# Paddle Power Manual

*The theory and tactics of kayaktivism*

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**Introduction**

Qajaq, the Inuktitut root word for what we now spell kayak translates roughly to "hunter’s craft." For thousands of years, these boats have been tools used by Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic as tools to pursue whales, seals and other prey across the frigid waters and coastlines of the Arctic. Long, fast and silent, kayaks today are primarily used as pleasure craft, but ever since a massive wave of water-borne protests took place in 2004 in the Pacific, *kayaktivism* is fast becoming a symbol of a new kind of people power in the fight to stop runaway climate change.

Sitting in a kayak or a canoe, you’re about as close as a person can get to the water without being in it. In this seat, most of us feel somehow more connected to the water, and elements like the flow of a river or the changing of tides and weather take on new meaning. Both the power and the fragility of a body of water become clearer when we strike out onto it with little more than a paddle and a few centimeters of material between us and the depths. Looking up at a tanker, an oil refinery or a drilling rig, that fragility is magnified by the sheer scale of these megalithic instruments of fossil fuel industry expansion.

In this manual we share some broader theory of direct action and recent examples of kayaktivism, drawn from experiences as early as the 1970's to recent examples (as recent as an action Cam participated in just a few weeks ago). **We share this to think about best practices and how to carry out this work even more effectively.**

*Cam Fenton and Daniel Hunter, July 2016*
Example kayaktivist actions

1970
Quakers in Philadelphia stopped freighters bound for East Pakistan (what we now call Bangladesh) with canoes. The freighters were carrying shipments to support dictator Yaya Khan.

*Learn more from the book* Blockade! *by Richard Taylor or the new movie* Blockade: National Resistance to Stop Genocide.

1971
An old fishing boat set sail towards a small island called Amchitka, located off the west coast of Alaska. The boat was called *The Greenpeace* and its crew was determined to sail in and prevent the United States government from performing a nuclear weapons test. Since then, Greenpeace became nearly synonymous with high-stakes action on the high seas.

2014
Pacific Climate Warriors launch their handmade canoes in an attempt to blockade coal exports from the Newcastle Coal Port on Australia’s eastern coast.

2015
Kayaktivists blockade Shell’s drilling rig Polar Pioneer delaying its departure from Seattle’s Elliott Bay bound for the Arctic on June 15, 2015.

2016
Kayaktivists attempt to blockade coal exports from the Newcastle Coal Port on Australia’s eastern coast.

2016
Break Free from Fossil Fuels: Activists in Canada, Australia and across the United States took to the water to blockade coal terminals, tar sands tanker facilities, oil refineries and more.
**Why Nonviolent Direct Action?**

Before jumping into the water, let’s remind ourselves the strategic value of direct action. What is nonviolent direct action and why do people do it?

Nonviolent direct action is known by many names. Gandhi called it satyagraha (truth or soul force). Henry Thoreau called it civil disobedience. Activists in North Philadelphia sometimes call it street heat. In the Philippines, democracy activists call it people power.

Underneath all of these definitions are similar themes such as a use of tactics outside of normal institutions (use of the street or fasting) and a commitment to refraining from violence. But even more core to all of these is that direct action is about power – bringing together people to make a united change.

**A Simple Definition of Nonviolent Direct Action**

We use a simple definition of nonviolent action:

*Nonviolent action are techniques outside of institutionalised behaviour for waging conflict using methods of protest, noncooperation, and intervention without the use or threat of injurious force.*

In essence, people turn to nonviolent direct action after the institutionalised ways of settling disagreements are unsuccessful. In the civil rights movement, African-Americans turned to nonviolent action after years of fighting in the courts to end institutionalised segregation. The courts did not provide the relief needed, and so nonviolent action was born. The methods of nonviolent action lie outside institutionalised behaviour.

In these methods people either: a) do what they’re not supposed to do, like the hundreds of thousands who flooded the streets in defiance of Quebec’s anti-protest laws were created to try to stop student protests against austerity measures; or b) refuse to do what they’re expected to do, like Canadian Union of Postal Worker’s historic 42-day strike in 1981 for paid maternity leave, which paved the way for others to win this right.

These are all in contrast to actions which try to make change through the formal channels. CUPW turned to striking after negotiations had broken down. And the thousands wearing red in the streets of Quebec turned out only after the government showed it valued control over freedom of expression and negotiation in good faith with the students’ demands.

