

dRworks Principles for Taking Action on Racial Justice

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USE ORGANIZING MIND

We begin by looking around to see who is with us. Then build relationships with those people. Focus on your circle of influence, which includes those concerns that we can do something about. Organizing mind is based on the idea of “each one reach one” in ways that build relationships, community, solidarity, and movements. Organizing mind helps us to focus on who and what is within our reach so we can build a larger group of people with whom to work and play and fight for social justice.

IDENTIFY EXPLICIT GOALS

Tie the talk of social justice to explicit goals so that people and communities have a clear sense of what social justice looks like. We all know how easy it is to “talk the talk” – and the talk of racial justice is deeply compelling. This principle asks us to tie the talk of social justice to explicit goals so that people and communities have a clear sense of what racial justice looks like up close and personal. When people in communities or institutions make a racial equity commitment, they often have little to no idea of what that commitment means in terms of their role, their job, or their responsibility. Those leading the change must build a team that can help people identify what racial justice looks like in their sphere of influence, whether it is working for a policy goal to stop deportations or an internal organizational goal to insure clear communication across language and cultural differences.

BUILD POWER ON THE MARGINS

Strong equity goals are best designed when they speak to, serve, empower, and engage those on the margins.

The principle talks about how strong equity goals are best designed when they honor and build power and agency of those most on the margins. This principle recognizes that when we frame goals and strategies in ways that benefit those on the margins, we’re framing goals and strategies that benefit all of us, directly and indirectly. We also want to keep in mind that people and communities on the margins already have power and are often using that power strategically and well, even when that power is regularly invisibilized by traditional power brokers. That said, we also know that one of the ways that oppression works is to take power from people and communities targeted by those in control; sometimes we have to work to remember our own power.

THINK AND ACT COLLECTIVELY AND COLLABORATIVELY

We save and are saved by each other. Building strong and authentic relationships enable us to act from a place of wisdom collaboratively and collectively gathered. By design, the dominant culture ensures that we have a very weak collective impulse; the collective impulse that people and communities held originally (Indigenous nations and cultures) or brought with them from other countries and cultures has been systematically erased in the service of racism. This means that we have to teach each other and ourselves to collaborate and act collectively. We can look for guidance to those people and communities whose resilience has preserved that impulse. Acting collaboratively and collectively means that we build strong and authentic relationships that enable us to act in concert with each other from a place of wisdom collaboratively and collectively gathered. It also means that we learn from our mistakes rather than pretend we never make them.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Be accountable to people and principles. Accountability is a form of solidarity. Accountability becomes a way to reconnect through the power of authentic relationship. Accountability is also a form of discernment around how to live into shared values or principles. Principles help us focus beyond our own socialized confusions. Social justice values or principles are collectively created, grounded in the generational wisdom of elders, what we have learned from history, our experience, our understanding of the Creator and/or environment, and our desires for liberation.

KNOW YOURSELF

Knowing ourselves means that we can show up more appropriately and effectively in the work and ask for help when needed. Doing our personal work is a collective practice. We do this by calling each other in rather than out.

WORK ON ALL THREE LEVELS

Individual: Individual acts

Institutional: Policies, practices, procedures

Cultural: Beliefs, values, norms

The work of racial justice is more than individual acts. The actions and impacts of white supremacy culture are embedded in our institutions and the dominant culture. Even without individual acts of racism, the system will continue to create outcomes that are racialized unless we work to disrupt the systems that drive our implicit and explicit actions, practices, and policies.

Take Risks & Learn From Your Mistakes:

This culture often teaches us that to make a mistake is to be a mistake. Maurice Mitchell, one of the leaders of Black Lives Matter, is making the point that we will inevitably make mistakes and our anxiety about that does not serve us or the movement. Failure to take risks because we are afraid of failure or our own vulnerability does not serve us or others. We can, of course, take risks more wisely through collaboration and accountability, which avoids putting others at risk without their knowledge. Denying that we made a mistake also does not serve us or others. Failure to learn from our mistakes is the only real mistake we can make.

Transparency:

We can use transparency to help people understand complexity and nuance. For example, if we are trying to land on a strategy for taking action, rather than argue that one strategy is the “best” or “right” one when there is disagreement, we can be transparent about the tensions involved in making a choice. Transparency is really useful when we find we are caught between conflicting values or options; rather than force ourselves to take a position, we can make the tension transparent and work collectively to make choices about how to face the tension and learn from the choices.

Seek Connection:

We live in a culture of fear. Fear shuts down our ability to be creative, compassionate, and brave; fear also divides us and pits us against each other. Notice when fear shows up, name it, and seek ways to feel it, address it, and choose a way that builds connection and relationship. Ground your actions in a desire for connection; choose love (not that it’s always easy to know what love is in any situation) and ask yourself: what would build connection here? Relationship? Love?

‘If it builds relationship, do it.’ - John Parker