

What is Organizing?

by Marshall Ganz

Marshall Ganz grew up in Bakersfield, CA, son of a Rabbi and school teacher. He was a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee 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, understanding 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 action as the community mobilizes and deploys its resources on behalf of its interests--as services or as advocacy.

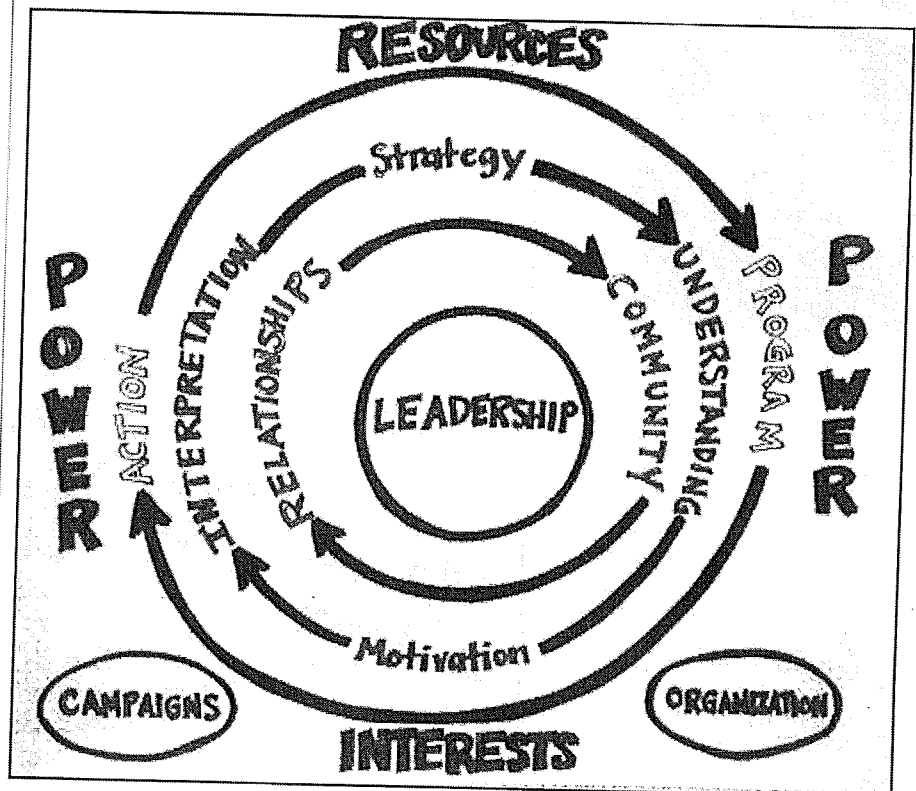
Organizers develop new relationships out of old ones--sometimes by linking one

person to another and sometimes by linking whole networks of people together.

Organizers work with people to interpret why they should act to change their world--motivation, and how they can act to change it--strategy.

Organizers motivate action by deepening people's understanding of who they are, what they want, and why. Mobilizing feelings of anger, courage, hopefulness, self-worth, community and urgency, they challenge feelings of fear, despair, self-doubt, isolation, and apathy that inhibit action. They help people articulate their values as a shared story of challenges they face, why they must face them, and why others should help--rooted in who they are, where they've been, where they want to go.

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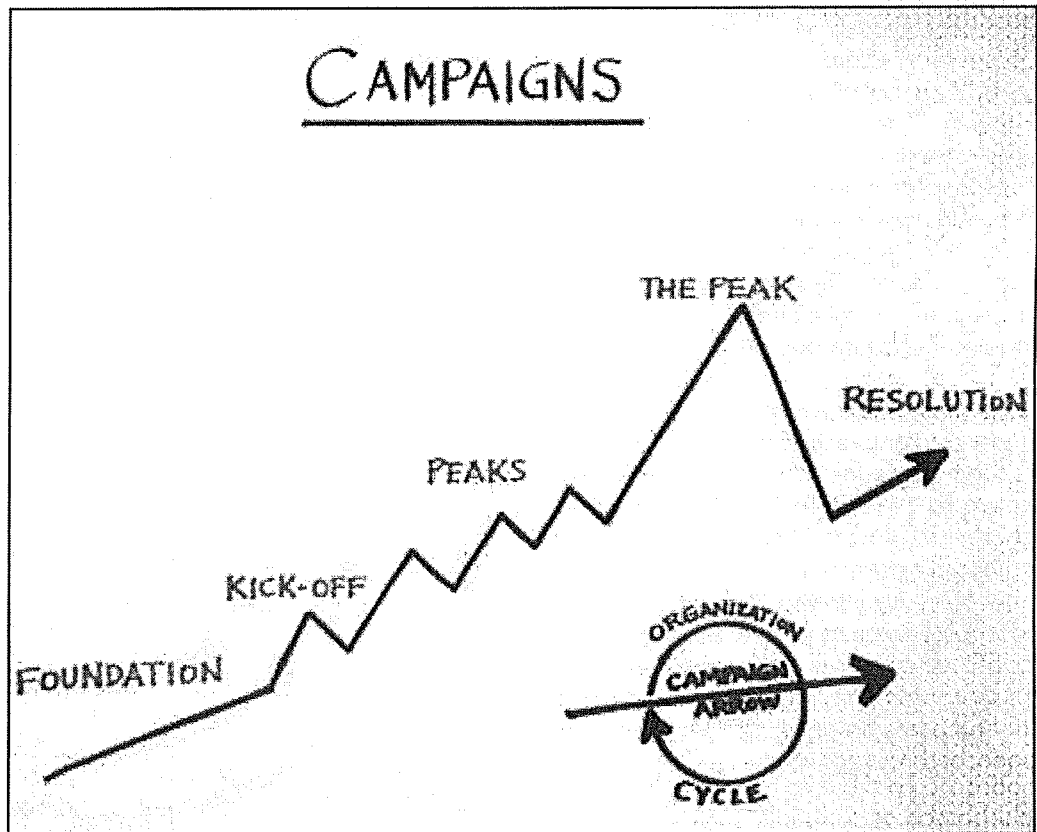
Organizers deepen understanding of how to act by creating deliberative opportunities for people to strategize how to turn resources they have into what they need in order to take advantage of opportunities to get what they want.

Organizers focus on the taking of responsibility to act. Empowerment for a person begins with taking responsibility. Empowerment for an organization begins with commitment: responsibility its members take for it. Responsibility begins with choosing to act. Organizers challenge people not only to understand, but also to take responsibility, to choose, to make commitment, to act.

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 campaign work 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 can gain new understanding of their interests as well as power to act on them - communities which are bounded yet inclusive, communal yet diverse, solidaristic yet tolerant. They work to develop relationships between a constituency and its leaders based on mutual responsibility and accountability.



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