

**BROADENING THE “USE OF SELF”
Steps Toward Tactical Self-Awareness
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Knowing how to work with one’s personal and emotional capacities is a fundamental skill in the social work practice. “Use to self” has been written about primarily for caseworkers, where transference and countertransference issues are endemic problems to good practice.¹ The social caseworker uses available tools to minimize long-term problems created by such phenomena: regular clinical supervision, knowledge of cultural and social psychological differences, the spatial limits of an office and the temporal limits of a forty-five minute session (or less), are all used to maintain practice effectiveness. Such aids help the caseworker and the client overcome what are otherwise emotionally charged problems within the therapeutic process.

Few of these aids exist for the community practitioner. He or she works with varying numbers of people in rarely neutral settings, often at irregular hours. Supervision, when it exists, is structured around the political and strategic concerns of the group. Furthermore, many community practitioners are predisposed to mistrust the presumably “gloppy” process interests of case- and group workers: the task is everything, and the process, if it matters, is concern for leadership development, not personal issues related to one’s self.

The reality, of course, is that community practitioners, whether organizer or manager, are as much engaged in “process” as any other worker. The emotional strains are certainly as intense. This is why, in part, so many organizers leave community organizing after a few years. They “burn out,” not because the work is finished, but because they are too exhausted, personally, to continue. Instead of the experience being a “mellowing process,” as Perlman called long-term professional work, it becomes a justification for exhaustion. The result is that many social work agencies and communities lose some of their most skilled professionals just when they could be of most service.²

One of the ways that organizers can avoid burning out is through a new appreciation of “the use of self.” However, we need an approach that looks at personal issues in terms of the community organizing experience, drawing on both casework and community organizing literature to create a viable methodology – one that actively incorporates “the self” into the socially and politically tumultuous world of organizing. What follows is an attempt to do just that.

A Case Example of the “Person” in the Organizing Process

An example of how the personal make-up of an individual affects the organizing process occurred during a legislative session where social workers were intently lobbying for their issues. A young organizer was speaking with me about her lobbying efforts on Food Stamp legislation. It was a complex and exciting task, one she relished. If passed, the new procedural guidelines would have tremendous impact on thousands of people.

The vote was expected to be close, but she looked forward to the effort, complete with arm-twisting, late night negotiations, and constant haggling as the vote drew close. Later in the conversation, we happen to speak about casework, and she visibly cringed when I suggested she also might like being a caseworker. “Never! I haven’t the right to do that kind of work- there’s too much power over the individual. I’d never do it.” When I mentioned she seemed to relish the power at the legislative level, which could affect thousands of people, her consternation grew. “But there’s a difference- one’s individual, the other’s collective. I want to help communities, not just one person.”

As she later admitted, however, her initial response to my query had been personally, not politically, based. While she still felt “politically correct” in choosing organizing over casework, part of her justification had centered on her own discomfort with intense personal interaction. Unfortunately, the blanket political justification also had diminished her own effectiveness as an organizer. Personality is not destiny, but since *people* implement strategy, one’s own personal understanding becomes tactically necessary. This otherwise-effective organizer later found herself limited in her arm-twisting techniques. She was highly effective when working in groups, but lobbying’s one-on-one interaction left her awkwardly inarticulate. If she had been more aware of this personal limitation, her ensuing difficulties, repeated throughout the legislative session, might have diminished.

Locating the Introspective Cutting Edge of Organizing

As the above example suggests, the introspective cutting edge of organizing is not an “either political or personal” issue, but one of *tactical self awareness*: how aware are you of your personal skills in the array of organizing settings that you are part of daily? Can you distinguish between objective and personal limits? Did that important contact at the fund-raiser turn you down because her funds were already committed or because your own discomfort in social situations made her disinterested in your organization? Did the plans for the large rally fall apart because people truly weren’t interested or because you don’t have the necessary attentiveness for the minor detail beforehand?

