Practical Advice For Addressing Needs With Your Neighbors

Authors: CB, LB
Partially plagiarized from: MK, RC

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Boundaries

Saying No / Responding Slowly

1) Take time before replying to requests; you are entitled to take time to consider
2) Be comfortable saying no
3) If you say yes to everything you’re asked to do, you won’t have enough time for everything you want to do. You may also burn out.
4) There are multiple ways to “say no”
    a) Give me N days/weeks/years to think about it.
    b) Can you give me more information?
    c) What would you need to do this without me?
    d) Can you post about this in HOCS?
    e) Can you ask X about this?

Set boundaries for yourself; support people in setting boundaries for themselves

1) Only commit to things on behalf of someone else if you have talked to them about it and know that they are okay with it
2) When you've overextended, regrouping enables you to be effective in what's important and makes space for new work & emergencies
3) It is worth setting limits for yourself even if you feel like you *could* surpass these limits right now. This will give you room to be flexible moving forward and prevent burnout. It will also help you get more comfortable saying no.

Do by not doing

1) Organize with enough "space" so that you can respond to new, unexpected situations as they arise with resources to spare and a relatively fresh head. If you're doing all that you possibly can, you won't have bandwidth to evaluate the bigger picture nor capacity to handle emergencies.
2) If you stop doing something, you give other people the opportunity to step up and fill the role. So you don't even really know the "capacity of your collective" until you stop doing things

Flavors

1) Different organizers have different "flavors" -- interests, strengths, passions, niches
2) This is a good thing, and when working with people, seek to understand and amplify their flavors
3) You can choose which of *your* flavors you want to focus on and strengthen

Hyperlocal organizing

1) Focus most of your effort on a small geographic area. Say "no" to most requests for help outside of that area
    a) Not everyone needs to do this, but not enough people are currently doing it
2) Work with a large enough community such that a poor relationship with one/some people does not jeopardize your project, but small enough that you have regular interactions with the same people often enough to build relationships with them.

"Smallest Winnableism"

1) Do the smallest winnable version of the thing
2) No action is too small
3) Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly
    a) Anything worth doing is worth doing embarrassingly badly
    b) With some caveats (see next item)

4) Make yourself trustworthy and dependable
    a) Make commitments and follow through
    b) Only promise what you know you can deliver

“How to make things winnable”

1) The likelihood of something getting done is directly proportional to how explicitly you engage with the thing
    a) If you want to help someone get activated as an organizer, talk to them one-on-one, not just in a large group, so you can actively listen to their needs and interests
2) If you are inviting someone to work on a project, ask the person if they are willing to do a specific, small task to get started, rather than leaving it open ended

“Withiness”

1) Work towards doing things with people rather than for people
2) Work towards supporting people in doing things with each other
    a) Work towards the work not being dependent on you
3) Ask unhoused folks what is important to them and work on that
4) No heroes - in order for this project to be successful, it can't rely on one person to be a hero who does everything themselves. Only a large and growing group of comrades can accomplish success in our ultimate project
    a) Growth of a collective isn’t always desirable -- more collectives are preferable to a single large collective
    b) If you're doing much more of a particular task (spending money, participating in supply delivery) than anyone else in your collective, this is a sign that you're over-extending. Regroup & distribute these responsibilities.

Examples of things to do

1) Visit an unhoused person (with a buddy if you’d like!) and ask them what their needs are. See if there’s something you can fulfill

Things to avoid

1) Spending any energy on thinking about or working with the State
    a) Electoralism
    b) Asking the State to do things, or asking the State not to do things
    c) Spending time trying to understand “why” the State does things
        i) E.g., don't waste time searching for "why" the cops, parks department workers, etc. are evicting folks. They're doing it to put folks on a constant death march and immiserate them. Asking cops questions is probably only useful in terms of wasting the cops time so that they can't harass unhoused folks

