

A GUIDE TO NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

“Welcome to the revolution!” Cameron Kasky, a Junior at Margorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida extended that welcome on March 24, 2018 during the rally for the March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C. Kasky is one of the many Parkland students who helped organize that reaction to the killing of 17 of his friends at the school. The movement aims to change gun laws in order to ban assault rifles and to urge young voters to register and vote for candidates who support that ban. Their vigor and determination sparked similar responses across the nation.

Will their efforts, and uniting with other gun control activists, generate effective gun control? In the wake of Harvey Weinstein’s arrest for sexual assault, women across the world have joined the #metoo movement. Other similar allegations against various celebrities have added to the movement, so that now the #metoo slogan remains a growing avalanche of protest and outrage, with supporters calling for behavioral change and respect for women in our society.

Will this effort effect the social and legal change that justice demands? There are other issues that simmer within our society, each one demanding rapid change: Black Lives Matter, the Peace Movement, and Occupy Wall Street are just a few more of them.

Will any of these passionate and justifiable desires effect the results they envision? Proponents of these causes call for revolutionary change as opposed to evolutionary change. Often revolutions include violence and sometimes, war. An effective alternative to violence and war is non-violent direct action. This non-violent approach has been and can be successful but it must follow some basic principles and employ some disciplined tactics to have the best chance of changing an injustice into a more just situation.

conditions and actions for peaceful revolutions. More study and research is needed to implement these steps but this framework provides a valuable structure for achieving the goal of profound change regarding any example of injustice. For further research, I recommend the work of Terrence Rynne and *The Center for Peacemaking* at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

1. There must be a just cause shared by many people.

There are multiple examples of injustice in the world: the actions of brutal dictators, deliberate policies of repression, dominating social class customs, unfair business practices, and even personal, intentional discrimination. Each injustice is a cry for justice. Often, the reaction to injustice is flight or fight, to get away from the offending cause or to fight back using any means available to confront and change the injustice. The fight approach often leads to violence or even war. The flight response may offer an improvement for those who can escape but leaves the cause of the injustice in place to impact other people.

Sometimes there is neither fight nor flight but devastating inaction, ignoring the injustice. The demeaning behavior and discriminatory attitudes are so embedded in our society that many people become immune to the evil, even when they recognize it. “It is just the way things are” and “We must wait until the right time comes along” to change what we know needs changing now. Rev. Martin Luther King’s pivotal “Letter from Birmingham Jail” was a passionate response to a letter from eight clergymen who insisted it was time to “wait” for justice through the court system



.An alternative to fight, flight or inaction is non-violent direct action. Non-violent direct action is designed to eliminate or diminish the cause of the injustice. But the targeted injustice must, in fact, be a demonstrable injustice. There must be clear, documented evidence, available to many people, that the current situation is unjust. Hitler's Germany obviously oppressed multiple countries and millions of people. Apartheid in South Africa visibly denied rights to black citizens. The Soviet Union denied independence to Poland and other countries. Discrimination against black people in the U.S.A. was accepted and promoted. The evidence of systemic injustice was clear to any objective viewer in all of these, and other, cases.

In a similar way, any effective non-violent direct action begins with a clear just cause, accepted as such by many people. How many people? On large, deeply ingrained and systemic injustices, the numbers of people who acknowledge the injustice will likely be in the millions. Some of the proponents of the identified change will need to recruit even more followers of the proposed action and hoped-for results. One person, acting alone or with a small group, rarely attains major change.

The responsibility for determining and articulating the need and correctness of the desired change rests on the leaders of the organization or movement who want the change. Whether their cause is just or not will be determined by those who hear their message.

2. There must be a charismatic leader, or multiple grass roots leaders, to articulate the need, vision, and plan for a more just outcome.

A leader or leaders must emerge from among the seekers of change who can inspire these proponents, articulate the vision, and urge them to take non-violent direct action. There may be differences in the style of leadership but these leaders must be able to speak to large audiences with passion and conviction. Other forms of communication must also be used skillfully, e.g. social media, writing and interviews. Without clear spokespersons, the movement will likely falter and splinter. These leaders will not be self-proclaimed but people who have the public endorsement of a large number of others who want the change. By definition, a leader is someone who has followers so these leaders will not have influence due to an elected political office or a power grab. These leaders have power and influence because their followers continually choose them as the spokespersons for their cause.