There are no easy answers, but this chapter shall focus on how heightened tactical self-awareness can increase one’s organizing effectiveness.³ The term “tactical self-awareness” has been chosen carefully, for the phrase emphasizes *both* personality and organizing techniques in their active relationship to the strategic environment; indeed, without such an on-going relationship, tactics are meaningless.⁴

Tactical self-awareness, with simultaneous involvement in both personal and political skills, is an extension of the relationship Alinsky discuss in “The Education of An Organizer.” In analyzing the failure of some organizers to grow beyond a certain elementary level of skill, he stated:

[Those who failed] memorized the words and related experience and concepts. Listening to them was like listening to a tape playing back my presentation word for word... The problem... was their failure to understand that a specific situation

is significant only in its relationship to and its illumination of a general concept. Instead they see the specific action as a terminal point. They fail to grasp that fact that no situation ever repeats itself, that no tactic can be precisely the same.⁵

However, Alinsky was stating only that tactics are different in each new situation. An individual is different, too with distinct emotional and personal responses to the event, its participants, and the host of tactical considerations that are evoked by each strategic context. If each new strategic situation demands a fresh look at tactics, so it also needs a quick reappraisal of the people involved in implementing them... including one's self

The basic assumption of tactical self-awareness, by emphasizing simultaneous personal and tactical changes in varying contexts, opposes "the Great Organizer Theory of Organizing." This theory (and one which almost every organizer has succumbed to at times) goes like this: *Every organizer should be able to perform well within all important strategic situations, from running the office (the autonomous, neat, punctual organizer) to running the demonstration (the collective, spontaneous, charismatic organizer).* Furthermore, any who can't perform all these tasks should seriously consider a different profession.

A number of organizers have taken up this alternative job consideration after reading Alinsky's list items that "while idealized, the best organizers should have all of them to a strong extent, and any organizer needs at least a degree of each: (1) curiosity; (2) irreverence; (3) imagination; (4) a sense of humor; (5) a bit of a blurred vision of a better world; (6) an organized, rational personality; (7) a well-integrated political schizoid; (8) a strong ego; (9) a free and open mind."⁶

Alinsky, always the provocative tactician, undoubtedly wrote this list with an eye towards some of the smug younger organizers of the late '60s (like me). However, anyone who reads this list, whether grayish sixties activist or 21st century Third Wave feminist, will feel understandably defeated. For example, after my own reading, I proceeded to eliminate everyone I knew from the "best" category, and only a few squeaked into his "any organizer" slot. Yet, as I thought about his list, musing on it while continuing my organizing, I realized something was missing in his analysis. At times, such as during large demonstrations, I was a terrific organizer: I functioned well, spoke clearly, got along with everybody, and even digested my food with ease. At other times, doing office routine, I was a klutz, about as effective as an Adam Sandler character on a blind date, without the humor. Did this mean I was only half an organizer, half effective?

All organizers will ask the same thing, particularly after certain organizing problems reoccur. If the problem is strictly tactical, they can find suitable political alternatives. For example, you don't have a petition campaign when people can't decide what the problem is; nor do you attack the landlord when the rest of the group still likes him. That's simple enough, and fits the general guidelines Alinsky was writing about. Most organizers learn this within six months.

But *real* organizing, the day-to-day, garden variety of three-person meetings, busted conference calls because someone forgot the number, gulped lunches, overlooked details, and late night, laughter-filled drinks at the bar aren't easily fit into abstract strategic formulas. *In reality, an organizer is engaged in the implementation of tactics every day, and thus is an embodiment, personally, of the tactics themselves.* If some of those situations are personally discomfoting, the tactic won't be as effective as it might otherwise be. The task here, then, is to learn how to work with that discomfort in ways that minimize potential organizing problems in the future.

The young working woman working on Food Stamp legislation had had just this type of problem. In her discomfort with direct, individualized conflict, she presented the bill in her one-on-one meetings so poorly that a few moderately sympathetic legislators began to suspect both her and her program. Yet later that night, at a group strategy session the organizer could skillfully synthesize different bits of political information on how votes were lining up, and her final presentation was instrumental in charting the next day's lobbying efforts.

