

Understanding the question 'why' without an answer at all

Years ago, an organizer came to me. He told me he would like to send me to Western States Center, Community Strategic Training Initiative (CSTI). CSTI is where they train you on different strategies of organizing.

Michael Woo, the organizer that was working with Labor, Employment, and Law, said he would pay for everything, the workshops, the meals, the transportation. "I know you'll benefit from this."

I told him I was too busy. I was fighting for indoor shelters, tent cities, Chief Seattle Club, health care for the homeless, homeless people's rights, and the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, just to name a few.

A month later, he came back with the same proposal. I was tired and needed a break so I went. I signed up for Fundraising and Power Analysis.

When I got to Reed College where they have the workshops, the energy, the enthusiasm was like, "wow!" It was what I needed.

The workshops were great. I got on their e-mail list. I've been supporting CSTI and talking to other people about my experiences. I always wanted to go back but was too busy.

This year I went with the sponsorship of Street Roots, and on July 29, I signed in, got my package, then waited for my first workshop. I also met a few people from Sisters of the Road.

My first workshop was called "Flash Mobs, Handcuffs, and Successful Campaigns: Direct Action and Civil Disobedience." In there, we were shown a timeline of civil disobedience and a video of a flash mob and discussed it, then spent time on organizing. We were even given different scenarios and asked, "How would we get organized and what would we do?"

The best part for me was one of the organizers who had participated in the WTO demonstrations in Seattle. At one point she said, "We had this crazy idea ..." I could relate. I mean, every campaign I've been on, people said, "It was crazy." To me, those people aren't thinking outside the box.

The next day, the workshop was called

"Building Power and Alliances for the Common Good." This was an unusual workshop. The organizer said from the beginning, "if you want hand-outs, binders, notebooks, I'm not about that." He said this several times. This workshop was building relationships, using your experiences in life and so on. I and several others thought it was great. I even told him it was a breath of fresh air.

That evening, there was a banquet. They informed us they were going to change their name. Here are some of the choices: Organizing Movements from the Ground (OMG). Training for Activists & Community Organizers (TACO). Grassroots Organizing & Activism Training (GOAT). Strategic Organizing Learning in Detail Around Really Important Themes Y'all (SOLIDARITY). What they settled on was Activists Mobilizing for Power (AMP).

The last workshop on the next day was called "Visions and Verse: Tapping into the Creative for Engagement and Empowerment." Michael "Mic" Crenshaw was giving this workshop. First he told us a little about himself, then sang one of his songs. Then he showed us some quotes by Assata Shakur, and suggested a movie "The Murder of Fred Hampton," and a book by George Jackson, "Blood in My Eye." Then he asked us to get into three groups. When we did, he said, "I want you to write a poem. The topic is 'Why?'"

I didn't get it. So I asked, "Hey Mic, why, what? What do you mean?"

He explained, "Why this, why that..." and went on telling me different "whys." Then he said, "But I don't want it to be specific. Just why?"

OK, I was still confused.

Colin Kiley rose to the lead and said, "OK, write down the three worst comments people say to you." Then we all (about eight of us) went from there. When we finished our comments, Nicole Sangsoree helped Colin organize the comments. I felt my comments didn't belong. But Nicole reassured me it did. In the presentation part I was supposed to go up. But I got cold feet and didn't. The presentation went well.

I'd like to thank the contributors of this presentation: Patrice Mays, Ani Lineback, Ikaika Regdor, Colin Kiley, Nicole Sangsoree, Sarah Morrigan, Maria Mendez. I also think this shows the diversity that is AMP. To the right is what we presented

WHY?

Why are you so aggressive?
Why don't you just get a job?
Why help, why bother?
Why don't you know how to speak Thai?
Why are you so straight-acting?
Why don't you have a family yet?

WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE LIKE US?

Are you legal?
Why do I get so jealous of white women who love black men?
Why can't you get over it?
What are you?
Are you Mexican?
Are you Native American?
Are you Asian?
Are you Black or White?

WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE LIKE US?

Do you speak ooga-booga talk?
Why help those freaks?
Are you happy being that fat?
Do you like being homeless?
What makes you think you know better than I do?
Are you a man or a woman?
Why are you so into your culture?
Why don't you practice your culture?
Why aren't you all the same?

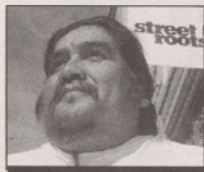
WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE LIKE US?

STOP! But wait, I have some questions for you.

Why do I have to fit your stereotype?
Why can't I just be in charge?
Why do you try to run my life?
How is it that you have "straight sex?"
Why can't you accept who I am?
Why do I have to struggle for my rights when you just get to have them?
Why are you worrying about my life instead of your own?
How come I don't get to vote on your marriage?

WHY DO I HAVE TO BE LIKE YOU?

"WHY?"



THE WANDERER

Leo Rhodes

Leo Rhodes is a street activist and homeless advocate. He is also a vendor with Street Roots and a regular contributor to the newspaper.

To A True Friend

By Jeff Mc

Thank you for being who you are.
Thank you for always helping me out.
Thank you for keeping me out of the weather.
Thank you for giving me work when you had extra.
Thank you for listening to me when I've had problems.
Thank you for being so positive toward me.
Thank you for being the best friend a person could ask for.
I'm very thankful for having you as my best friend, and you are.
You are the most thoughtful and giving friend anybody could ask for.
Vance Strong, you're my best bud, I truly mean that.
Thank you for everything that you've done for me.

Your friend,
Jeff Mc

people's
FOOD CO-OP

good food. free classes.
real community.

3029 SE 21st Ave
open 8a-10p daily
EBT accepted
(503) ORGANIC
www.peoples.coop

street roots
ROSE CITY RESOURCE
July-November 2011
Portland, Oregon

www.rosecityresource.org

The new Rose City Resource is now available. For copies, write us at pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com.

The most important 104 pages you'll find under one cover!