

Non-stereotypical Skills for Activism



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Stereotypical forms of activism

- Many people think activism involves:
 - Waving a placard and shouting angry slogans in a protest march
 - Distributing flyers to the public
 - Taking part in endless committee meetings
 - Standing for hours with a collection bucket to raise funds
 - Writing letters to politicians
- You should do those things *only if* they appeal to you
- If you do things that you don't enjoy then:
 - You will find them tedious and frustrating
 - You will quickly give up
- Whatever activism you do should be enjoyable and rewarding:
 - So you will look forward to doing it
 - And you won't get stressed or burn out

Non-stereotypical forms of activism

- Don't limit yourself to stereotypical forms of activism
 - Instead, focus on your innate skills or activities you find pleasurable
 - Find ways to use them in activism
- Examples:
 - Are you good at teaching or explaining things?
 - A lot of activism involves educating the public. Could you do that?
 - Do you have good writing skills?
 - If so, could you write leaflets, articles or books about an activist cause?
 - Do you enjoy photography?
 - If so, think of ways these skills might be useful to an activist group
 - Are you good at decorating?
 - Could you help redecorate the headquarters of an activist group?

Non-stereotypical forms of activism (cont')

■ More examples:

- Are you good at cooking?
- Could you cook lunch when an activist group has an all-day meeting?
- Do you have dreams of being a film director?
- If so, could you make a documentary relevant to an activist cause?
- Do you like gardening?
- Could you brighten up the activist headquarters with flowers?
- Could you grow a particular type of flower in large quantities:
 - To sell in a fund-raising event?
 - To use in a dramatic way at an activist event?

Example: Ciaran McHale

- Ciaran's skills include:
 - Understanding complex issues and re-explaining them more simply
 - Writing training courses (mainly about computer technologies)
- Those skills are not stereotypical activist skills
- Ciaran used those skills as follows:
 - He read a lot about people who have changed the world (activists, entrepreneurs, inventors, and so on)
 - He noticed they shared many skills and faced similar obstacles
 - He wrote this training course to explain those skills and obstacles
 - He made the training course available on the Internet
- Result:
 - Ciaran wants to help *other* people acquire skills to change the world
 - Ciaran wants to do this on a massive scale

Example: Richard Stallman

- Details are given in the *Two Kinds of Power* chapter of slides
- Richard Stallman felt proprietary software was immoral:
 - He did not have “power over people” to force companies to make their software non-proprietary
 - He realized he had “power to help people” by writing his own non-proprietary software
- Richard’s non-stereotypical activist skill was programming:
 - “I asked myself: what could I, an operating-system developer, do to improve the situation? It wasn’t until I examined the question for a while that I realized that an operating-system developer was exactly what was needed to solve the problem.”

Example: Joanna Russ

- Joanna Russ' skills include:
 - Being an author (mainly science fiction)
 - A deep knowledge of literature
- She was frustrated that literature written by women is often dismissed as being inferior to literature written by men
- Through research, she identified several historical ways women's writing had been suppressed
 - She documented this in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*

Relevant quotes

■ Relevant quotes:

- Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.
— Howard Thurman (1899–1981), American author, philosopher, theologian, educator and civil rights leader
- Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart to give yourself to it.
— Buddha
- I sing sometimes for the war that I fight
'Cause every tool is a weapon — if you hold it right.
— Ani diFranco in her song *My IQ*

Summary

- Don't feel constrained by stereotypical forms of activism
- Find ways to help the world by doing things that you like doing