Take the #ShellNo campaign, as an example. On April 17, 2015, Shell’s Polar Pioneer, a monolithic yellow and white drilling rig, arrived in Port Angeles, a small town on the tip of Washington’s Olympic Peninsula. Anchored beneath the Olympic Range, the rig had already drawn the ire of Seattle residents when they learned the city’s port had agreed to a lease with Royal Dutch Shell to allow the rig use of its facilities. City council was opposed. The mayor was opposed — but against the power of a multinational corporation, they claimed they were unable to stop it.

In other words, the traditional political had been tried. But the rig continued, despite on-going protests and political maneuvers to attempt to stop it.

So on May 14th, people took to the water. Confronted by First Nations and hundreds of kayaks, images from the action spread around the globe—small boats led by First Nations canoes in a David vs. Goliath struggle with a
massive drilling rig bound for the melting arctic, the physical manifestation of misguided oil lust in the age of climate change.

Actions continued for weeks, and spread while the Polar Pioneer remained in the Port of Seattle. In Bellingham, a short drive south of the Canadian border, a student activist chained herself to the anchor line of Shell’s Arctic Challenger and later in the summer, 13 activists in Portland rappelled from, while kayaks paddled beneath, the St. Johns Bridge in Portland, Oregon to block Shell’s icebreaker Fennica from joining the rest of the company’s drilling fleet in the Arctic.

While Shell’s fleet was successful in reaching the Arctic, by September 2015, the company announced that it would end its plans to drill in the Alaskan Arctic for the “foreseeable future.” A month later, the Obama Administration made moves to limit future Arctic drilling in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas and rejected a request from Shell to extend its lease.

Direct action had played its part. And while it was certainly not the only factor (as with all campaigns, it’s a combination of many pressures), the action was critical in galvanizing people’s imaginations and raising the stakes on this campaign. The boldness, the creativity, and the willingness to sacrifice and risk — these all take center stage in direct action.
Nonviolent action, therefore, can be distinguished from other forms of doing conflict which are within current institutions and traditions. Going to court, participating in elections, or engaging in negotiations can sometimes work — but they are not considered nonviolent action. Instead, people turned to nonviolent action when courts, elected officials, and official institutions abandon their roles to protect citizens and instead act corruptly. Masses of people turn to nonviolent direct action after the institutional modes fail.

So why does nonviolent action work? Aren’t institutions like the government imbued with more power than frustrated citizens? The answer, surprisingly, is no – not when people use their power.

**IT’S ALL ABOUT POWER**

Traditional power is thought of as a pyramid, where power flows from the top downward. A janitor takes orders from a supervisor who takes orders from a district head, and so on—all the way up to a CEO or head of state at the very top of the pyramid. In that way of viewing power social change happens when we either replace the people at the top (for example, regime change or voting) or are able to convince the top to change their ways (for example, educating via such a public outcry).

But that’s not a grassroots way of viewing power. That leaves power in the hands of the oil executives and the rest of us begging for them to do the right thing. We need a new way of viewing the power.

The grassroots way views power as flowing upwards: the upside-down triangle.

In this way of viewing power, the oil executive or head of state is inherently unstable. Like an upside-down triangle, unjust power and authority is unstable and will fall. To prevent that, that rely on support to keep them upright—we call them pillars of support.

For example, oil executives are dependent not only on their managers, but other pillars of support like the company’s stockholders, the secretary who keeps track of their schedule, the tech workers who keep their cell phone and e-mail functioning, the janitors who clean their offices, their limo driver, truck drivers and ship captains who transport their oil, writers who do not investigate their human rights violations, engineers and
contractors who make the roads that the oil companies’ trucks move on, customers who buy their product, and so on.

Through all these actions they give legitimacy to the oil companies—and prop them up, which allows them keep doing their destructive practises.

A campaign from the 1970s illustrates this. The US government was sending weapons to Pakistani dictator Yahya Khan that were used to murder the people of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). In an attempted genocide, nearly 3 million East Pakistaniis were killed.

A group of Quakers in the United States wanted to make a difference. When they found out that some of the arms shipments were loaded from ports in their city, they picked a dramatic action to stop the flow of weapons— a naval blockade! For a month, they publicly practised “naval manoeuvres” in canoes and kayaks in front of TV cameras. Some days had themes—religious leaders, kids, elders—all leading up to the arrival of the gigantic freighter ships bound for Pakistan.