2) Vetting
    a) The bar for whether someone organizes you is whether they are willing to organize with you
3) Being insensitive to risk that you aren't sensitive to because of privilege
    a) E.g., If you're less likely to be harmed by the State because you're housed, don't get into confrontations with the State that may jeopardize the safety on unhoused people (certainly not without their enthusiastic consent)
4) Using jargon
    a) Jargon has its place - when communicating with someone about a concept that you are both already familiar with
    b) It can be a good exercise to be explicit about what you're describing instead.
        i) E.g., "Hosting a lunch to introduce ourselves to people in the community" rather than "mutual aid"
        ii) E.g., "Providing manual labor to people who are building wooden platforms for their tents to rest on" rather than "mutual aid"
    c) This can help you to realize whether you are doing the thing that you purport to be doing, and force you to relate the details of what you're doing to why and how you're doing it
    d) Example of jargon: "Mutual aid", "power imbalance", "harm reduction", "direct action", "gatekeeping", "solidarity", "stand with", "showing up", "relationship building"
5) Missing the forest for the trees
    a) Don't get so caught up in details that you lose sight of why what you're doing is important in the first place, or what other things you could be focussing on instead
6) "Trolleyism"
    a) Don't spend time deliberating over a particularly bad hypothetical outcome that isn't likely to occur (like the Trolley Problem)
    b) Notable exception: It is very helpful to role-play conversations you are anxious about having, so that you can feel more confident in having these conversations
7) Armchair perfectionism
    a) Not taking any action because you're concerned that you haven't found the perfect action to take in this scenario yet
8) Believing that you've got the right idea and all you need is more people.
    a) Example: "The way to success is getting more and more people doing exactly what you're doing"
9) Bad parochialism
    a) i.e. only addressing a particular type of need because it's convenient for you, rather than being responsive to the community you're working with

Be intentional about how you spend your time

1) Set a small number of goals with homies and review them periodically

2) Using a calendar (with Trello) for task management allows me to have a clear idea of how I'm spending my time, encourages me to be mindfully engaged in the task at hand, and is proof that I'm allocating my time as intentionally as I can.
3) Scheduling and regularity makes everything easier; planning makes things smoother

Take care of your mind and body

1) Making an effort to engage in relaxing activities is a crucial part of my daily planning, so as to ensure that I'm fresh for the work to be done and do not counterproductively fret over all the work to be done and whether it is being performed optimally

Excerpts from The Lean Startup relevant to effective community organizing

1) "I've come to believe that learning is the essential unit of progress for startups. The effort that is not absolutely necessary for learning what customers want can be eliminated."
2) "This is one of the most important lessons of the scientific method: if you cannot fail, you cannot learn."
3) "Measuring runway through the lens of pivots rather than that of time suggests another way to extend that runway: get to each pivot faster.
4) "Some unfortunate companies wind up following this strategy inadvertently. Because they are using vanity metrics and traditional accounting, they think they are making progress when they see their numbers growing. They falsely believe they are making their product better when in fact they are having no impact on customer behavior. The growth is all coming from an engine of growth that is working-running efficiently to bring in new customers—not from improvements driven by product development. Thus, when the growth suddenly slows, it provokes a crisis."
5) "too many innovation teams engage in success theater, selectively finding data that support their vision rather than exposing the elements of the vision to true experiments, or, even worse, staying in stealth mode to create a data-free zone for unlimited "experimentation" that is devoid of customer feedback or external accountability of any kind."

Plagiarized from EMT Training

1) "Recognize that, because of the nature of your job, you participate in extreme encounters with tragedies that are not the norm for the majority of the population."
2) "Recognize that your training has largely been focused on scene safety related to elements that will cause you physical harm. You likely haven't been trained to protect yourself from psychological harm."
3) "Understand that the stressors you experience at an incident may not immediately impact you. The effects of psychological trauma may not show for days, weeks or longer."

4) “Be aware of loss of productivity, sleeplessness, burnout, avoidance, fatigue, agitation, depression, thoughts of hopelessness and suicide ideation in yourself and in your associates and seek help if you have trouble getting over any of them.”