

10

Suggestions for Effective Activism

By Paul Rogat Loeb

Effective activism's a long-haul process, not "save the earth in 30 days, ask me how." But there are some principles that seem to reoccur for people addressing every kind of challenge from the Gulf Oil spill to inadequate funding for urban schools to how to deal with Afghanistan and Iraq.

Suggestion #1:

Start where you are. You don't need to know everything, and you certainly don't need to be perfect. You want to make sure you're acting on accurate information, but you don't need to know the answer to every conceivable question, and you don't need to be *as eloquent as Martin Luther King or saintly as Gandhi*, particularly since even our greatest historical figures had their hesitations, failures, and doubts.

Suggestion #2:

Take things step by step. You set the pace of your engagement. Don't worry about being swallowed up, because you'll determine how much you get involved, and in what ways.

Suggestion #3:

Build supportive community. You can accomplish far more with even a small group of good people than you can alone. Isolation breeds cynicism and despair. Engaged community helps sow the seeds of hope.

Suggestion #4:

Be strategic. Ask what you're trying to accomplish, where you can find allies, and how to best communicate the urgencies you feel. You don't need to have every answer, but you want to think through your actions as best you can.

Suggestion #5:

Enlist the uninvolved. They have their own fears and doubts, so they won't participate automatically; you have to work actively to engage them. And sometimes they come from very unlikely places. But if you do, there's no telling what they'll go on to achieve.

Suggestion #6:

Seek out unlikely allies. The more you widen the circle, the more you'll have a chance of breaking through the entrenched barriers to change. Internet Neutrality, for instance, was mostly saved by an unlikely alliance between the liberal group MoveOn and the highly conservative Christian Coalition.

Suggestion #7:

Persevere. Change most often takes time. The longer you continue working, the more you'll accomplish. If Rosa Parks had given up in year ten of her 12-year journey from her first NAACP meeting to her famed stand on the bus we'd never have heard of her.

Suggestion #8:

Savor the journey. Changing the world shouldn't be grim work. Take time to enjoy nature, good music, good conversation, and whatever else lifts your soul. Savor the company of good people working for change

Suggestion #9:

Think large. Don't be afraid to tackle the deepest-rooted injustices, and to tackle them on a national or global scale. Remember that many small actions can shift the course of history. It's tempting just to focus on areas where we can make a personal one-on-one difference, but it's even more powerful if we can tackle the roots of the issues we take on.

Suggestion #10:

Listen to your heart. It's why you're involved to begin with. It's what will keep you going. And never forget to tell and retell the stories that go to the heart of why you act and will help you keep on.

Ten Suggestions for Effective Activism is adapted from the wholly updated new edition of *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in Challenging Times* by Paul Rogat Loeb (St Martin's Press, \$16.99 paperback). With over 100,000 copies in print, *Soul* has become a classic guide to involvement in social change. From *Soul of a Citizen* by Paul Rogat Loeb. Copyright © 2010 by the author and reprinted by permission of St. Martin's Griffin.

PAUL ROGAT LOEB is the author of *Soul of a Citizen: Living With Conviction in Challenging Times* (St Martin's Press 1999 and 2010, now with over 100,000 copies in print), *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear* (Basic Books, 2004, and named the #3 political book of that year by the History Channel and the American Book Association), *Generation at the Crossroads: Apathy and Action on the American Campus* (Rutgers University Press, 1994), *Nuclear Culture*, and *Hope in Hard Times*. He has written on social involvement for The New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Los Angeles Times, AARP Bulletin, Boston Globe, Psychology Today, Utne Reader, Redbook, Parents magazine, Christian Science Monitor, Mother Jones, Salon, the Village Voice, National Catholic Reporter, Chronicle of Higher Education, and the International Herald Tribune. He's been interviewed on CNN, NPR, PBS, C-SPAN, NBC TV, the BBC, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, American Urban Radio, Voice of America, and national German and Australian radio. He's lectured on 400 college campuses and at numerous national conferences. In 2008 Loeb worked with Campus Compact to create and coordinate the Campus Election Engagement Project, helping colleges and universities in 15 states engage their students in the election. He is also an affiliate scholar at Seattle's Center for Ethical Leadership and blogs regularly at HuffingtonPost. He's spent over thirty years researching and writing about citizen responsibility and empowerment—asking what makes some people choose lives of social commitment, while others abstain.

Read more by Paul.



1. Follow Paul Loeb on Twitter.
2. Sign up to receive his monthly newsletter for educators at sympa@lists.groundwire.org. Please include the subject line: **subscribe paulloeb-articlesedu**



3. Become a Paul Loeb Facebook fan at www.facebook.com/PaulLoebBooks.
4. Check out his website at www.paulloeb.org.

You are **1** degree of separation from changing your world. **Which 1 will it be?**

76 affordable degrees of distinction – 100% online, including:

M.Ed. Teaching – Instructional Leadership	M.Ed. Administration & Supervision
M.Ed. Teaching – Reading and Literacy	M.Ed. Guidance & Counseling
M.Ed. Teaching – Special Education	M.A. Humanities

Let us help you get started today.

1.877.777.9081 • www.apu.apus.edu/educators



Respected. Affordable. Online.