When the first ship arrived, the group jumped into their canoes and paddle boats. The coast guard immediately pulled them out, as photographers tried for the best picture. Over the next weeks, they played ‘a cat-and-mouse game,’ as the freighters tried to avoid the public spotlight by changing their arrival times or rerouting to other nearby ports. But an important group of people was watching the unfolding storyline on TV– the longshoremen employed to load the ships.

The Quakers went to bars and met with them. The longshoremen were struck by their sincerity and the sense that this was a historic moment. The local longshoremen union agreed to refuse to load weapons headed to Pakistan. It was the beginning of the end.
The local longshoremen convinced the national union to stop loading any military shipments to Pakistan. With that crucial pillar of support removed, the government couldn’t use any port on the East Coast to send arms. This classic civil disobedience made it prohibitively expensive to send the weapons. Soon after, the federal government announced it would no longer support the dictator (unsurprisingly, they did not mention the activists’ role).

Without firing a shot or making a single lobby visit, this small group forced the hand of the US empire. That’s power.

This is a different view of “people power” than people merely working together to try to persuade powerholders to change, instead it uses the specific strategy of conversion of allies to destabilise power. By analysing our targets using this way of viewing power, we may see new pillars we can “remove” from the system—and also better analyse who power sources we have relationships and access to in order to force change.¹

¹ Get handout on the concept of people power and how to use the pillars of support from http://trainings.350.org
Methods of Water Action

In April 2014, a group of Pacific Islanders called the Pacific Climate Warriors launched a bold pledge in Australia to take to the sea and blockade coal exports from the Newcastle Coal Port on the country’s eastern coast. And, they would do it using traditional canoes they would carve themselves.

After months of work building momentum, and building canoes, they took to the water in October. Thirty warriors from twelve islands were joined by hundreds of supporters on the water, where they blocked coal ships from leaving the world’s largest coal port.

In a place like the Pacific Islands, water is life. As the Pacific Climate Warriors themselves wrote: “Every morning, we wake up and the ocean is there, surrounding our island. But now the ocean, driven by climate change is creeping ever closer. Unless something changes, many of our Pacific Islands face losing everything to sea level rise.”

That’s why they adopted the slogan “We are not drowning. We are fighting,” and why their canoes were such a powerful tool. Much like the kayak in the north, these canoes have deep cultural roots, rich stories and a connection to the place that the Pacific Climate Warriors are fighting to defend. Taking to the water unlocked this connection, not just for the activists involved, but for people around the world with their own connections to the water.

One of the Pacific Warriors, George Nacewa, summed it up in an interview: “We speak different languages and come from different cultures, but we are connected to the land and we are connected by the ocean.” This connection to water is at the heart of kayaktivism.

Pacific Climate Warriors attempt to blockade coal exports from the Port of Newcastle on Australia’s eastern coast—the world’s largest coal port. Right-top: Tokelau Warriors: We are not drowning. We are fighting. Right-bottom: Fiji warriors. Photos: 350.org
Broadly speaking, there are two types of actions that are going to take place on the water: Offensive Actions and Defensive or Blocking Actions.

The Pacific Climate Warriors goal in the water was to block coal shipments. (Their broader goal was to raise awareness of the crisis, gather people inside the Pacific to raise their voices, and help remove pillars of support from the fossil fuel industry.) So they were using the most common method of kayaktivism: blocking actions.

Blocking actions take place when the goal of activists is to block something from moving into, out of or through an area of water.

*Examples of blocking actions* — where the goal is stop a ship or water-based vessel. This requires maneuvering your kayak into the way, being very careful about the massive undertow these ships possess.

In contrast, offensive actions are actions where the activists are moving towards something stationary with the goal of swarming it, and in many cases preventing it from moving in the first place. These actions typically target vessels at rest.

*Examples of offensive actions* — where the goal is to swarm so that a stationary cannot move (like before a vessel starts) or to prevent it from leaving.
**Handling Risks in the Water**

**Nonviolent direct action always involve some level of risk.** Some aspects of risk are within your control, and some are not. Police and public reaction to a particular action is never 100% predictable. Paddling also includes some inherent risk, and while the vast majority of people enjoy the water with no issues, every year paddlers drown, get injured, get seasick and deal with things like hypothermia and dehydration. The good news is that with preparation and planning, we can manage risk.