In fact, she was no different from another practitioner. Equally important, her choice of *tactics* in the lobbying situation had been correct. The failings were her personal inhibitions in highly specified organizing activities that she herself could have predicted beforehand. She had functioned, not as a heroine, but as a human, good in some areas, a little shakier in others.

Reflective question: What is the key distinction between 'professional use of self' and 'tactical self-awareness' for the community-based practitioner?

The Person's Search for Stability in the Midst of An Organizer's Ambiguous Work Situations

Organizers can begin to become more tactically self-aware by recognizing, rumors to the contrary, that they are just like other people in their varying effectiveness at work. In doing so, community practitioners can become much more open to the subjective concerns of psychologists and clinical social workers. One helpful role model is Carl Rogers, who years ago developed a series of still-popular propositions related to personality development that explain some of the subjective reasons for one's constantly shifting tactical effectiveness. While written for a different audience, the propositions (based on years of research) are illuminating:

1. A (person) reacts to the field (environment) as it experienced. This perceptual field is, for the individual, reality.
2. The (person) has one basic tendency and striving- to actualize, maintain and enhance (itself).
3. Behavior is basically the goal- directed attempts of the (person) to satisfy it's needs as experienced, in the field as it is perceived.
4. Emotion accompanies and facilitates such goal-directed behavior.

5. *Any experience which is inconsistent with the organization or structure of self may be perceived as a threat, and the more these perceptions there are, more rigidly the self-structure is organized to maintain itself.* (My italics-SB)
6. Under certain conditions, involving complete absence of any threat to self-structure, experiences which are inconsistent with it may be perceived and examined, and the structure of the self revised to assimilate and include such experiences.⁷

Later we will return to the last point, with its element of active, personal change. Rogers' first four propositions underscore the point that person's behavior is always a response to his or her existing need to experience reality in a way that allows one to be comfortable with both the environment and his or her sense of "fit" in that reality. Secondly, Proposition 5 makes clear that when one's environment is in some way personally threatening, it is natural to become defensive (consciously or otherwise) and thus *rigidly responsive* (tactically less effective) to the world around you. In other words, the self (emotions and all) is personally mobilized to maintain its perception of a "safe environment," even if political/organizational concerns and tactical flexibility suffer as a consequence.⁸

To use a concrete example, it was neither accident nor "political inconsistency" that the Food Stamp organizer was tongue-tied in individual confrontation and yet skillful in group interaction. Her personal make-up, complete with its own history, emotions, and behaviors, made her better able to actualize her entire range of skills in one situation (the group), and less able in another (one-to-one). Without attempting psychoanalysis, we can see from Rogers' formulation that, in the particular context of individual conflict, what was going on beneath the organizer's awkwardness had served not a political but a personal purpose—engaged, individual conflict had been avoided effectively.

Strategically, if organizers can view one's personality as being as potentially variable as any other tactic; then they are freer to adapt their personal attributes to particular situations, letting others perform in those more difficult contexts or, if that's not possible to build recognizable supports so that tactical problems are minimized.⁹ Rather than berating yourself for being a lousy organizer because you can't do well in, for instance, social situations where important contracts are improved, a little tactical self-awareness frees one to use more easily other abilities in a more dynamic-and personally liberating-manner. You're not so hot on social contacts? How about your colleague, who is a gregarious as he is disorganized on follow-up? Let him have the main tasks at the social function, and you can handle the later phone calls.

Tactical Self-Awareness with the Task-Oriented Practitioner

The awareness of how personal effectiveness varies from situation to situation is important for all practitioners to consider, but perhaps even more for organizers, for most tend to identify themselves as "task-oriented" rather than "process-oriented" personalities. Indeed, in brief surveys with about 100 students' organizers and thirty

practicing organizers, it was found that over 70 percent consider themselves task-oriented... the type of person who focuses on the actual work, is disinterested in the procedures of how the work is done, worries mostly about outcomes, and devalues social interaction over goal achievement.¹⁰ This orientation thus tends to ignore a social environment's demands for long-term, more open ended practice. Being task-oriented is helpful, of course, especially as a group gropes toward understanding what it can accomplish. At the same time, organizers shouldn't deny how *personally helpful* this can be for one's sense of "fit" in the world.

