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ABSTRACT- This chapter is based primarily on my own community organizing experiences over 40 years. It is also informed by literature current and classic, and validated by the cumulative field experiences of hundreds of community organizing students. It contains 14 Principles some of which are provocative, some are counter-intuitive, and which are seemingly simplistic but truly complex guidelines to put into action. These are: Principle 1: Effective Organizing Balances Process and Product; Principle 2: Planning Is a Complex Value-based, Sociopolitical and Technical Process ;Principle 3: There Is No Such Thing as “Rational” and “Irrational” from the Perspective of How Problems Are Defined or Resources Are Allocated ; Principle 4: Know and Make Your Case; Principle 5: The “Community” Is Not Monolithic; Principle 6: Know the Decision-Making Structures of the Target System: who holds The Formal power (Authority) as critical actors and who holds Informal power (Influence) as facilitating actors; Principle 7: Do Not Assume that the target You Want to Influence Is a Unified, Monolithic System; Principle 8: Assume Nobody Knows Anything, Anytime; Principle 9: Assume Goodwill and Common Cause on the Part of Those Who control and operate the

System; Principle 10: Assume the Principle of Least Contest. Escalate the Process Only as Needed; Principle 11: There Will Always Be Opposition to Change at Some Level, Be it Active or Passive Resistance; Principle 12: in Making Change from the Inside, Assess Risks Realistically—Identify and Weigh Costs against Gains; Principle 13: Recordkeeping and NoteTaking are Political, not Clerical Functions; Principle 14: The Media Are Unpredictable and A-moral. Proceed with Caution.

This chapter is based primarily on my own experiences over 40 years. It is also informed by the literature reflected at the end, and validated by the cumulative field experiences of hundreds of community organizing students at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College (formerly Hunter College SSW). I address the reader as “you” and assume that you are reading this when you initiate or are being called on as a student or experienced organizer to respond to an issue, address an agency or community need or are training and teaching others these principles. The phrase “target of change” is used to mean whichever body (a person, agency, or a system) you are trying to influence. These principles are not laid out in a linear order. Several of them need simultaneous consideration before taking action; others are interactive and overlap.

PRINCIPLE 1: EFFECTIVE ORGANIZING BALANCES PROCESS AND PRODUCT

A key assumption is that there is never sufficient time, staff, and other resources to involve people in making change (the process) and accomplishing a specific goal or task (the product). Both are important, so the question is how to operationalize and balance them. Process means that there must be enough discussion to achieve a consensus to move ahead and keep the participants engaged. This does not mean unanimity, but rather a “sense of the body,” informally or formally

(by vote) determined. Where there is disagreement, there must be a mechanism to ascertain its intensity, and whether moving ahead means a permanent division or dissolution. How much dissension is inevitable and acceptable? You need enough process to gauge people's interest in and commitment to the task. Involvement of people creates a sense of investment and can ultimately lead to a sense of ownership of the product as well as a transformative process of working together in its own right. You need time to build trust between the group and you as well as among participants. That can be done by working on the task while reflecting periodically on the process: "How we are doing?" "Whose voices do we still need to hear from?"

The solutions to managing time so that you achieve the product without sacrificing the process are to (a) calculate a more complete and realistic timetable; (b) modify expectations if necessary; (c) prioritize what is essential with those involved; and (d) ascertain who else can assist with the project. Organizing means planning for contingencies, allowing more time than appears necessary, following through and paying attention to detail.

PRINCIPLE 2: PLANNING IS A COMPLEX VALUE-BASED, SOCIOPOLITICAL AND TECHNICAL PROCESS

Planning is not just about data collection, goals, and timelines or who can write a clear, internally consistent proposal. Rather, planning, as a part of organizing is a sociopolitical as well as a technical process. Power and resources inform the way you and your constituency define the problem and select the solutions. But underlying planning is a value base or ideology which includes basic assumptions about why a problem exists, why needs are not being met, why conditions are not optimal, and ascertaining who or what is to "blame" for the problems identified. Social work values are informed by social and economic justice and democratic, participatory decision-making. Power means understanding that *somebody* (with a small or capital B), that is,

some individual or group has the ability to make decisions about how resources are allocated and whether to implement the program or change a policy. Resources include creating, increasing or redistributing assets (social and economic capital) that address the planning outcomes. Hence, the strategies you select for influencing the decision makers to achieve your goal are done within a social-political and value based context.

Here are some examples, substance abuse was identified as a national problem in the 1960s when it spread beyond the ghetto to middle-class America; mental retardation “came out of the closet” when President John F. Kennedy disclosed that he had a mentally retarded sister. While middle-class parents had been organizing and planning services for their children throughout the 1950s, mental retardation became a national priority because the president used his office to create funding opportunities for additional facilities and programs. On the other hand, HIV/AIDS did not become a national priority when first detected because President Ronald Reagan did not publicly address the problem until enough visibility and pressure was placed at his doorstep in 1986. It took organized social action of groups like ACT-UP together with publicity about a Caucasian boy Ryan White who contracted AIDS because of a blood transfusion that led to additional funding for prevention, education, and treatment with the involvement of consumers and providers.

