

Four Roles Relating to Change

by George Lakey with thanks to social activist and strategist Bill Moyer

INEFFECTIVE

Believes charity can handle social problems, or that helping individuals can change social structures

Focuses on casualties and refuses to see who benefits from victimization

Provides services like job training which simply give some people a competitive edge over other people, without challenging the scarcity which gives rise to competition

EFFECTIVE

Assists people in ways that affirm their dignity and respect

Shares skills and brings clients into decision-making roles

Educates about the larger social system

Encourages experiments in service delivery which support liberation

EFFECTIVE

Uses mainstream institutions like courts, city hall, legislatures to get new goals and values adopted

Uses lobbying, lawsuits, elite networking/coalition-building for clearly-stated demands, often backed by research

Monitors successes to make sure they are implemented

INEFFECTIVE

“Realistic politics”: promotes minor reforms acceptable to power-holders

Promotes domination by professional advocacy groups that are top-down, patriarchal and are more concerned about organization’s status than the goal of their social movement (such agencies can undermine democracy in movement and disempower the grassroots)

Identifies more with power-holders than with grassroots

Does not like paradigm shifts

helper

advocate

rebel

organizer



INEFFECTIVE

Promotes anti-American, anti-authority, anti-organization rules and structure

Attached to an identity as lonely voice on society’s fringe

Promotes change by “any means necessary”

Uses tactics without realistic strategy

Has victim attitude, behavior: angry, judgmental, dogmatic

Uses rhetoric of self-righteousness, absolute truth, moral superiority

Can be strident: personal upset more important than movement’s needs

EFFECTIVE

Protests: says “no!” to violations of positive American values

Employs nonviolent direct action and attitude, including civil disobedience

Targets power-holders and institutions

Puts problems & policies in public spotlight

Uses strategy as well as tactics

Does work that is courageous, exciting, risky

Shows in behavior the moral superiority of movement values

EFFECTIVE

Believes in people power: builds mass-based grassroots groups, networks

Nurtures growth of natural leaders

Chooses strategies for long-term movement development rather than focusing only on immediate demands

Uses training to build skills, democratize decisions, diversify and broaden organization and coalitions

Promotes alternatives and paradigm shifts

INEFFECTIVE

Has tunnel vision: advocates single approach while opposing those doing all others

Promotes patriarchal leadership styles

Promotes only minor reform

Stifles emergence of diversity and ignores needs of activists

Promotes visions of perfection cut off from practical political and social struggle