To look at the implications from Rogers' work again, one can see that the more a person views "reality" as time-limited and sharply focused in its demands, the more he or she can emphasize task-oriented, impersonal, concrete roles and actions. Furthermore one can thus "correctly" screen out more personally intense, emotional concerns. ("Cut out all this chit-chat! If this group doesn't decide on its budget tonight, we're finished!") To have a longer-term focus, with its heightened complexity and variability in the process itself, would greatly increase the emphasis on intuitive toeless and situations. It is equally likely, of course, that the personal discomfort of the task-oriented practitioner would increase as well.

Task orientation, then, is not just "the right way to organize." It is simply the style of most organizers as to how they personally adapt themselves to the world in which they live. As stated before, it is often helpful. However, *organizers need to learn that one's personal strength in some aspects of practice is not the same as an immutable law of how things must get done.* The daily life of an organizer touches on innumerable events that demand a more subtle mix in one's perspective. Indeed, most organizers go through enough tactical variation a week to touch upon almost every type of strategic situation—individual discussions, group meetings, social events, etc. The following case example, analyzed in detail, helps explain what can happen to a task-oriented practitioner when he or she does not account for personal dynamics in certain organizing situations.

An organizer, working in a poor neighborhood of a large city, was having his first large meeting of concerned community members. They had gathered to discuss local problems, and the organizer, a solidly task-oriented person, was actively trying to find out the main problems people wanted action on. People had been discussing both personal and community issues and the meeting was about an hour old. The following narrative took place:

Organizer: We've been talking about a number of things tonight, and we ought to start listing ones that people feel are the most important. Who'd like to start?

Mr. O (immediately): Where the smell's from...the sewers.

Organizer: Any other problems that ought to be discussed?

Mr. F: Well, what we need are some stop signs around here. We should have a stop light on the corner, so the kids don't get hurt.

Organizer (looking around somewhat blindly): What would you call that? (There was silence and finally someone said "safety.")

(People in general were looking at the organizer somewhat strangely. After a brief pause, Mr. M Brought up the topic of the street lights again. A wider, informal discussion then ensued in the group.)

Organizer: (Interrupting the informal discussion) Okay we've got recreation because somebody mentioned parks for the kids.. Are there any other problems in the area worth looking into?

Mr. P: Garbage collection

Organizer: Let's see now, we've got the garbage collection, and the sewers. Now what would you call that: *(Again people looked at him oddly.)*

Organizer (continuing): Could we call it sanitation? (There was no reply for a time and then some brief nodding.)

The meeting broke up soon afterwards, with a small committee formed. It never functioned.

The first and most obvious criticism one could make about the organizer's performance was his needless use of abstract categorization around concrete issues that served only to confuse people – his educated, class bias was showing. *There is only one problem with this criticism: the organizer almost never spoke that anywhere else.* Given his desire to be effective, his previously demonstrated talents and his generally concrete approach to work, what happened?

The answer is simple. Working in a new group of predominantly poor people had not only excited him but made him nervous with anticipation. That nervousness manifested itself, not in hemming and hawing, but in heightening the specific, categorical-and abstract-clarity of each and every topic. *Such obsessive categorization may have been tactically dysfunctional, but not personally.* Its abstract unity was the evening's closest approximation to satisfying the practitioner's own personal need for some concrete, *organized* success.

His behavior had helped resolve the underlying nervousness he felt in the new and exciting situation; it may have been unnecessary, but his own *personal* fit with the amorphous context was better for the effort. As Rogers would say (prop. 5): "Any experience which is inconsistent with the organization or structure of self may be perceived as a threat, and the more of these perceptions there are, the more rigidly the self-structure is organized to maintain itself." Or, as the organizer later put it, "I grabbed at something to calm me down."