PRINCIPLE 3: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “RATIONAL” AND “IRRATIONAL” FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOW PROBLEMS ARE DEFINED OR RESOURCES ALLOCATED

Many times as part of the process of identifying problems, someone may say that a particular system or structure or policy needs to be changed because it doesn't make sense; “It's irrational.” When someone makes such a statement, consider reframing the question by asking that

person or group instead: “To whom does it make sense?” “For whom is it functional and working?” “Why hasn’t that policy been changed, if it isn’t working for your constituency?” You will usually uncover reasons why conditions or attitudes have remained in place, why a need wasn’t met, why people have resisted change, or why a new program wasn’t implemented. Usually the case does make sense from the perspective of those who maintain that system or oppose the change. It is essential to consider reasons for the resistance to change. For example, a new program can be an implied criticism of the existing system. It may mean that a group perceives they will lose power if that program is created. In other words, it’s not irrational for groups that may be affected adversely to attempt to maintain the status quo. Understanding this allows you to identify the covert as well as overt reasons for resisting change and develop strategies to decrease resistance. This does not mean that there aren’t instances where situations don’t change because of mistakes, arbitrariness, inertia, time or cultural lag, or misinformation. Not everything is deliberate and conscious. Analyzing the status quo which seems irrational can be done by “peeling the onion,” addressing the stated reasons one at a time until perhaps the underlying rationale, whether coherent or not, becomes evident.

Understanding that there is no such thing as value-free planning and organizing provides an opportunity to identify and explore the values and beliefs that inform the problem definition, which in turn shapes the proposed solutions that emanate from that definition. It allows you to understand why your group’s beliefs and proposals may be seen as irrational to others.

It is important to understand that “rationality,” when it means utilitarian, is itself an ideology, one that is usually associated with capitalism and pragmatism. Often the term “rationality” is invoked to contrast it with “ideology,” as opponents of a plan will state that the proposers are not being rational. You need to consider whether evoking “rational” solutions is

being used to prevent deliberations that include values such as fairness, equality, and justice, or if it is being used to divert or discredit those who have a progressive value base. Nevertheless, you need to be open to listening to opposing viewpoints and understand and explain their attitudes and behaviors without necessarily excusing or exonerating their conclusions. To take the example of homelessness, the problem was ignored by government and the public until a combination of deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals and gentrification of formerly abandoned and neglected neighborhoods resulted in hundreds of thousands of people without a place to live in the 1970s. However, the solutions to homelessness are informed by values and ideology, not just on the basis of need or data alone. Those who perceived it as a housing problem advocated for the right to shelter and housing; those who perceived it as a mental health problem advocated for services; those who perceived it as a civil liberties problem advocated for personal choice and the right to be left alone; and those who perceived it as a criminal justice and morality problem advocated for incarceration, involuntary commitment, forced work, and other social control measures. These were all “rational” solutions from the perspective of the proposers.

Nevertheless, political and ideological arguments about rationality should not obfuscate your need to be logical, systematic, and problem-focused. It is necessary to anticipate the steps, activities, people, and resources needed to produce a coherent plan from beginning to end, implement it, and evaluate it, and also to identify contingencies beyond your own and your constituency’s control. Analytical skills as part of “rational” planning are essential.

PRINCIPLE 4: KNOW AND MAKE YOUR CASE

Assessments are a critical part of community organizing and planning practice. It is essential to ask the question: “How do you know there is a problem?” “How do you know there

is a need for a particular intervention?” “Who asserts that there is a problem/need?” “Who is defining the problem/need? Why at this time?” “How serious and pervasive is the problem?”

As noted in principles 2 and 3, defining the need has an ideological as well as factual component. For example, if it is reported that 30 percent of the students in a particular school or community did not complete high school, the questions to be posed should include: “Is that a problem?” “For whom is that a problem?” “What are the solutions?” Answers to those questions will depend on several factors and values: whether the norm in that community (however defined) is to complete high school, whether it is desirable to complete high school, whether that figure has gone up or down in the last several years, how that figure compares to other schools, and the alternatives to and consequences of not completing high school. Remember, the way a problem is defined will determine the proposed solution(s). If you report that 30 percent of the students dropped out of school last year, there is already an implied causation. “Drop out” implies a willful act on the part of the student or neglect on the part of parents or the community. Consider the difference when you say that 30 percent of the students were “pushed out” or “turned out” last year. The latter implies the problem lies primarily with the school system.

Once you define the problem, the next step in the planning process is to document the problem. This entails gathering quantitative and qualitative data, sometimes called empirical (objective) and perceptual (subjective) information. The needs assessments that use both are most effective; they present statistics as well as humanize the issue. Documentation includes identifying assets and deficits. Prepare the materials using multi-methods and media-- in writing, verbally, and visually. In making your case use numbers, narration, surveys, interviews, case studies, anecdotes, and secondary data analysis. Language matters. How one phrases a term also affects how it is received; e.g. when homeless people are welcomed as “guests” rather than

identified as “the homeless;” it makes a difference. Calling someone an ex-con versus a formerly incarcerated person, makes a difference in how the message is perceived.

