

Social Policy

Organizing for Social and Economic Justice

WHAT IS ORGANIZING?

By Marshall Ganz

[2005 revision, originally published in 32 (1) SOCIAL POLICY 16 (Fall 2002)]

Marshal Ganz grew up in Bakersfield, CA, son of a Rabbi and school teacher. He was a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Council Mississippi field secretary, spent 16 years with United Farm Workers Union where he learned labor, community, issue and political organizing, became UFW Organizing Director and for eight years was elected to its national executive board. In 1991, he returned to Harvard College to complete undergraduate work in American history and government. He is Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School, has received awards for his teaching, and has published articles in his field in popular and academic journals.

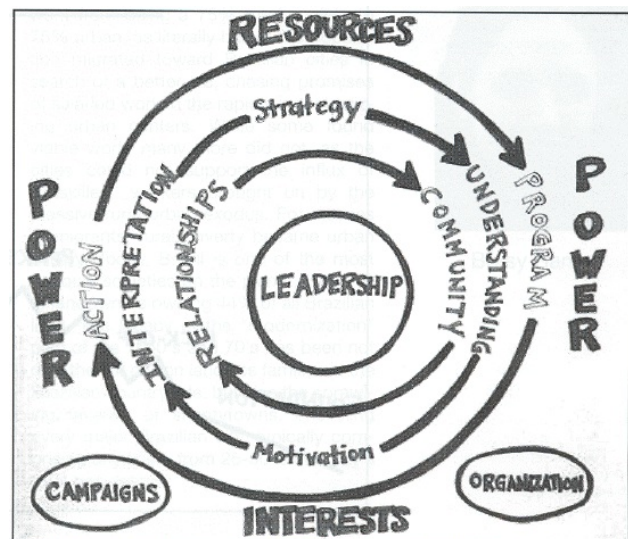
Organizers identify, recruit and develop leadership; build community around leadership; and build power out of community. Organizers challenge people to act on behalf of shared values and interests. They develop the relationships, understanding, and action that enable people to gain new understanding of their interests, new resources, and new capacity to use these resources on behalf of their interests. Organizers work through "dialogues" in relationships, interpretation and action carried out as campaigns.

Organizers interweave relationships, understanding and action so that each contributes to the other. One result is new networks of relationship wide and deep enough to provide a foundation for a new community in action. Another result is a new story about who this community is, where it has been,

where it is going -- and how it will get there. A third result is a strategy envisioning how a community can turn the resources it has into the power it needs to get what it wants. An a final result is action as the community mobilizes and deploys its resources on behalf of its interests -- as collaboration, claims making, or both.

Organizers develop new relationships out of old ones - sometimes by linking one person to another and sometimes by linking whole networks of people together.

Organizers engage people in interpreting why they should act to change their world – their motivation – and how they can act to change it – their strategy.



Organizers motivate action by deepening people's understanding of who they are, what they want, and

why. Mobilizing feelings of hope, anger, self-worth, solidarity, and urgency, they challenge feelings of fear, apathy, self-doubt, isolation, and inertia that inhibit action.

Organizers engage people in articulating why they should act as a shared story of the challenges they face, why they – and others - must face up to them, and where the hope is – rooted in understanding who they are, where they want to go, and why they want to get there.

Organizers engage people in understanding how they can act by deliberating about their circumstances, reinterpreting them to identify new opportunities, and strategizing to make creative use of their resources.

Organizers challenge people to take the responsibility to act. Empowerment for a person begins with taking responsibility. Empowerment for an organization begins with commitment: the responsibility its members take for it. Responsibility begins with choosing to act. Organizers challenge people to understand, but also to commit, to act and to learn how to act effectively.

Organizers work through campaigns. Campaigns are highly energized, intensely focused, concentrated streams of activity with specific goals and deadlines. People are recruited, programs launched, battles fought and organizations built through campaigns. Campaigns polarize by bringing out those ordinarily submerged conflicts contrary to the interests of the constituency. One dilemma is how to depolarize in order to negotiate resolution of these conflicts. Another dilemma is how to balance campaigns with the ongoing work of organizational growth and development.

Organizers build community by developing leadership. They develop leaders by enhancing their skills, values and commitments. They build strong communities through which people gain new understanding of their interests as well as the power to act on them -- communities which are bounded yet inclusive, communal yet diverse, solidaristic yet tolerant. They work to develop a relationship between a constituency and its leaders based on mutual responsibility and accountability.

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