Organizing Situations and Their Dominant Personality Demands

It might be helpful here to look at the variety of situations in which organizers eventually find themselves. While the variations on each category are endless (the social, informal party may be used for fund raising when a valued financial contact unexpectedly appears, day-to-day routines may be upset by anything from a fire to a firing), the following typology is based on interviews with experienced organizers regarding their most common situations, the kind that you inevitably will be called upon to respond to whether

you like it or not. In general, they range from the informal and social, with its greater demand for intellectual, task oriented abilities. Each naturally carries certain types of personal difficulty to match its strengths.

Table 1
Organizing Situations and their dominant Personality Demands

High Process-Oriented (Personal)	More Intuitive	More Intellectual	High Task-Oriented (impersonal)
<i>Informal Party</i>	<i>New Meeting (Informal Group)</i>	<i>Individual Day-to-Day Work</i>	<i>Formal Gathering (composing Reference Groups)</i> <i>On-Going Planning Group</i> <i>Militant Demonstration</i>

Most Common Personal Strength in Above Settings

Sociable Talkative	Cooperative Good-natured	A. <i>Office Routine</i> Tidy, persevering efficient	Intellectuality Formal poise Ideological clarity	Intellectuality Analytical ex- peritse	Adventurous Headstrong
		B. <i>Interpersonal Routine</i> Responsible Personable Verbally clear			

Most Common Personal Difficulties in Above Setting

Avoidance of Personal engagement,	Pushes group too fast, Overloads content	A. Sloppy Forgetful, Inefficient	Role conflicts Role strain	Over-focused Over-identification with group	Fear of conflict Over-reaction to conflict (heightened anger)
Awkwardness, Discomfort in nonintellectual tasks	Overstates future outcomes	B. Forgetful Inefficient in conversation Too much formality/ informality			

The dominant positive and negative characteristics in these organizing situations were selected by organizers in an informal survey over a two-year period. (Done yearly since then, the results have not varied in over twenty years.) They are not meant to be exclusive, but to serve as tactical aids in helping organizers better examine their own effectiveness throughout their work.

In general, people identify themselves in either the more personal, intuitively demanding situations (informal parties, new meetings, interpersonal routines) or the more intellectually precise situations (office routines, formal meetings, on-going group activity).¹¹ This is consistent with other's findings of people being either "task" or "process" oriented. These situations are:

1. *Informal gathering*: Parties, social events, late-night bar conversations after a meeting; these events are common to community development, social action, and labor organizing strategies. People want to know with whom they are working, at least a little, and task-oriented, intellectually intense organizers most frequently have difficulty here as they feel "there's nothing worth talking about," it wastes valuable time," etc. Others use this time quite profitably-and can have fun in the bargain!
2. *New meeting of an open-ended group*: Most common in community development strategies, but always part of any unfolding strategy or campaign, new meetings are a time where people explore common problems, present themselves to the group, check out who is in attendance, and generally talk a lot. They want to leave with some sense of purpose, and not be either too overwhelmed at the tasks ahead or distrustful of the group's approach. An intense, outcome-focused organizer can often push the group too fast or overwhelm them with detail; others, who are more process-oriented, may forget to show any results from the meeting. By having a modest goal beforehand, and with helpful structural reminders to allow the group to cohere (have a coffee break, include notes to yourself on your copy of the agenda about relaxing), new meetings end up being less anxiety-provoking than often expected.
3. *Day-to-day office routine*: No organized group does anything if it doesn't maintain its operations. Everyone knows that. However, knowing that and becoming efficient are too very different things for organizers who prefer a little more personal contact or excitement everyday. Others perform extremely well here, being valuable in their ability to pay the bills on time, keeping prompt schedules, etc. One common

technique for those seeking to become more efficient is to ask their tidier friends for helpful hints. (This is an area that's been one of great difficulty for me all my life. By taking some concrete hints from colleagues on how to use lists, how to build up an easy filing system, etc., I've made some progress over the years. Some.)