Next, consider the ways to convey that information to make the strongest, most convincing case. First you need to identify the various audiences who need to know about the problem. How do you reach the different communities and constituencies? How do they best receive information? Communicating with the decision makers may be different from communicating with supporters and allies. To reach the public at large, you may need different means and messages from the ones used for reaching clients and constituencies. Here are just a few of the many steps to consider: Will it be in the form of a letter or a report or an article in a community newspaper or a story on an ethnic radio station? Who writes and signs it? Who will review the format and content? Remember, presentation is as important as the content. *Pithy* and *poignant* are key words in persuasive communication. Make it brief with emotion! Lengthier background information pieces should be available without inundating the various publics. Is there a public or private forum where the data should be presented? Who will be there? Who else should be invited or know about the event? What materials should be presented (e.g., fact sheets, photos or videos of the conditions, testimonies of people directly affected, experts and influential people in the field)? Who will follow up? Outreach is a strategic campaign of many steps, not just an activity.

For example, several years ago, a director of a public health clinic helped create additional funding for dentistry for low-income adults by making the case about the depth and breadth of the problem. He launched a public awareness campaign showing enlarged photographs of decayed mouths of adults. He took them to many public forums in that community and then to the press. When asked the age and country of the people with this severe dental disease, no one

could guess that they were New York City residents 20 to 40 years old. This created public sentiment for increasing coverage of preventive dental care for low-income populations communicated to the decision-makers, the City Council and the Mayor.

PRINCIPLE 5: THE “COMMUNITY” IS NOT MONOLITHIC

In engaging in a change effort or trying to build the influence of your constituency, the organizer must pay attention to historic tensions, intra- and interpersonal conflicts and inter-organizational and inter-disciplinary differences as well as structural inequalities that prevent people from working together. Community has multiple definitions (geographic, symbolic, identity, interest/issue-based). The tension is that for some political and strategic purposes it is important to identify a general constituency (e.g. Latinas, seniors, Asian-Americans); for other purposes, it is important and almost inevitable to recognize that within that large category there usually are differences by other identities such as gender, country of origin, culture and other attributes which can divide the group if unaddressed. Organizers must balance unity and diversity.

If the aim of organizing is to build a diverse constituency or coalition that is multicultural or includes segments of a community that have been excluded, additional time and thoughtfulness must be brought to the fore. Historic and current differences by class, race, gender, ethnicity, status, or sexual orientation have to be factored in from the beginning. Experience has shown the difficulty of including excluded groups after a process of building an organization or coalition has begun. Consider the groundwork that has to be done “on the way to the first meeting.” Acknowledge and anticipate heightened sensitivities if new partners from different backgrounds are coming together for the first time, or if groups that distrust each other are returning to a new table.

The relationship between an organization that is leading a campaign (whether at a grassroots or coalition level) and the constituencies it wishes to reach are the important factors. Is the organization trustworthy? Is there a track record of competency? As you begin outreach, the reputation of your organization counts. Are the organization and organizer from that community (however defined) or from outside? The organizer is not a free agent. The auspice and background of the organizer is critical in the role he/she plays in organizing a campaign.

There are benefits and limitations to both the insider and outsider position. An inside organization has a track record and already has its allies and (most likely also) detractors; an outside organization (e.g., a university, a foundation, a corporation) especially if it is mainstream and powerful, may or may not have a positive track record with that community. A person with the same identity (or one or more identities—e.g. gender, race, education) as the constituency may be accepted more easily, but an outside person with a different background may bring new ideas, connections, a fresh perspective and may be able to bridge internal divisions.

PRINCIPLE 6: KNOW THE DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES OF THE TARGET SYSTEM: WHO HOLDS FORMAL POWER (AUTHORITY) AS CRITICAL ACTORS AND WHO HOLDS INFORMAL POWER (INFLUENCE) AS FACILITATING ACTORS

Understanding and utilizing the concept of power; which *body* (person) or *Body* (group, structure) can make the change you want is an essential organizing component. It is important to analyze the two faces of power—authority and influence. The “critical” actors are the actual legitimate decision makers, those with the sanctioned formal authority to grant the request, make the change, and allocate the resources. The facilitating actors are those who can influence the critical actors

because of their relationship to them. Many times, people don't know who has the formal power because it is hidden, or because the system is complicated. The best approach is to do a power analysis beforehand. Who are the people and organizations who control the systems you want to influence? For example, the authority in a hospital may be vested in the board of trustees and the medical boards. State health departments have the authority to grant or suspend an operating license to that hospital, has the ultimate formal power over the hospital—although they may not readily use it. The authority to evict a tenant rests with a landlord, but the local or state government may create regulations to curb their absolute power through regulations or the courts.

The formal system of authority is usually found on some version of an organizational chart. These are usually in the form of a diagram that shows the chain of command, who reports to whom in the hierarchy, who controls certain activities, and to whom they are accountable internally. Don't be surprised if the organizational chart is difficult to obtain, even within your own organization. Many organizations don't want to reveal the formal authority; they may conceal differences between those designated to make decisions and those who actually make them. Often, groups will be told that the organizational table is in transition or not current.

