

Four Roles of Activism

according to Bill Moyer: Movement Action Plan

ineffective

- *Naive Citizen:* believes the “Official Policies”. Does not yet realize that powerholders and institutions serve special elite interests at the expense of the less powerful minorities and the general welfare.
- or -
- *Super-patriot:* blind obedience to powerholders and the country.

effective

- promote positive values, principles, symbols, e.g. democracy, freedom, justice, nonviolence.
- Normal citizen.
- Grounded in center of society.
- Protect against charges of “outsiders” and “chaots”.

effective

- Parliamentary: Use official mainstream system and institutions, e.g., courts, parliament, city councils, corporations to get movement goals, values, alternatives adopted into official laws, policies, and conventional wisdom.
- Use variety of means: lobbying, lawsuits, referenda, official rallies, candidates, etc.
- Professional Opposition Organizations (POOs) are the key movement agency.
- Watchdog successes to ensure enforcement, expand success, and protect against backlash.

ineffective

- “Realistic politics”: Promotes minor reforms that might be more acceptable to the powerholders.
- POO limitations: patriarchal, hierarchical organization leadership and structure; organizational maintenance needs replace movement needs/goals; dominant power undermines democracy within the movement and disempowers the grassroots.
- Cooptation: POO staff identify more with official powerholders than they do to the movement's grassroots.
- Does not advocate paradigm shifts.

Citizen Reformer

Rebel Social Change Agent

ineffective

- against widely held values, anti-authority, anti-organization rules and structures.
- Self-identity as radical militant, a lonely voice on society's fringe.
- Any means necessary: especially disruptive tactics, damage of property and violence against people when “necessary”.
- Tactics without realistic strategy.
- Isolated from mass-based grassroots.
- Victim attitude and behaviour: angry, aggressive, judgemental, dogmatic, powerlessness...
- “Politically correct”, absolute truth, moral superiority.
- Strident: acts out strong personal upset emotions, needs, and freedom, regardless of movement's needs.

effective

- Protest: Say, “NO!” to violations of positive democratic values.
- Nonviolent Direct Action and attitude, including civil disobedience.
- Target: official powerholders and institutions.
- Puts problems and policies in public spotlight and agenda.
- Exciting, courageous, risky.

effective

- People Power: Educate, convince, involve majority of ordinary citizens and whole society in change process.
- Mass-based grassroots organizations, networks, activists.
- Puts issue on political agenda.
- Promote strategies and tactics for waging long-term social movement.
- Nurturer role: empower grassroots.
- Create permanent organizations and support and nurture activists.
- Promote alternatives and paradigm shift.

ineffective

- Utopian: Promote visions of perfection or live alternatives in isolation from practical political and social struggle.
- Promote only minor reform.
- Movement leadership and organizational patriarchy and oppressive hierarchy.
- Tunnel vision: advocate single approach, while opposing those doing all others.
- Ignore personal issues and needs of activists.