4. *Interpersonal routines*: these are all the phone calls, brief chats, short lunches, and street raps that an organizer goes through in following up with individuals everyday of the week. They call for some of efficient skills in one's office work, but are intuitively demanding as well. Some organizers hate the phone, or prefer political discussions over personal matters; they may end up being too brusque. Others in their anxiety to please may have a delightful conversation, only later realizing they had forgotten the reason they had called in the first place. Either case demands you follow two simple rules: (a) remember why you contacted the person by writing it down somewhere (the act of writing increases retentiveness); (b) remember that people are human, and allow for personal issues to be raised without viewing it as diversionary (if you have to, write that down, too!). The use of tactical self-awareness is important here, where the lack of formalized meetings or events minimizes the use of other, more structural supports.
5. *Formal gathering (competing or conflicting reference groups)*: these are formal, occasional events in one's work: cocktail parties before important conventions or conferences, obligatory organizational functions (forums, conferences), and coalitions. They most often involve social action and social planning strategies, and create role strain because their surface functions and their underlying purposes may be either unclear or problematical. (Two competing groups may be equally attractive in meeting-how do you decide?) Those who are uncomfortable with such political ambiguity and / or uncertain how they and their organizations fit with in such situations have difficulty here. Only by being thoroughly prepared, especially about one's own positions, can an organizer expect to be comfortable.
6. *On-going planning group*: Once an organization has established itself (especially in social planning and community development strategies), on-going group meetings are necessary to coordinate work, share information, and analyze progress. Real intellectual analysis may matter here. What can develop, however, are common forms of "goal displacement": one must stay attuned to other, less visible concerns or face the possibility of over-specialization and ignorance about newly developing organizational or community issues. Making certain that someone is responsible for maintaining and extending the group's out-reach work is an obvious structural solution, but individuals over time can also train themselves to be more intuitively responsive to new issues as they develop.
7. *Militant demonstration*: Used in community development, social action, and labor organizing strategies, militant action can be exciting and effective galvanizers to even greater commitment and success. For those who shy away from conflict, they also can be frightening experiences. I have also seen people become too excited, using the emotionally charged event to ventilate an unrelated, deep anger. As such

events are so public, it is important that organizers and their co-workers select their roles carefully, allowing more verbally confident and gregarious types to perform the publicly expressive roles while others handle the demonstration's order and safety. This minimizes both personal difficulties and potentially embarrassing public miscues.

The Steps Towards Developing Tactical Self-Awareness

By identifying one's personal comfort in the above organizing situations, the organizer can begin to structure ways to improve performance in areas of lesser effectiveness while maintaining strengths. The structure you develop should emphasize two operational principles:

1. **Be modest in your personal goals.** Everyone knows they you're suppose to work with groups in a way that does not build false expectations, the type that either can never be met or are so grandiose that solid achievements appear worthless, And so it is with one's self. You haven't efficiently organized the office's routines over the last month? Instead of berating yourself over the failure, start worth organizing you appointment book for the next week. By being modest, you have a chance at success that can spur you on to even larger tasks. (If you like, think of this process as "community development for one"!)

2. **Actively use your personal strengths to work on areas of difficulty.** No person is exclusively "process" or "task" oriented, and few situations are either. You're uncomfortable at parties? Why not tend bar or help serve food? This more focused task will fit your own personal make-up better, and creates enough "work" to help you relax a bit. One can reverse the content if the difficult situation relates to task-oriented groups. By being both modest and aware of how to use your strengths in every situation, personal change can and will take place.

An organizer then can begin using the organizing process in ways that help her or him lessen particular errors of the past. Increased effectiveness, rather than viewed as "art" or "just experience," is respected as a deepened ability to combine one's intuitive and intellectual skills in ways that help differentiate the "political" and "personal" elements of the organizing process.