Knowing someone's formal position can help decide the level of intervention in the system. If someone says they can't make a certain decision, you want to ascertain whether they are being accurate or "buck passing." It is essential to ask that person, "Who can make that change or grant the request?" Those persons you initially approached may become a facilitating actor in the process of making change if they reveal their relationships to the critical actor(s). There are many instances where organizers and their constituencies are at the wrong door as a result of ignorance or deceit.

There is also a need to know and use the informal structures of influence. Influence is power acquired by people when they do not have the authority to make decisions. Clearly people are able to amass power to make change by virtue of being able to influence the decision-making bodies. There are many ways groups can be powerful when they can't command, "Just do it!" People have power through the positions they hold, their past history of action, longevity in a system, perceived effectiveness and expertise, connections to the decision makers, ability to control a large constituency, characteristics such as persistence and willingness to take risks. There are powerful "subordinates" in organizations because of certain functions they perform or access they could provide e.g. janitors, secretaries, technical staff.

Organizing power by using strategies of influence is an essential skill set. Organizers use these strategies to bring pressure to bear on the structures of authority to convince them to make the needed changes, fund programs, reallocate resources, and so on. Different tactics will be needed for confronting public/government and private/corporate power. Depending on the issue, many changes can be made at lower levels in both public and private bureaucracies. It is not always necessary or wise to start with or go to the top.

PRINCIPLE 7: DO NOT ASSUME THAT THE TARGET YOU WANT TO INFLUENCE IS A UNIFIED, MONOLITHIC SYSTEM

Whether you are on the inside or outside, look for internal strains, divisions, and vulnerability within the system, organization, institution your group wants to influence. Seek friends and allies from within. Most organizations try to create a culture of unity; at the very least, they attempt to present a unified front to the public. However, that doesn't mean that there is unanimity among staff as to their positions, policies, or programs, especially in large bureaucracies. In analyzing

the system you are trying to influence, it is essential to ascertain who on the inside of that system (besides you if you are part of that system) feels similarly about the issue as does your group/constituency? Those inside people can provide important pieces of information, including the identification of the critical and facilitating actors. They know about the organization's past and current policies, procedures, and culture.

Conversely, those insiders may need your (outside) group for support, legitimacy, and resources, and even want you to pressure them to do their job more effectively (Principle 12 provides more detail for those on "the inside"). The model of exchange is pivotal. You provide them with the capacity to be more influential on the inside, and they can become an ally.

The expose of the conditions at Willowbrook State Institution for the Mentally Retarded in New York City in the early 1970s provides a case in point. It was a long struggle and went public after several years of professional staff and families trying to convince those in charge to improve the horrendous conditions. Many courageous social workers, resident psychiatrists, and other staff inside the institution worked with advocacy and family groups on the outside by providing necessary information to them and eventually to media and elected officials. When then young investigative reporter Geraldo Rivera turned his cameras on the site, it was because people on the inside obviously had blown the whistle. This resulted in a transformative change in the system of care. Working behind the scenes is tantamount to Principle 10.

Some caution must be exercised in attempting to exploit the complexities or tensions with an agency or target system. Although outsiders may rally staff (and clients) initially, it may also create difficulty in negotiating later on in the process because the conflict has been escalated and widespread. It may prevent at least some on the inside from cooperating for fear of antagonizing their leaders and managers. You may need to protect their cover and also respect their need for a

low profile. Clients may fear losing their program even if it has deficiencies. The principle is to proceed deliberately, allowing time for the people on the inside to persuade others of the need to grant the request or meet the demand (further discussed in Principle 9).

PRINCIPLE 8: ASSUME NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING, ANYTIME

For political and strategic purposes, you must work from the assumption that those in charge of the systems you are attempting to change are ignorant of the problem or need. Therefore, your first step is to define and document the need in a way that gives the decision makers a chance to respond, even if you believe that those in control already have the requisite information on which to act. For example, assume the Mayor of a large city does not know that thousands of homeless people live on the streets every night. In reality, that information has appeared in various media. Nevertheless, it apparently has been ignored or dismissed. So, once you present the problem and possible solutions, the ball is in their court. If they really did not know the extent or seriousness of the problem, then this is a genuine opportunity to influence and negotiate change by presenting the necessary information and making a cogent argument as discussed in Principle 4.

If they already knew about the problem but didn't act, they are more apt to respond when the need is directly presented in an organized and persuasive manner. You may have given them a chance to save face if the need was hidden. Don't underestimate the value of this human principle. In the best scenario, they will do something about the issue (i.e., clean up the park, fund a program, pass legislation, allocate staff time for an activity, etc.). In the worst scenario, they will delay or oppose the solution openly. If they don't respond, your group has greater legitimacy for moving ahead and escalating the pressure—from presenting additional information to using more intense and persistent persuasive tactics including taking the issue

public or threatening later actions. The important point is to document all the steps taken in this process, and keep the relevant people, constituencies, and organizations informed and involved. This should include the constituency itself, as spokespersons, leaders, and as representatives of the population.