Before engaging in blockades, you should attend a full training session on the specific blockade you will be using. Organisers should be responsible for full action planning, looking at various options beyond the scope of this manual.

**Know the water**

Water has carved rivers and shaped shorelines, in other words, it’s a powerful force. Some considerations to remember:

- If you are paddling on an ocean, when is the tide high and low? How could these tidal changes affect your action? What about currents? When do the currents ebb and flood and how could that effect you. Are there any dangerous areas like things like whirlpools, high waves or rogue waves, or submerged dangers exist?
- If you are on a river, how fast is it moving? Is it high or low water? Are there any rapids or submerged obstacles that participants need to know about.
- Large lakes can also have currents, if you are paddling on a lake, make sure you know about these.

The best tools for learning about a body of water at a glance are maps and charts. Maps show features of the earth above sea level, charts show features below sea level. Maps will be the most helpful to rivers, while charts will be indispensable for actions on large lakes and the ocean. Charts are complex, but this is a good primer on what to look for. You can find charts online or at a local boating store.

If you are planning an action on the ocean, it’s a good idea to find out about the tides and currents. Countries publish tide and current tables in different ways.

- How to read tide and current tables: [http://www.paddling.net/guidelines/showArticle.html?554](http://www.paddling.net/guidelines/showArticle.html?554)
- US Tides & Currents: [https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/noaacurrents/Regions](https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/noaacurrents/Regions)
- Canada Tides & Currents: [http://www.tides.gc.ca/eng](http://www.tides.gc.ca/eng)

**Know what else is on the water**

In a kayak or a canoe, you’re probably the smallest vessel on the water, and that makes you extremely vulnerable, some important things to consider are:

- Do you know what the local regulations for boating are?
● Are you just assembling a flotilla, or trying to block a ship from moving?
● What kind of natural hazards or other physical risks exist for larger vessels?
● If you are blockading a specific ship and it is underway/moving, can it stop before it would hit you?
● Have you taken things like undertow and water displacement into account? Large vessels create their own sea states that can be very dangerous and a small boat can be sucked under a larger vessel, or even into a large propeller if you are not careful. As a general rule, try to keep at least 25 meters between yourself and a moving vessel, and have rescue scenarios for what happens if things go wrong. A good way of measuring is to look up and see if you can see the bridge (where people steer a ship from) from where you are, if you can’t, you’re likely in a dangerous place.

Charts can also be helpful for learning about the movement of large vessels, but you may also want to invest in a VHF (Very High Frequency) Radio, which ships use to communicate on the water. A VHF radio can help you monitor ship traffic, speak to other vessels and more. Operating a VHF radio requires a license and using one without it can result in a hefty fine.

A cheaper, but less effective tool is the smartphone app and website MarineTraffic, which tracks the travel of large vessels around the globe.

### Have a way to communicate (and a back-up!)

High winds, loud boats and distance can make communication on the water very difficult, so in addition to vocal communication, make sure you have back-up systems to communicate on the water.

- **Radios.** The most expensive option, but also the best way to make sure you can communicate complex messages. Make sure you get waterproof ones.
- **Cell phones.** Phone and text messages can be useful, but make sure that you have reception on the water and that every phone is in some kind of waterproof protective case and either connected to it’s user or connected to something that floats. Water, especially salt water, and phones don’t mix.
- **Whistles:** Whistles are very loud, pretty cheap and extremely reliable. They’re also useless if you don’t have a clear system for their use. We suggest using whistles mainly for emergencies, with two long blasts signalling someone needing help. You can use them for other things, but beyond a few signals, they become confusing, and if you are using them for key communication, make sure people aren’t blowing them for fun.
- **Paddle and hand signals:** The simplest and most reliable form of signals, but as with all signals, they only work if people know what they mean. There is not hard and fast rules for signals so customize them for what makes sense for your action.

Stop (Move paddle Up & Down)  Go This Way...  One or both arms overhead: I’m OK...Are You OK?

Attention! or Help! ~ Universal SOS Paddle Signal ~ Held High -Waving Paddle (when possible)

Gather - come to me (Hold paddle straight up)

On a river it can mean: "Go straight ahead" to Whitewater Kayakers

### Make (simple) plans

Make your action as safe as it can be to achieve your goals. Make a Plan B....and C, D & E, if you think you might need it (or not!). Have agreements on when you will turn back based on increases in the human, weather or sea state risks.

