

These notes are organized by sections of the book.

Getting Started

- Characteristics of great organizers
 - Rough, completely honest and direct, reverence for nothing but the fundamentals of organizing
 - Some fundamentals are applied or not depending on context
 - Others transcend context: starting where people are, the centrality of relationships, the transformative power of confronting the people keeping you down
- Power
 - We organize to transform potential power into actual power
 - Potential power is everywhere. People ripped off by payday lenders are individuals until organized, then they are a power bloc
 - Power is the size of your membership, the time, money and relationships members are willing to risk, the relationships an organization has forged, the funds it has raised, the capacities created, its moral standing in a community, other
- The organizer
 - Gets people to come together to create the change they want
 - Unifying issues are always there, but we don't talk about them or don't have faith anything can be done
 - The organizer agitates us to take on battles we never imagined we could, listens and empathizes, provokes and inspires, strategizes and coaches, spurs us to act, teaches us to plan, helps us digest, and more
- More than activism
 - Activists are active in the fight, doing things themselves
 - Organizers develop the power of others within the fight
 - By developing others, you not only help to create change, you change souls
- Seize Openings
 - Have an eye for when a change in conditions inspires people to rethink old arrangements

Meeting People

- Starting where people are
 - Is the greatest organizing superpower
 - Don't start where you are or with what you believe
 - Organizing is powerful because we assemble people who don't agree on all things. And now we are in a room together
 - We help people take the jump from where they are to their potential

- Listening
 - Listen to learn, not to confirm
 - This shows respect and interest
- Suspend judgement (while listening)
 - We have no idea what people have been through in life or just that day
 - Having more of us move into the uncomfortable broadens who we can reach and the scope of what we can change
- Uncover motivations
 - Of the people in power and the people we are organizing
 - Not just what they want, but why
- 1:1
 - Absolutely fundamental
 - This *is* the work
 - Both people share, draw meaning from each other's journeys, find a point of connection that could lead to building power together
- Keep it simple
 - Complexity loses people quickly
 - People in power often make things complicated so they seem like the experts
 - We are the experts of our realities
 - Start simple, build in more complexity over time if needed

Campaigns

- Get into fights to win
 - Most people in tough situations don't believe they can win
 - Winning builds belief and hope
 - Small wins are building blocks
- Find widely and deeply felt issues
 - We find these issues through listening
- Cut the issue
 - Organizing works when we turn unwieldy problems into actionable solutions and pressure specific people with the power to enact them
 - Raising awareness about large, vague problems like poverty or climate change is good; but without cutting those large issues down into actionable solutions and targeting specific people, little changes, and people fall away
 - Attack a smaller cut of the issue, then a larger one, then an even larger one...
- Organize toward north stars
 - Got to have them, even if they'll take generations to reach
 - Stepping stones to get there along the way could be victories won, leaders developed, relationships developed, etc.
- "Power concedes nothing without a demand." -Frederick Douglass
 - We are not asking for kindness or charity
 - We are demanding something that we deserve from specific people in power

- Sometimes using the word "demand" can be counterproductive, but that is the spirit, and members need to feel that in their bones
- Power analysis first, strategy second
 - Power analysis of your organization, the community or workplace you are organizing in, your state, your state legislature, etc.
 - The strategy to win sits inside the answer to these questions about the people you want to move: What do they have power over? Who has power over them? What do they most want? What do they most fear?
 - ***Know that there will be backlash and be prepared for it***
- Get to the table
 - The table will need to be reorganized/repopulated, but we need to get there first
- Tell the story
 - Early and often
 - Protagonist (us), antagonist (bad guy), initial action (bad guy did stuff), conflict (we fight back), hanging in the balance: how it will end