This principle also applies to the constituency itself without being patronizing. Educating them about the root causes, the power structure, and the gaps between their knowledge and actions is an important role for the organizer. It must be done in a way that respects their views even if misinformed. Presenting data from real life can counter stereotypes and myths.

PRINCIPLE 9: ASSUME GOODWILL AND COMMON CAUSE ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO CONTROL AND OPERATE THE SYSTEM

This may seem to contradict Principle 7, but in reality, both tensions have to be managed at the same time—both are truths. There are unhappy employees who may be willing to provide “inside information” and even speak out, but experience has shown that line and support staff, professionals included, are usually loyal to their place of employment. Assume that most people want to do a good job most of the time (based on the human relations theory of management). The reasons for loyalty are many. It may be because of the pride they take in their own work or because they understand the many obstacles impeding major changes inside their system. It could be out of a sense of vulnerability, or their fears of being outspoken, or their uneasiness with proposed alternatives. They may have been coopted, or they may have made the system work for them. Certainly a need for stability and predictability may outweigh change and uncertainty.

Even if you uncover disillusionment, fear, or inertia among certain staff, caution must still be exercised in publicly criticizing the whole agency or system. Staff or clients may agree

with the problems being raised; however, they do not automatically want those problems uncovered in public. Time and again, organizers have underestimated the sense of workers' and clients' feelings of hurt or anger at perceived attacks on their system or agency. Even when the outside group attempts to separate or not blame all workers or supervisors equally, there may be resistance to align themselves with an outside or even inside activist group.

As noted in Principle 6, it is vital to gauge the tacit or active support of at least some people on the inside and identify the extent of their loyalty. This will help you assess whether those in control of the institution/agency have the power to use a “we/they” division to create rifts between those on the outside and those on the inside. To use one case example: when a neighborhood health organization began criticizing a local hospital for inadequate care, the organizers assumed the hospital workers, most of whom were from the same background or came from the same neighborhood, would join in their public meetings or issue a statement of support. Private conversations afterwards revealed that many staff were angered that no one had asked them their opinions about their issues or strategies. A “divide and conquer” strategy ensued, with the hospital director firing the few sympathetic workers who joined with the health organization while promoting a few others who were then coopted. The rest of the staff remained silent. This came as a total surprise to the organization seeking change and undermined its effectiveness.

Therefore, in beginning any campaign with an organizational target, it makes sense to assume that the system is not intentionally out to harm or hurt the clients/constituency, but rather attempting to do the job they were given. Hence the value of framing the problem in consensus terms, at least initially. It should not be presented or perceived as a “win/lose” scenario (see principle 8). The goal of a campaign can be stated in ways that recognize that everyone has a similar mission; for example, they want to help children, provide quality health care, have a

clean environment, keep a neighborhood safe, and so on. Alternatively, your group could convey its understanding of the difficulties that the agency/system has in meeting the needs of its clients or constituency. Then your strategy becomes one of demonstrating and documenting to the leadership, staff, the public, and clients, how the agency/system is interfering with or defeating its own goals or mission. Where possible, appeals should be made to their self-interest as well as to their altruism. “What we are asking is good for you and good for the community!”

Assuming common cause does not mean letting people off the hook or giving them a “pass.” As conveyed in Principle 8 it means alerting them to the inadequacy or deleteriousness of their program or policy in a systematic sustained manner.

Principle 10: Assume the Principle of Least Contest. Escalate the Process Only as Needed

Following from Principle 9, in order to have credibility and to gain the broadest support, your group should not antagonize the targets prematurely or unnecessarily. Intervene just high enough to gain recognition and ultimately to achieve your goals. Strategies of influence exist on a continuum of social change from consensus to contest tactics. These range from presenting information in persuasive ways, to negotiation and bargaining processes, to offering incentives to more conflictual tactics including threats, to using social action strategies of mass mobilization, protest, resistance, and disruption.

In general, you should not begin with adversarial and confrontational tactics until those with the authority haven been given a chance to change voluntarily going along with Principle 8. On the other hand, you cannot assume that information alone will be sufficient to produce major change. A strategic question to answer is: “What will it take to have the issue seriously addressed?” A well-thought-out strategy will determine the process and timing of moving from the

least to more conflictual strategies assuming you have some control over these factors. The cogent questions are: “How long have you been waiting for change to occur? How long can you wait; that is how serious are the consequences of inaction? What is your group prepared to do next? What resources and contributions would be needed to move to the next step? What are the consequences of escalating the tensions?” Who will you lose and gain along the change continuum?