Design the plan both for your own physical blocking/offensive goals — and for the visual imagery it creates — and that it fits into the overall logic of the campaign. *(Is this the right time to escalate? Does this escalation make sense to people not intimately involved in the campaign?)*

Especially if there isn’t a history of water-based actions in your area, start with small, low risk actions and work your way up as you develop an understanding of the water, the police and your targets. Don’t deploy all your technology at once. Leave room to escalate during the action, if that is appropriate.

When planning paddling trips, guides will consider 3 key risk factors, and using this model can also be helpful for direct action on the water. These factors are:

- **Human risk.** Ask yourself, how skilled or well trained are the people that you are taking onto the water? What other vessels are you going to be paddling with or around? What do you know about how the police where you are taking action respond on the water?
- **Weather.** Is it going to be calm or windy. If there is wind, is going to make paddling easier or harder? Will it be working with you or against you, and at what times in the day? Will it be sunny and hot, which raises the risk of dehydration, or rainy and cold, where hypothermia can become an issue. What kind of weather would keep you on shore? Remember, the marine forecast can be very different from the forecast on land.
- **Sea state or water conditions.** Are the waves and swells big enough to tip paddlers? How strong are the currents and could they be a factor in your action? If you are on a river, how fast is it moving and are their any rapids you need to be concerned about?
Scout. Scout. Scout. Spend a lot of time getting to know your location and the water that you're planning to paddle on. Unless it's extreme circumstances, your action should never be the first time you’re paddling in an area.

Get clear on the different roles. A good support team is essential. People who are not wanting to risk being part of a blockade are needed to help out other logistics, paying attention to safety, talking to media, and more. This is especially true during an action on the water when food, water and media access are going to be limited by how close you are to a shoreline. If you can, have at least one support boat with a solid crew.

By thinking through your action and the context in which it will take place, you can develop some scenarios to help you predict how things will go.

Get help

Before you go implementing your plan, take advantage of the experience of others, through training, or on-site support. Everyone does it for the first time once. And the more experience you have, the more responsibility you have to support others in an appropriate way.

For actions on the water, seek out experienced paddlers or guides who may have important, specific knowledge. Often times local guides and paddlers are also the kind of people with a vested interest in protecting the bodies of water.

Practise! Practise! Practise!

Practise. Over and over. Then practise some more. The more you practise, the safer you will be and the more effective your action will be.

Some specific skills to know and practise:

- **Kayak Wet Exit**: Flipping over in a kayak can be scary and dangerous if you don’t know how to get out, especially during an action. Practice wet exits to make sure you are comfortable in case of a capsize.
  - How to Do a Wet Exit: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEmOxMP2tR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEmOxMP2tR4)
- **Rescue**: Eventually, someone is going to end up in the water, and you don’t want to have to rely on the police to pull them out, or their swimming skills. Drowning, hypothermia and other risks are real, so knowing a few simple rescue techniques and practicing them can go a long way to making sure your action is safe and effective.
  - Here are two key examples of rescues
    - Kayak T-Rescue: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiBd2RnXu7g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiBd2RnXu7g)
    - Canoe T-Rescue: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUW1b8W1bK4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUW1b8W1bK4)
- **Towing**: Paddling is tiring, and there’s a good chance someone might not be able to get back to shore under their own power.
  - How to Tow: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwyYrr7N07A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwyYrr7N07A)
Other reminders

**Plan a media strategy and execute.** Make sure your message gets out and that your action logic is as transparent as possible. Remember, the further you are from shore, the harder it will be to get media to the frontline of your action. Make sure that you’re producing photos and videos, and if you can, have a boat to bring journalists out onto the water. Don’t let communications be an afterthought.

**Dress for success.** Make sure that your appearance helps carry the tone you want to set for your action, and is appropriate for the conditions that you are paddling in. In the South Pacific, shorts and t-shirt may be enough, but in the Pacific Northwest, the ocean can be cold enough to cause hypothermia within minutes if you fall in. Dress comfortably, but appropriate. Have your support people around with layers changes of dry clothes if it gets cold or someone ends up in the water.

**Have the right gear.** Different kinds of boats will be the norm depending on where in the world you are, whatever the case, make sure you have the right equipment for your action. In some places this may mean specific equipment each boat needs to be on the water, like rope, an extra paddle and something to bail out water. The authors of this guide STRONGLY RECOMMEND wearing a Personal Flotation Device anytime you are on the water.

