

April 17, 2014



**Organizer's Edge** 

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**From: Michael Jacoby Brown**  
**This Organizer's Edge**

I have repeated more times than I care to remember: ***The job of an organizer is to build organizations and develop leaders.*** The really tough job is to build powerful organizations.

Recently a union colleague told me that things are ok, although some of his (from his point of view, privileged white middle class) staff say they feel like "exploited workers." These same staff tell me of the complicated inter-racial and inter-class dynamics in the organization that fuel conflict and hurt.

This reminds of the wisdom of [Visions-Inc](#), a multi-cultural training organization that explains how organizational change has to happen at four levels: personal, inter-personal, cultural and institutional. Too many social justice organizations focus only on the institutional changes needed in the world and perhaps this leads them to neglect the first three within their organizations. The internal stuff is often the hardest stuff. As Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

Building powerful organizations requires paying attention to so many things, including people's feelings. When social change organizations are focused on institutional change in the outside world (more funding, better public policies, etc.) it is easy to think that money or better policy alone will solve our internal organizational needs as well. If I have learned anything over more than 40 years of organizing, it is that ignoring people's feelings is not the way to go. We have to do a better job of listening to each other within our organization, as much as we are trained to do this in our one on ones out in the world.



**Jessica Tang** is currently the new Director of Organizing at the [Boston Teachers Union](#). It's a new role at the union which includes both internal member organizing and external community organizing. She was most recently the 6th grade social studies teacher at the Young Achievers Math and Science Pilot School in Mattapan and has taught in Boston Public Schools for the last eight years. In 2011 she was elected to serve on the Executive Board of the Boston Teachers Union and spearheaded the creation of the union's first Community Advisory Board. She is a founding member of the Teacher Activist Group-Boston, former co-chair of the Massachusetts Asian-American Educators Association, and has been a part of many community organizations, district work groups, and educational advisory groups.

### **Organizing Parents and Teachers**

**--Introduction:** In the past, I have lamented the lack of parent and community outreach and organizing among teachers unions. This month comes some welcome news from Jessica Tang, an organizer and former teacher with the Boston Teachers Union who is pioneering a new way of organizing teachers and parents in her union. I hope more teachers unions start using at least some of their resources to organize parents and others in the community who could do some much to support public education.-

**MJB**

### **From Jessica Tang, Organizer, Boston Teachers Union, [AFT](#)**

I am learning that overall parents like their teachers, trust them, and want to work with them. The more important point is that parents want to advocate for their kids and often don't know how. Parents can make a difference. Politicians pay attention to parents, especially when they are organized.

I have also found that teachers want to work with parents, but often don't have time or know how either. When the union is able to set up structures - committees or parent councils where people can get in the same room and talk - then there is power. We can also help our members learn how to engage parents and work with parents.

Teachers want parent engagement - in helping their kids learn and also about the larger policy issues. When we are all on the same page we are much more effective and powerful.

Regarding the issues of firing "bad" teachers, we first ask: Is the teacher getting the support to improve? It is just not true that teachers unions can stop the firing of teachers--Unions just ensure that there is due process and that members are being evaluated fairly. Firing ineffective teachers is up to the principal. At the end of the day, that is the role of the principal and the principal's responsibility--and they have full authority to make those recommendations.

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

<http://michaeljacobybrown.com/contact/>

### **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,

Linda Honold, of Wisconsin Voices

Attica Scott, now an elected official in Louisville, KY,formerly with Jobs with Justice,

Quinn Rallings in Alabama with the PICO Network,

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

Walter Davis, in Tennessee, of the National Organizers Alliance,

Deb 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,

Claudia Horwitz, of Stone Circles in North Carolina,

Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles

and others, hopefully, including YOU

### Other Useful Links

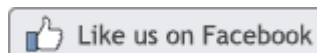
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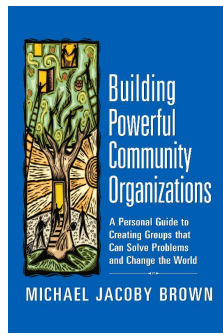
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