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Michael Jacoby Brown
training & coaching

*Helping organizations achieve their goals
through recruiting and motivating others*

Organizer's Edge ▶

Community Organizers and Electoral Campaigns

I remember many years ago Ernie Cortes, one of the lead organizers with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) put down electoral campaigns as the "silly season." Most community organizers worked outside of the electoral process and focused on influencing those in office.

For some organizers, this has been changing --- for some at least since Ronald Reagan cut off funding to many grass roots community organizations. That was a wakeup call: elections mattered to community organizations --especially when the organizations had funding from VISTA and other Federal agencies.



"Go High?"

Lately, I've been involved with a couple electoral campaigns. In a local State Senate special election, caused by the death of our State Senator, two liberals campaigned for the Democratic nomination in the primary -the election that counted in our very Democratic District. Both candidates had similar positions on most issues. I worked for the one I knew better and longer. As campaigns go, it was pretty polite. There were few policy disagreements, and yet I found myself having to resist the urge to see the bad side of the candidate I did not endorse, although I agreed with him on the issues, knew him and basically liked him.

This comes in part from my own position that I would not run for office unless I thought the candidate would not represent me well. I thought the candidate, who was already our State Rep, should not have run. My

candidate had been the Chief of Staff for many years to the late State Senator and had the support of his family. I also knew her personally from other local campaigns. I felt her opponent was running more from ambition than principle.

I also found myself, feeling like I could not support MY candidate without finding something wrong with the other candidate. I fought this feeling, because I liked her opponent too. (In fact, after the election I wrote him an honest thank you note for inspiring a young man I met outside a polling place.

I am also working for [Tito Jackson](#), in the Boston Mayor's race. I provide some training to Tito's volunteers and tell them not to denigrate the opponent, (the current Mayor.) As Michele Obama said, "When they go low, we go high."

Recently some people (assume the Mayor's people) have been tearing down Tito's signs. People from City Hall have also has been threatening stores with Tito posters that the Mayor will cut some of their funding if they don't take down the Tito signs. Even though the current Mayor has 40 times as much money in his campaign account, thousands of people who owe him their jobs, a building boom (of mostly luxury housing), general favorability, it seems his campaign is "going low."

So, how do we "go high," and yet tell the truth about the bullying and possibly illegal activities of the "other side?" How do we run a positive campaign that treats everyone including the "other side" with "dignity and respect?" (This was the watchword of the [Harvard Union](#), and it was unusual among union drives -- and they won union drives without demonizing the enemy.) I don't have easy answers.

It may be simpler, and it is certainly tempting to me and I assume others, to demonize electoral opponents. Emotions play a role in elections - when people make either/or decisions, based on complex reactions to how they view people running for office.

Voting decisions are often made on emotion. Many voters told me they "hated" Hillary Clinton. I recall a State Rep race when the emotion against one of the candidates was overwhelming. Negative emotions play a role in elections - where you know the candidate personally (local) or only thru the media (President.)

This is hardly news. But unless we can have on-going dialogue and education about government and our elected officials - not just for a "campaign season" every two or four years, we are not going to see much improvement in what government does.

Briefly noted: Know Your History Dept.

LGBTQ History of Western Canada has some lessons for today...see [.LGBTQ History in Western Canada](#)

Book Review:

[Caring for Red, A Daughter's Memoir](#), by Mindy Fried (Vanderbilt University Press, 2016) is the intimate story of one woman caring for her

elderly father before his death --- and really so much more. Her father, Manny Fried, was a Buffalo, NY based union organizer, playwright, actor, teacher, and the object of red-baiting by the House Un-American Activities in the 1950's and later. Her memoir covers labor history, class conflict, working class theater, the McCarthy period and its effects on families and children, family relationships, caring for elderly parents and how we make meaning of our lives. The story of her father, the complexities of families and how the decisions social justice organizers affect their families and others, make this is a book, that organizers -- and anyone exploring how we make meaning of our lives and legacies -- need to read. .

Feedback Welcome

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

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Michael Jacoby Brown Story

Who else you will hear from.....

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

Jessica Tang: Boston Teachers Union, AFT

George Luse of the Mass Teachers Assn,

Scott Reed with the PICO Network, ,

Cathy Howell, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,

Caesar McDowell of the Interaction Institute for Social Justice,

Diana Bell of Community and Labor United,

David Hernandez of the California Education Assn,

Attica Scott, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky

Bob Van Meter with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,

Walter Davis, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.

Debra Askenase, of Community Organizing 2.0,

Deb Fastino, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,

Rebecca Gutman, with SEIU-1199,

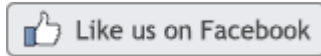
Tim Dean, of SEIU-1199,

Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles and others, hopefully, including YOU

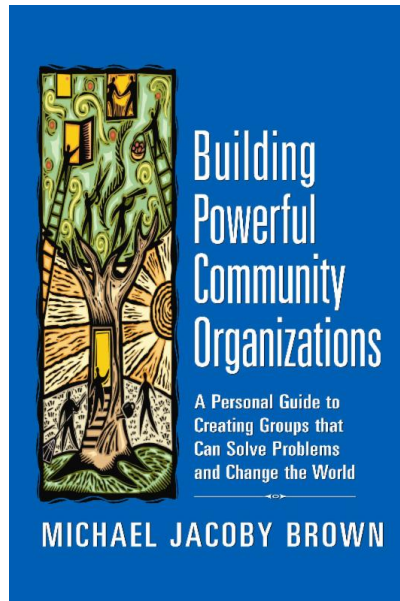
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