**Stay hydrated.** Bring more water than you think you will need, and make sure your support people can get water to you. You can’t drink the ocean and many places where you may be taking action could be dangerous to drink the water in.

**Know the legal risk.** Maritime law and port regulations vary all across the world and can carry significant legal risks that may exceed similar actions on land. On top of this, many jurisdictions don’t have good legal precedent for this kind of action. Make sure you reach out to a lawyer, get a clear sense of the legal risks for taking action on the water where you live and work together to come up with a plan to minimize those risks.

**Be Creative.** Have Fun.
**Post-Action Debriefing**

Taking on the system is exhausting! So is paddling a small boat for hours! Whether physical pain or emotional, we need to take care of each other!

**NOT JUST THOSE ARRESTED GET STRESSED**

Research on people in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission showed some surprising results on trauma. The commission itself listened to people’s heartbreaking storeys of torture, mass killings and rapes. They, of course, suffered from what’s called secondary trauma, the dynamic of becoming traumatised from someone else’s trauma. What was surprising was that the people in the office, filing the statistics and never seeing the tears, showed *higher* levels of traumatization!

We therefore should care for all of us in the movement, not just those “on the streets.”

**WHAT HELPS REDUCE STRESS AND TRAUMA**

The techniques may not be surprising: sharing storeys and telling your storey with empathic listeners, hanging out with friends, eating well, drinking well, sleeping well, exercising and moving your body.

Taking care of your body is especially important, since during high-stress times your body will take on the stress. During such events, for example, the body releases large amounts of adrenaline into your body. If you don’t release that extra adrenaline through running or other physical moving, it accumulates as acetic acid which, surprise, isn’t good for your body (it causes those little knots in your back). Assisting each other to care for our own bodies will help us in the long run.

**Before, during, and after actions: do stretches or physical activities, get a lot of sleep, stay hydrated (especially for those on the water!) and do whatever healing or cleansing rituals help you.**

Another tip from almost all research on trauma says that the number one, most cross-cultural, most widely applicable rule is this: Whatever you’re feeling, it’s 100% normal.

That’s right! Some of us sometimes feel like we’re not processing it the “right” way. In fact, the way we’re feeling is perfectly normal and a fine feeling. Shutting down, being super-angry, restlessness, being sad and feeling bad, all of them are different ways of coping (plus hundreds of other ways).

Starhawk writes from her numerous experiences going to jail. Again, anybody may have these reactions:

*rage: jail is simply the distilled form of the larger violence around us. anger is a sane and healthy response, but you may find it deflected onto your friends and families instead of directed to the systems of oppression we’re fighting. warn your friends and coworkers to tread gently and not order you around for a while. be prepared for flashes of rage, and try to remember whom we’re really angry at.*

*self-blame: you’ve been in a system designed on every level to make you feel bad, wrong, inadequate and powerless. the men and women who run it are experts in psychological manipulation and intimidation. they spend a lifetime developing their techniques, you had at most a few hours training in how to resist them.*
when you’re in jail, you’re constantly faced with decisions to be made with inadequate information under conditions of fear and exhaustion. you may make mistakes. you may end up complying when you later wish you’d resisted, or failing to act when you think you should have. you may make decisions you later regret.

try not to blame yourselves. one of the ways the system functions is to keep us focused on what we, individually, did or didn’t do instead of on the violence of the system itself. self blame is the way we take the violence of the system in, and beat ourselves up instead of making the guards and police do their own dirty work. and it rapidly turns into blame of each other, becoming a force to divide us and cut us off from the very support we need.

difficult re-entry: it’s hard to go back to regular life after the intensity of an action. it’s hard to go home to a lonely apartment after the strong community we’ve felt in the action and in jail.

LISTEN TO EACH OTHER DEEPLY

Encourage people to feel what they're feeling. After a really challenging action in 2004, I was facilitating as people were in various emotional states, including a lot of despair and feeling bad. Someone began to talk about how bad they felt — it felt like a failure to them. A second person interrupted, "But we won Pennsylvania! Don’t feel bad."

It's great to cheer each other up. But the way that second person interrupted, it didn't help the other person in their situation — that person needed to feel bad for a little bit. I made a small intervention: "It's okay for each of us to feel what we feel."

Instead, spend time listening deeply to each other. Use the time on the buses, calls afterwards, or even spend the next meeting just talking about your own internal states. Afterall, we are building a long-term movement!