



19 Power Principles for Progressives

1. Progressives need to remember core concepts, values, and/or principles drive individual and group behaviors (or perceptions) in one direction or another. To ignore concepts like how values and morals influence thinking (science is rock solid on this) is to engage in futile activities. Values are at the base of all human thinking, decisions, and communications. Values and morals connect with other brains better than policy positions. Fighting injustice is about values and morals.
2. Most people are motivated primarily by self-interest. It is the glue that binds political organizations and movements. This is a general indicator of whether people will be attending meetings and how long they will participate in a group. As a creative progressive leader, you are always trying to figure out the group's/people's common and self-interest. Differences exist between casual self-interest and passionate self-interest.
3. Institutions and people holding power over others are rarely as united as they first appear. If you can't get a person or institution to support you, do everything in your power to convince them that it is in their best interest to stay out of the fight. If possible, create scenarios where they (your opposition) want to compete against one another.
4. When planning your strategy tactic, consider potential outcomes and impact. Ask whether one of the outcomes is the building of power for your cause. Determine whether this new level of power can be applied to future tactics. Ask what are we accomplishing with the selection of a tactic or specific action (e.g. protest rally)? Progressives can ill-afford to confuse activity with accomplishment.
5. Start your process of strategy development from that instant just before victory. Working backwards, do your best to figure out the steps that will lead to that moment.
6. It is useful, as part of any creative organizing campaign, to advocate for a specific positive as well as to oppose a negative. Example: we are against the Republican healthcare plan. We also support Medicare for all US citizens. Provide a better alternative. See item number one.
7. The more complicated strategy tactic, the harder it is to carry out, and the less likely that it will be successful. You can ask a few people to do a lot of things, particularly if they're a committed activist. If you want hundreds of people to participate in the campaign, you need to ask the great majority of them to do one thing, and only one. Provide support for easy engagement into the action.
8. You need to believe that human beings, no matter how much they hate each other, can somehow find some common connection. To do that, leave behind your stereotypes. Yes, donkeys can work with elephants.
9. In real life and in progressive campaigns for justice, the participants are always partly united, partly divided. It is up to you, the organizer, to reinforce unity and to compensate for the divisions among people with whom you work.

10. Don't ever let anyone tell you demonstrations were only effective in the 1960s that in the 21st century we need to find other, less confrontational ways to make their voice heard. However, today's progressive campaigns need parallel, simultaneous actions: 1 protest in groups on an issue parentheses short-term close parentheses semicolon to take actions to build the power of your organization long-term. More people and actions mean increased power for progressives.
11. Be certain the people you work with truly understand the potential impact that could result from a specific action. Planning any action individually or as a group calls for reviewing unspoken assumptions, risks (assessing how things go wrong), and unintended consequences.
12. A vitally important leadership skill is their ability to frame issues and ask questions of a group in ways that makes people not only want to answer them, but also to think deeply, and in unexpected ways about what the answers maybe. An "in complete" analysis of a problem (and the related questions), can lead groups to unproductive meetings, directions, and/or actions. Always identify the weakness of your opposition before selecting an action.
13. Personal relations can be the glue that bind a group of people. Fun and laughter really are therapeutic, and hope does heal. Help others to feel the fun or tone at meetings. The tone of your meetings and relationships can determine whether people return for future actions, engage everyone and make them feel a part of the group in that their voices are heard
14. One for the leaders- the "more confident" you are of yourself, your expectations in others, and campaigns, the more you must struggle to avoid the arrogance of thinking you know what's right for other people. This leader's blind-spot can ruin the effectiveness of a group and their actions. This is often an unspoken reason why people don't return for future meetings or actions.
15. When an institution (or organization) has a responsibility to everyday people and fails to do its job, one option is to build another organization to challenge the first one to do the right thing. The other option is not only to use it as a base for a campaign to "take over" the original organization. Taking over an existing organization is a shorter, and faster, route to change.
16. Organizers are often unjustly accused by the powers to be or establishment of inciting violence. That's a lie, and it needs to be put the rest. It's just a tactic the opposition uses to describe progressives and your organization. Example: protesting the Republican Healthcare. Protesting Injustice is a service to the community and a moral thing to do.
17. Progressives always need to help with current actions. Baby Boomers need to help tomorrow and remember every generation in the 21st century will need to fight for their freedom. It's quite easy to slide from helping organize a community or campaign to be coming its leader or spokesperson.
18. Understand how to change your curves and who can drive it. Institutions create change in the shortest amount of time, organizations create change in the second shortest amount of time, person-to-person actions will always take the longest amount of time to achieve the desired amount of change. Example: anti-smoking bans. Anti-Vietnam protests. Legalize marijuana movement.
19. Progressives can count on current mass media (including WPR and NPR) to intentionally (or not) modify your message. They do this by filtering information, changing information, and/or using only the opposition's information. This is a major problem for protest actions. The mass media by its nature and reporting practices limits the power or influence for your organization.