A brief example of this process would probably look like the following.

- As a good organizer, you will make some tactical mistakes (and good organizers are *always* making mistakes) at some organizing event. (Choose your hardest one from the table above).
- Recognizing your mistakes, you will go home and for the rest of the evening berate yourself for being such a colossal failure.

- After a while, fatigue sets in and some of the self-hatred instilled by “great organizer” theories begins to wear off. The tactically self-aware practitioner can now use this slight distance from the situation to analyze what happened:

- “Where and when was I effective?”
- When did people respond to well, and when did they get results?
- What was I doing specifically that seemed to excite or irritate people?
- Was the problem in my implementation or were there hidden agendas floating around?

- As one explores these answers through both introspection and later talks with others, a sifting process occurs, one that allows you to recognize strategic mistakes, others’ hang-ups, and one’s actual personal inflexibility.
- Away from the context of the actual work, a tactically self-aware organizer begins to integrate new elements into his or her behavior, allowing yourself to have a few structural supports in future situations so that overall tactical effectiveness is maintained.

Or, as Rogers put it earlier in more theoretical language(prop 6):

Under certain conditions, involving primarily complete absence of any threat to the self- structure, experiences which are inconsistent with it may be perceived and examined and the structure of the self revised to assimilate and include such experiences.

An Exercise in Building Tactical Self-Awareness:

Choose an event that had success and struggles for you, too:

What worked well for you?:

What did not go as well?

On reflection, which part of the problem related to your tactical inflexibility?

Is there a way you can use your tactical strengths as a support within this situation?

What other pre-planning supports can you use with others in the future?

While Rogers was discussing therapeutic issues, but the process related to tactical-self-awareness isn't really much different. Such introspection and reflective work may not be easy, but one's willingness to engage in both personal introspection and to use tactical supports in personally challenging organizing situations can help move one, over time, from a mechanistic application of tactics to a more fluid use of your self in any variety of strategic contexts. Thus, the next time a similar situation occurs you free yourself from personally-discomforting tasks by taking different assignments, or if not possible, giving yourself structural cues to ease the situation (notes of your agenda, etc.)

There always will be moments of greater and lesser success, of course, but the application of tactical self awareness over time uses experience as a tool for ongoing learning and not as a static "artistic" place at which old organizers someday arrive by accident. This is why task-oriented organizers can grow to work well with individuals,

and highly process-oriented caseworkers can learn to handle large political groups. Neither type of individual has been born with certain irrevocable styles of how to work. Each practitioner is *made*, again and again, by both contextual, environmental demands and one's willingness to engage personally in understanding further those demands as they change.

Which experience, you can extend your use of this introspective tool beyond your own personal growth and increased tactical effectiveness. Looking at your self means increasing your willingness to look at others, too, and helping judge their personal fit in different situations. Nancy Wehle, an organizer doing liaison work in the Bronx, recalled the following example:

I dislike confrontation. I link it to my own background that emphasized the virtues of stoicism, since confrontation involves a show of emotion, anger. I end up being very uncomfortable, even though I know confrontation is needed, and end up putting off any display until it's almost too late.

However, looking at the issue of confrontation from another perspective (otherwise known as turning a sow's ear into a silk purse), I know there are people who feel the same way I do. I've been able to connect up to their hesitancy in challenging authority. An example was senior citizen center that was in jeopardy. Their funding was about to be terminated and they had gone the route of appeals and appointments and meetings. While talking to the director of the center, I suggested picketing and a demo at the Board of Estimate, if all else failed. The director became hesitant and uptight. I knew what she was talking about when she said that wasn't her style. I was able to be supportive, understanding my own discomfort on those situations. Instead, we talked about someone else taking main responsibility and she staying in the background. She agreed, and the protest march was organized successfully...

A less experienced organizer in the same situation would probably have ended up straining relations with the director and potentially jeopardizing the strategic demands of the center. After all, the ABC's of organizing are clear militancy: if all other means have been tried and fail, of course you have a legitimate right to use it! As few politicians want to be seen openly disagreeing with a group of seniors (even George W. Bush), this joint use of militancy and rightful need might go far in saving the center.

