language is especially important because it can make or break relationships. Language is used for learning and to resolve conflicts. "Formal register" and the language of ***negotiation**** are powerful tools when dealing with people in middle class and wealth.

Module 6—Eleven Resources

Poverty is defined as “the extent to which an individual does without resources.” It’s not just how much income or wealth we have. A high-quality life and stability come from other resources, such as good physical health, a rich social and emotional life, and more. This definition gives us something to do about the problems we face: Build resources.

Bottom Right of Triangle: Understanding Where I Am

Having investigated economic conditions as they are played out locally, it’s time for us to apply the information.

Module 2—Theory of Change*

Building economic stability means making some changes. Whatever plans you make, they should be yours and not someone else’s. This module shows us how you can take charge of your changes, and it gives you a way to monitor how you are doing.

Module 7—Self-Assessment of Resources

Most agencies evaluate or assess people in some way. In *Getting Ahead*, you conduct a self-assessment of your own resources. This self-assessment is even more beneficial because you can include everything, not just one part of your life, and you do it for yourself, rather than having it done for you or to you. This self-assessment is the foundation for the personal plan for economic security that you will soon create.

Module 8—Community Assessment

In this module we complete the work we began in Module 3 by doing an assessment of community resources. This is the foundation for our plan for community prosperity.

Center Section: Power

In this section we reflect back on everything we’ve learned. When we see the bigger picture, we can do a critical analysis and figure out what it means to us and what we want to do about our particular personal situations. With the information we have, we can gain power—both in our own lives and in our communities.

Module 2—Theory of Change

Here we revisit Module 2. The *Getting Ahead* Theory of Change helps free us from being in the cycle of solving the same problems again and again. When we are in a safe place, have time to think, and can come up with new ideas, we’re able to take charge of our lives.

Module 9—Building Resources

Building resources is virtually the only way to establish economic stability, but it's hard to do. If it were easy, we wouldn't be getting together like this. The thinking we do here will be used when you make your individual plan.

Top Section of Triangle: Responsibility

Module 10—Personal and Community Plan

This is when you develop a detailed plan that will move you toward your future story. This plan develops naturally from everything you've done so far. You will create a "Mental Model of My Future Story," and the group will create a "Mental Model of Community Prosperity."

As you work through the modules, you will develop a "Future Story Portfolio." This is basically a folder of all your work (mental models, worksheets, reflections, and, of course, your plans).

Top of Triangle: Action (Getting Started on Your Future Story)

Information about how Getting Ahead graduates have supported each other is found on the aha! Process website. The workbook also describes some of the support strategies developed by sponsors, communities, and other organizations. Your sponsor will let you know about the supports in place in your community. Those plans may have been developed with the help of Getting Ahead graduates from the first classes. Or, it could be that your group will need to help design the supports for those in the group—and those who follow you.

Taking Part in Getting Ahead

We know that everyone has experiences, skills, and talents that can be used to help others and the community, so we need you to share your ideas, thoughts, and feelings with the group. About half of the learning that you get out of Getting Ahead comes from the content of the workbook. The other half will result from the discussions you have around the table.

For the best possible learning experience, the group members need to be accountable to each other. Your input and the input of the others are crucial to the success of Getting Ahead. You want to be accountable to yourself first, then to the group for attending every session, being on time, doing your share of the investigations, and participating in the discussions.

You are the reason Getting Ahead works. As always, it's going to be an adventure! Best wishes.

Phil DeVol

*** *Vocabulary List for the Introduction***

Lens of economic class: examining poverty and prosperity by focusing primarily on economic information and class issues instead of age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation, all of which are valid lenses

Mental models: pictures in the mind that help us learn quickly and remember longer

Negotiation: ways to reach an agreement

Theory of change: a system of ideas intended to explain how something happens