Action

- Direct action
 - Take the crisis to the person who created it
 - Non-violent, assertive public act
 - Takes place outside of cultural norms, outside of the rules and the box (which were created by others to keep us penned in and to protect power and the status quo)
 - Brings the crisis to light, lays bare the truth for all to see
 - We are no longer the only ones agitated, now the people who created the issue are too
 - Victories in direct action include not just winning but restoring dignity:
transforming not only relations of power but the human spirit
- The action is the reaction
 - We are concerned about the reaction to our action
 - The more clear we are about the reaction we are looking for, the more strategic we can be about our actions
- Action is the lifeblood
 - It has magnetism that draws people, money, and media
 - There are times to pause and reflect/analyze, but actions spark reactions and breathe life into orgs and members
- Question the be nice rule
 - When trying to get a meeting or create change, those in power may say, have patience, send a nicely worded letter to the committee, etc.
 - This is often misdirection and buying time. We are then forced into direct action which may not be perceived as nice (but either is the issue created by the people in power)

- Prepare, act, digest
 - Repeat
 - By digesting the action experience, we gather insight; and we do it in groups to unearth the wisdom together and get multiple viewpoints
 - Understand why some things didn't work, why others did

Developing Leaders

- Seek out leaders
 - George has yet to meet anyone who walks in and says I'm a leader
 - Are they someone people follow? Or could they build a following with more training and experience?
 - Are they willing to create tension?
 - Are they interested in and curious about their own personal growth?
- The Organization exists for the members
 - We are here to advance the power and interests of the members, not the staff
 - Agenda is set by the members
 - Governing body is elected by the members
 - The language of the organization should resonate with the members
- Create the arena
 - We are organizing not just to win but so that people can grow, feel their power, tell their story and feel heard
- Agitation as an act of love
 - Organizers are here to create a new discomfort
 - We have limiting thoughts about ourselves and communities: I can't. Or, The community doesn't want to come together. We bridge the gap between these negative beliefs and what is possible
 - Done right, agitation is an act of love. Done wrong, it is clumsy and aggressive
- Share the work
 - Create opportunities for people to take on work and grow through it
 - Expand who is moving the organization forward so that it lasts beyond us
- Ask people to commit
 - Ask directly; no hints, no passive aggression
 - If this is hard for you, think about why, work on it, and take risks
 - Turns out people appreciate being asked directly
 - And getting people to commit means the organization becomes a bit less reliant on you. This is organizing
- Celebrate often
 - Created a culture of celebration
 - Have to acknowledge issues and weaknesses but don't make studying the imperfections the default, or you'll create a group of grumpy people

The Organizer

- Be curious
 - Every good organizer is curious about peoples' paths, hopes, fears, what shaped them, blocks them, drives them
 - Constantly try to understand the human condition, the person in front of you, and the systems of people, especially power and culture
 - Constantly refine your analysis
 - Always be willing to learn and unlearn, see from different angles
- Respect people's lives
 - They don't ask us to come into their lives, knock on their doors, but we do
 - Show respect for their time, ideas, and sacrifices by being prepared and by having a legit plan for delivering change
- Be as humble as you are bold
 - There is a place between being as bold as a lion and as humble as a dove: find it
 - Bold: we need the daring, confident, borderline arrogant parts of our selves
 - Humility: we are going to fall flat at times
 - The key is to stay close to the members; to never think that we are smarter than anyone else; to not lose our ability to listen, learn, and see things anew; to always act with the curiosity and humility of a beginner
- You're an organizer, not a facilitator
 - In addition to listening, you get an opinion
 - The opposition has experts. You are the expert for your organization. Own it
- Become mindful, have a practice
 - When we are not mindful, we can go weeks reacting poorly to things and feeling off course and not know why
 - If mindful, we can see when a reaction is not about the person in front of us but about our own unmet need; then we can respond from a sturdier place with compassion and grace
- You are an organizer
 - If you have read this far, you are an organizer or curious about becoming one
 - Seize that impulse
 - Be with people, feel their pain, know their dreams, see what they see, listen intently, pull people together, bring out their genius, find common ground, go into battle as one
 - Along the way you will build trust, explore the uncommon ground and create space for people to awaken, not alone but in a group
 - You are here to stir the pot and take the crisis to those who created it, to transform hearts and minds on the way to transforming how the whole thing works