In intensifying and escalating the pressure on those with the authority, you must pay attention to ethical considerations. You will need to build support for your effort, preferably before and not just during a campaign so you don't alienate (again, unnecessarily or prematurely) potential allies who are either on the inside or on the outside. You need to build your credibility before your group goes above or around someone or exposes someone publicly (the principle of “no surprises”). It is essential to have factual information and ethically engage in a democratic decision-making process with your group and its allies. Among the essential ethical practices based on social work values, is whether your constituency is informed about the tactics in which they are being asked to engage. If there is a chance of provocation or serious repercussions, participants should have the ability to make an informed choice in advance, even at the risk of losing some of them, to the extent that the risks can be anticipated. The organizer's role is to anticipate the consequences as noted in Principle 11. A key question to pose is: what's the worst that could happen if...?” Organizers cannot promise their constituencies immunity from the consequences of their actions, for example, you should never use absolutes, “Your landlord can't evict you” or “Your boss can't fire you.” Even when this may be legally correct, a person can still be harmed emotionally, financially, and even physically from confronting powerful targets of social change. Collectively, people need to know the consequences of moving from lawful

protest to civil disobedience. This is especially important around tactics that have legal ramifications, for example, events that need police permits, trespassing laws, and so on.

Saul Alinsky wrote in his “means and ends” essay that an end justifies the means. Organizers informed by social work principles need to seriously weigh violating undemocratic deceitful tactics—and never without consulting colleagues, constituencies and allies. The related principle should be “no surprises!”

PRINCIPLE 11: THERE WILL ALWAYS BE OPPOSITION TO CHANGE AT SOME LEVEL, BE IT ACTIVE OR PASSIVE RESISTANCE

It is essential to assume that *somebody/Body* will always be opposed to the change your group wants to make, and therefore to anticipate a range of responses to your actions. You may hear such things as “It can’t be done,” “We’ve tried it before and it can’t work,” “We can’t afford it,” and so on. Identify the opposing side’s arguments by playing out alternative responses to the problem and by testing the waters with the facilitating actors who can influence the decision makers. Analyze who may be opposed to the identified solutions in advance as much as possible and why they may be opposed.

Effective organizers develop strategies to counter or neutralize opposition where they can, as well as identify those elements in the change process that they or the group cannot control. In identifying supporters, it is essential not to write off potential allies, even if they have been adversaries on other issues. Short of those intense ideological battles where there is little room for compromise (e.g., abortion rights, affirmative action, etc.), appeals for support can be made to most sectors of society. Arguments will usually be different for different groups. You may appeal to such factors as reputation, pride, and professional expertise to gain or keep people

on the side of your proposed change. Ask supporters for their advice or would be adversaries to put themselves in your constituencies shoes.

Sometimes the opposition may not be apparent because the implications of the change may not be visible until the change process is under way. Don't assume that all the opposition is external or conversely that it is being orchestrated from the target of change. Remember that communities and systems are not monolithic. There may be as much division and difference within a community as between "the community" and the target of change (see Principles 5 & 7). Sometimes the opposition may be passivity or inertia rather than visible and articulated differences. They may delay or avoid a response in hopes of outlasting your group.

To the extent possible, your group should have one or more responses, anticipating resistance. For example, one tactic of the opposition is to ask, "So how would you fix it?" or "What would you do if you were in charge?" Understand that groups engaged in social change are not obligated to come up with solutions because they identify an issue. In a democratic society, citizens have the right to raise questions, make demands and hold those in charge accountable for outcomes. The latter have the authority, resources, and expertise to run the show. Your group has a right to point out that things aren't working and there must be a better way.

However, you are more likely to be credible and effective if you have thought through the arguments for why the current situation has to change and how it can be changed. If the response to your request is, "We don't have the funds," your group may be able to counter with "We know where you can get them" or "We know from where they can be taken." When the response is, "We can't do that" your group has to ask "Who says?" Ask for the written policies and procedures when the rejection is a legal or regulatory one.

There may be circumstances in which your group may be strong and invested enough to pose alternatives to the current situation and even strive to replace those in control or create an alternative entity. This takes a long term commitment with its own set of limitations when you are “in charge” as opposed to holding those with the authority accountable for their actions.

Another tactic of the opposition is to divide and conquer or discredit a group. This has happened when groups left out of the decision-making process begin to challenge the authority of those in control. Those in charge may question your own or your group’s credibility and representativeness. It may attempt to exploit differences within a community or coalition, or “play favorites,” bribe, or isolate. Hence, out of the range of the opposition, your group should strategize the range of alternatives available. It is important to identify who your spokespeople will be and what message you want to convey even if you can’t always control all the events. Establishing some procedures and protocols in advance is essential. It is always helpful to have some counter-expertise, meaning trustworthy allies and supporters who are willing to use their professional knowledge or political experience to challenge the opposition on its own terms. Given the elitism and privilege of those in positions of authority, having professional or powerful people on your side lends weight to your arguments, although relying on this strategy does little to change the structural inequalities of a system. You must come to agreement on the following: Is your group willing to negotiate? What is the bottom line? What happens if the target says no? What happens if the target says yes? What happens if they ask your group to come up with a proposal or to join a task force? There is no one right or wrong answer, except the principle of anticipating opposition and being prepared for differential outcomes.