Mahatma Gandhi in India, Lech Walesa in Poland, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Martin Luther King in the U.S.A. are all examples of leaders who fit and model the kind of leadership needed to implement effective non-violent direct action to effect change in policy, cultural transformation or political, religious or institutional power. The emerging gun control and #metoo movements have multiple leaders. Usually, the prophetic change-makers are outside the formal political system of their country or institution and are accountable to their followers, not to any other interest group or pressure from political, financial, religious, academic, or business concerns. They speak from their personal convictions which are shared with their followers who identify with these

convictions, and their courage emerges from their spirit. They are articulate, expressing these beliefs in powerful words and in their personal actions.

Political leaders must be concerned with multiple, sometimes conflicting concerns, and will need to compromise in order to move their constituents forward in the pursuit of justice on many fronts. A just cause leader can remain focused on the one central issue and pursue that one issue, probably step by step, without the need to compromise with conflicting interest groups. A designated political leader will not likely be the preferred spokesperson for change in a just cause movement, although the political leader may be crucial in advancing that cause.

3. There must be a disciplined plan of action, including long term strategies and short-term tactics, to accomplish the goal of the just cause.

The leader, or leaders, may be able to inspire and motivate the followers of the just cause but there must be a disciplined plan of action to implement that vision. Without this plan, the followers may be enraged by the injustice but have no way to channel this anger into effective, long term, beneficial change.

It is best if the outline of this plan is determined before a public campaign about the just cause begins. A large spontaneous response to an egregious example of the injustice often arouses public outrage and large crowds. It is difficult to move that crowd into an effective non-violent direct action capable of accomplishing long-term results. A group of trained, disciplined responders can impact the larger spontaneously assembled crowd and provide clarity and purpose to achieve pre-determined short-term objectives. But the primary focus of the plan is to marshal the greatest impact of the effort so that the best long-term results are achieved. All short-term objectives must progress in accomplishing the ultimate goal.

Widespread injustice breeds widespread emotion. Emotions like anger, outrage, and revenge can fuel the determination needed to change injustice into a more just situation. But that emotion-filled

determination must be coupled with discipline. And that discipline comes with guided training. This training is more than enlightened lectures. It must also be accompanied by careful, orchestrated practice. Whether the plan calls for sit-ins, marches, confrontations with authorities, lawmakers, and opponents, trained, disciplined protesters must be able to channel the direct action into a short-term achievement that points to the long-term goal. Any lack of clarity and purpose about the reason for the action will weaken the possibility of success. This disciplined approach must be strong enough and clear enough to overcome the actions of other protesters, especially those who resort to violence. The non-violent direct action must be controlled by those who participate in this approach.

On September 3, 1957, nine black students tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas for the first day of class. The ensuing conflict brought attention to the educational inequality between black and white students, and an eventual lessening of that discrimination. The courage of those students and their commitment to non-violence is a model of this quality of a disciplined plan of action to effect major social change.

The use of social media is now crucial to executing any plan of non-violent direct action. The plan must include directions on the concerted use of email, Facebook, twitter, Instagram, etc. before a public action takes place, during the action and after the event. A protest event may be local but the goal is to make that local event regional, national, and sometimes international as well. Experts in the use of social media must be a part of the just cause movement, and their knowledge and expertise must guide this media aspect of the action. There must be designated spokespersons for the action in order to describe and explain the reason and purpose of the action. Reporters, hopefully, will cover the event and they will seek interviews from many possible perspectives, including opponents, so the spokespersons for the direct action must be prepared to defend the

action with cogent, clear comments. At this point in history, the overall impact of the action may be determined by the social media and news coverage as much as or more than the event itself. The plan must make use of this reality to be effective.

4. There must be a determined willingness to accept the possible negative consequences of this non-violent action.

There will be opposition to the just cause, leaders, and direct action. Proponents of change must expect this opposition and plan to cope with it. It is best to assume this angry opposition and practice responses to it in non-violent ways. Not all protesters will be able to control their reactions to taunts, personal insults, perhaps even physical violence, from opponents or even the police, in public or in private. The more deeply ingrained the injustice is, the stronger the opposition will likely be. Protesters, marchers, sit-in demonstrators, social media proponents, even people who speak out about the just cause to family and friends, must expect firm push-back from people who do not share the same viewpoint.

To remain non-violent in thought, word, and deed during those confrontational moments takes courage, commitment, will-power and conviction to curtail impulsive reactions and the desire to fight back. Sometimes the direct action is a clear violation of a law and will likely end in an arrest. It takes practiced discipline to maintain a principled response, and the resolute belief that non-violence will create the best outcome in the long run.