In this case, Wehle saw through the prism of her own personal struggles around militancy to the director's real issue—*she didn't oppose protesting as long as she didn't have to be in it*. This personal recognition of a politically necessary tactic had not always been immediately obvious. However, by being able to identify the director's statements with her own discomfort with militancy, Wehle had supportively helped the director to distinguish tactically between her own personal needs and those of the center. No arguments on the legitimacy of protest, the just needs of the seniors, or whatever, would have worked as well. Indeed, as the director generally agreed with those arguments, any discussion of them would have distracted her from her personal difficulties. Wehle's use

of tactical-self- awareness avoided such barriers. *A sweet strategic irony had occurred—the one that underlies the effective of tactical self-awareness in all situations: they had admitted to personal limits and allowed for political growth at the same time.*

In conclusion, it's important to reiterate that tactical self-awareness is not a panacea that can correct for the political limits of a diminished resource base or lack of wide-scale progressive social movements. It's application, however, is designed for any period of history, not just ones of seeming passivity or intense activism. With this recognized, tactical self-awareness can have one final underlying benefit as well. By understanding and working with the entire organizing process, you not only deepen the practice experience but lessen the likelihood of unnecessary exhaustion. "Experience" no longer burns you out, but makes you better able to deal with the shifting tides of all organizing work. After all, in seeking to change the world, what can be wrong with changing ourselves along the way?

¹ For a website featuring a discussion on clinical social work, go to <http://www.cswf.org>. For a review of clinical issues see Lambert Maguire, *Clinical Social Work: Beyond Generalist Practice with individuals, groups, and families* (NY: Wadsworth, 2001).

²Helen Harris Perlman, *Social Casework* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press<1974) continues to be in print. Her work's influence is noted by Maguire, op.cit.

³Since writing this in the early 1980's I have learned that similar management tools have been developed and are used inside many corporate and non-profit offices to help teams better problem solve and communicate together. They include the DISC problem-solving series and Meyers-Briggs personality assessments. See www.DISC.com and www.meyers-briggs.com for use of these tools.

⁴With this noted, there is no suggestion that one's personality is unchangeable – in fact, the opposite is true. As one lives through certain situations, his/her personality can and will change, as will the situations themselves. It is thus necessary to be that much more aware of these changes as they occur in one's self and in others so that one can maximize *on-going* strategic effectiveness.

⁵Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), p 18.

⁶With the exception of number 7, these points relate to personal characteristics. Point number 7, however, is a political prescription ideologically bound to a form of liberalism more other organizers reject, and should be viewed as being as politically motivated to a particular ideology as any other political statement.

⁷Carl Rogers, *A Way of Being* (Wayfarer Publishers, 1995), Chapter One.

⁸ Joe Shreiver, *Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Shifting Paradigms in Essential Knowledge for Social Work practice*, 3rd. Edition (London: Allyn & Bacon, 2003) has a nice over view of these dynamics.

⁹I am convinced that a lack of personal awareness about one's effectiveness in varying situations is a major reason why so many organizers "burn out" in their late twenties. Having denied, or felt they had to deny personal discomfort with any number of tasks, they come to realize that the immediate pay-offs in such work don't seem worth all the personal strain and opt for an entirely different line of work.

¹⁰ This is consistent with the previously referred to DISC Profiles, especially "Drivers" and "Calculators."

¹¹Interestingly enough, people who fell into either primary category frequently felt comfortable in demonstrations. However, on closer examination their particular comfort depended on the function they

selected to perform at the big event. “Process-oriented” people enjoyed engaging others in protest, speaking, etc., while others enjoyed maintaining the demonstration’s safety and order (serving as marshals, being in charge of organizing speakers, etc.) The varied “task” and “process” functions of large-scale demonstrations seem to allow room for just about everybody...as long as they approved of the use of protest in the first place!