PRINCIPLE 12: IN MAKING CHANGE FROM INSIDE, ASSESS RISKS REALISTICALLY—IDENTIFY AND WEIGH COSTS AGAINST GAINS

You can successfully engage in major change efforts from within your own system or agency, if you strategically assess your role and are prepared for possible controversy and consequences. All the Principles in this document apply here. There are several positive aspects of initiating or participating in change from within. By being on the inside, you already have a foot in the door. You have the legitimacy to ask for and obtain information; you know who makes decisions and how the system “really” works, that is, its informal as well as formal structure. You know the history of past efforts to engage in change, and most importantly, presumably you have some credibility, longevity, and allies within that structure. Working to improve an organization from within is not disloyal. It may be the only ethical course to pursue as noted in the NASW Code of Ethics. Timing and tactics are part of the equation as to when and how to act—not whether. There are two conundrums in working from within however. Those on the outside may not know of your efforts behind the scene and might assume you’ve been coopted; on the other hand, working with others outside the system or going outside (i.e. whistleblowing) may produce reprimand or worse. The seriousness and pervasiveness of the issue will help guide your actions.

Therefore, it is essential to play out for yourself and with your constituents the generic question posed above: “What’s the worst that can happen if . . . ?” You have to ascertain the support you have and to anticipate the amount and intensity of the opposition to minimize your isolation or ostracism. There are times when hard choices have to be made as to how far to take a social change project. To determine the type and extent of action to be undertaken, you should consider pragmatic things such as feasibility of success, and factors such as the seriousness and

pervasiveness of the situation. Is there an imperative to act? Is there a sense of urgency? Is the timing right? Is there a window of opportunity? What are the consequences of inaction?

There will be some risk to every action taken. It is important to anticipate actual or perceived repercussions (as per Principle 11) from peers, line or support staff, supervisors, managers, and clients. Therefore, if a major change that affects a department or the whole agency is needed, or if the required action includes an implied criticism of your agency or system, you need to employ Principles 8, 9, and 10.

Note that there is a long continuum from doing nothing to getting fired. The importance of keeping your own house in order cannot be stressed enough. Rarely will you be directly sanctioned for your organizing activities. You are more likely to be called to task for not doing your paid job. Pay attention and don't be caught off-guard when engaged in internal organizing, no matter how justified. Staff are reprimanded for not turning in reports on time, for leaving early, for not following up. To minimize any criticism directed at you, consider taking on additional responsibilities. Demonstrate your value to your employer and the clients.

If you are advising or part of a group of people working on the inside, it is essential neither to overpromise protection nor to underestimate repercussions. Organizers can never assert that nothing untoward will happen to those participating in a change process. On the other hand, it is essential to uncover any perceived fears, even if not grounded in reality, so they can be addressed by you or the group. People are often caught short when they haven't thought through Principle 11.

PRINCIPLE 13: RECORDKEEPING AND NOTETAKING ARE POLITICAL, NOT CLERICAL FUNCTIONS

If information is power, than obtaining and recording information is a political process. The persons or group in charge of those processes may be the most powerful players in their organization or system. Experienced organizers always want to be involved in those processes although what and how records are kept should be identified and decided by the group's leaders.

Documentation includes taking minutes, corresponding with people, recording actions and inactions, keeping people on track and reminding people of past decisions through letters, memos, e-mail, and written records. Technology allows for myriad methods of storing data, but the bottom line is to have them available in multiple ways and permanently stored. Taking minutes is a critical skill, value, and process. Minutes help gauge and set the tone for the way a group makes decisions as well as what decisions were made and by whom. Documents are accountability tools; they help keep processes and outcomes transparent and keep the people involved, focused, and honest. They also provide a historical account, preserving the institutional memory, and their availability allows disputes about past actions to be resolved. Therefore the role of archivist should be identified to organize and store and help determine access.

You can assess the seriousness, effectiveness, and cohesiveness of a group/organization by whether minutes are taken and reviewed and how participants are engaged in their production and review. Experience has demonstrated that if there are no minutes of a meeting or group process, chances are nothing will change. Experience has also shown that those in charge of a system or the target of change (the critical actors) will often resist the formal recording of or sharing of minutes. In those instances, you must create a paper trail that includes agreements and timetables and note-taking shared among all constituencies.

Minutes can also be a diagnostic tool to assess an organization's culture, structure and history. When organizations spend an inordinate amount of time refuting minutes, you can infer that there is distrust and dissention that will result in an inability to move ahead. When minutes are viewed as *pro forma* without much attention paid to them, you can infer that there is not much investment or involvement of its participants in the organization.

It is important to prepare someone in the group to take notes of strategic meetings, regardless of whether the person in charge agrees to have notes taken. If possible, at least two people should attend all important meetings or be conferenced in and be ready to report on the session verbally and in writing. If there are no minutes taken, those who attended should debrief and designate someone to write a letter or send an e-mail thanking them for meeting and stating their understanding of what took place and what was agreed to. Highlight any disagreements and next steps. The same thing applies with strategic phone calls. If there are minutes taken by those who called the meeting, those attending should ensure that they receive a copy and have the ability to review and comment on them. It should not be surprising that there are memory lapses (intentional or not) and different interpretations with regard to issues addressed, and promises made. Without a record, there will be little or no progress.