Knowing the history of the positive results of non-violent direct action is a key factor in exercising this kind of action in the present. Examples from India, South Africa, Poland, and the U.S.A., along with other efforts, are helpful studies to assure protesters that non-violence is an effective method for achieving major social and political change. When a large portion of the protesters are convinced of the effectiveness of non-violent direct action, and they are trained to respond peacefully but resolutely to threats, attacks, arrest, or

violence, then there is a greater chance of neutralizing the injustice and creating a more just situation. Sometimes, for some people, personal self-sacrifice is necessary for effective use of a more just situation.

5. There must be a more just follow-up plan to replace the current unjust situation.

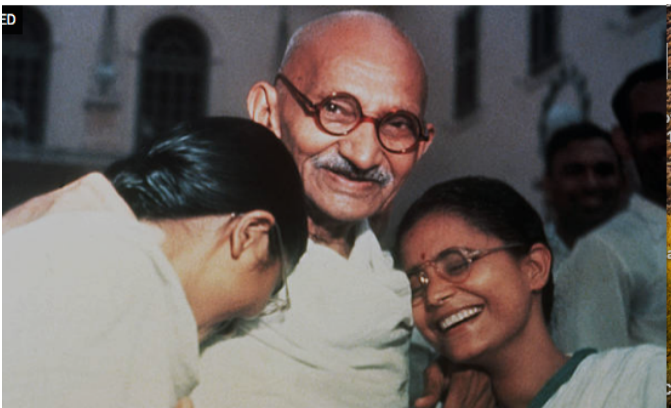
The success of a movement for greater justice does not end with the elimination of the most harmful aspects of the injustice. Once some or all of the most obvious forms of the injustice are removed, there remains the difficult task of creating and developing counter systems of greater justice. History, for example, includes many examples of one dictator replaced by another dictator and the system of government remains basically unjust.

When one aspect of injustice is overcome, it must be replaced with a more just system, not with a revised form of injustice. In order to replace injustice with justice, a plan must be developed to initiate and stabilize an on-going experience of a more just situation. This plan must be created while the non-violent direct action is taking place, not after the success of the movement is achieved. This thought-out approach following a struggle for justice must be implemented quickly in order to solidify the accomplishments of the struggle.

The skills needed to create and sustain a practical implementation of a more just society or set of policies, procedures and laws are different skills than the ones needed to lead a revolution. Often, but not always, both of these skill sets do not rest in one person or group of leaders. To govern justly is different from overcoming injustice. People who are sympathetic to the just cause and who have experience in governing will be valuable members of the group planning to initiate new procedures and laws after the success of the movement. These organizationally talented people need to begin planning the after-success campaign while the non-violent direct action is taking place.

This after-success plan must be ready to be implemented immediately, at least in outline form.

Identifying the leaders and spokespersons for the new system, inviting new people to engage in the necessary re-building of structures that will maximize the benefits of a more just system, establishing the ties that will ease the transition to a better way of living and governing, healing the wounds of both proponents and opponents of the non-violent direct action are all tasks that emerge from the success of the action. It is best to have these and related issues considered in as much detail as possible before the end of the campaign.



For example, in Gandhi's drive toward an independent India he championed the use of a spinning wheel and the continuing production of cloth both as a symbol of freedom and a practical tool for work and manufacturing. It was part of his plan to add dignity and sustainability for Indians before, during, and after independence.

Without this pre-planning, any movement runs the risk of stalling and disintegrating in the details of trying to implement the justice that was gained with the success of the direct action. Opponents to the change could create procedural obstacles that will undermine the implementation of the success. Being prepared to deal with these roadblocks is the best way to overcome them.

Each of these five steps to a revolution that follows the strategy of non-violent direct action deserves extensive study and detailed goals and plans. One approach to using this guide is to divide proponents of change into these five areas and have each group research, brainstorm, and

establish more detailed plans for each of the five areas, after some familiarity with all of the steps and the general purpose of each step. This specialization will allow proponents to focus on areas that are most aligned with their knowledge, interests, and experience.

Sometimes societies evolve slowly into more just communities. But sometimes it takes a faster paced revolution to make progress. Sometimes the change needs to happen rapidly so the rebuilding can begin from a new starting point. This rapid change is revolution and it is needed in multiple arenas. To be effective some form of these five steps are crucial. So, let the non-violent direct action continue on many issues. The human race needs help now.



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