PRINCIPLE 14: THE MEDIA ARE UNPREDICTABLE AND AMORAL. PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Given the importance of communicating with a variety of different constituencies and publics, understanding the role of the media as a powerful sector of society, and knowing the types and functions of various media outlets are essential parts of the organizer's job. The variety of media outlets today are growing and changing rapidly—electronic media, blast e-mails and faxes, blogs in addition to the more traditional print media (newspapers, magazines, mainstream and

alternative presses), plus broadcast media— TV (network, cable, public), and radio. Organizers and designated leaders in the group need to know the basic tools of these various outlets and the functions they play in society, in your community and in the sectors you wish to influence. Given the importance of outreach campaigns in creating awareness and action for your issues, and the role technology plays in making as well as recording “news,” your group may want to retain a media consultant for a fee or on *pro bono* basis. If there is a college nearby, chances are they have a media studies or journalism, film and video departments for you to consult.

Communication is an essential skill and facet of an organization’s life today.

As part of an outreach campaign, the first step is to identify whom you want to reach and then decide how they are best reached. You need to know how the constituencies you want to influence receive their information. What mass media do they read, watch or listen to? What ethnic and community media do they value? How do they use the internet and social media? Who are the media personalities that influence them? Second, is to identify and cultivate a person in each of those outlets used (*outlet* is a generic term for all the different types of media). Who writes or talks about your topic or issue? Be proactive with them. Send them background materials about your organization. Invite those reporters or opinion-makers to your organization. Ask them to meet with your constituency. Become their expert on the issues and know who else is. Determine who may be “more friendly” and less friendly to your organization and/or issue.

How do you craft a message so that the media important to your organization will want to publish or cover the issue? How do you convey your story in compelling ways? At this juncture, organizers and most media part ways and hence the “a-moral assertion.” Organizers (social workers, human rights and social justice advocates) usually want to publicize stories that are serious and pervasive. The story you want told probably involves many people who are in that

circumstance, for example, people who are suffering from what the government or a corporate body is doing—or not doing—to them. The target of change may be providing inadequate or denying services; they may be cutting back on opportunities and pathways, limiting resources, and so on. You usually want to show universality of an issue and convey the numbers of people affected. For example, “Ms. Jones is one of millions of people losing her food stamps.”

Most media on the contrary regardless of political bent want to show just the opposite. They cover the unusual, the bizarre, and the extreme. If there are thousands of people collecting an inadequate amount of public assistance, or if the child welfare system discriminates against parents of color, they will feature the “welfare queen” or the one tragic case of major child abuse. Journalists, regardless of whether they are liberal or conservative, whether the outlet is a tabloid or an intellectual magazine, do not generally portray the usual or typical. They don’t cover the good news as often as they do bad news. They are prone to exaggeration and hyperbole; they like to cover conflicts and dissension. The slant is usually toward the sensational. This does not infer that the media is non-ideological. Different outlets have their political slants reflected in their editorials and opinion sections. But experience has shown that regardless of the reputation of the station or newspaper, they may not cover “your story” the way you want it to be conveyed. Therefore, the organizing principle when the media comes knocking is that you cannot control the outcome. So the decision your group must make is whether to reach out to the media and still make every effort to educate them in advance where possible. It helps to provide succinct background material; easy to read, but substantive at the same time (See Principle 4).

The media as a sector of a society has the same biases as other institutions in the US. They usually reflect the “isms” in some fashion regardless of their politics. Recognition of this fact will temper expectations of the outcomes. There are many examples of media coverage that reflect

institutional inequalities. In general, with few exceptions, they will generally focus on the professional rather than on the client or constituency. They will seek out males more than females; they will gravitate more to the Caucasians rather than people of color. Therefore, practically speaking, if you want to downplay those disparities and to assure a unified and accurate message, prepare spokespersons in advance. Agree to channel the media to designated people and provide everyone with a few sound bites, should they be asked. If relevant, try to pair professional and indigenous leaders so that new and undervalued (by the media) voices are up front and visible. Learn to handle the pressure and avoid the seduction of becoming an instant celebrity.

If the coverage you received portrays the story differently from what you wanted, write a letter to the editor and to the author and publisher or owner of the outlet. Let your own constituency and allies know what you attempted to convey. Research has shown that letters to the editor are the second most read section of a newspaper (after sports) and are highly read in magazines as well. It may be difficult to get an article into the *New York Times* or a story on national network TV, but there are hundreds of smaller outlets in your community.

CONCLUSION

These principles are meant as guides to action and will apply differentially, depending on the auspices of your agency, the goals identified, the political and economic context of the community, issue, and the system driving the organizing. Organizers cannot control all the variables, but acquiring these competencies along with your commitment to the long haul go a long way. Remember to incorporate these four H's in your work that reflect critical social work values and traits: humanity, humility, honesty and humor.

WEB SITES

Association for Community Organization and Social Administration. <http://www.acosa.com>.

Community Toolbox. <http://www.ctb.ku.edu>.

Education Center for Community Organizing. <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/ecco>.

Comm.Org-The On-Line Conference of Community Organizing

<http://www.comm-org.wisc.edu>.

Resources

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