

**Let's Talk about Leadership:
Anti-Authoritarian Approaches to Taking Initiative and Building Capacities**

Presentation by Chris Dixon (chrisd@resist.ca)

To me, the idea of anti-authoritarian politics isn't that there are no leaders; it is the idea that there is no arbitrary leadership and that leadership is shifting. Leadership is actually encouraged to the degree that you have group-centered leadership or collective leadership, or even individual leadership based on specific roles and responsibilities and experiences rather than an arbitrary and stagnant leadership. (Harsha Walia)

Definitions of leadership

I would define leadership as a willingness to think about the group as a whole and to offer some direction and influence in helping the group meet its goals. (Katrina Shields)

[Ella] Baker had an innovative understanding of leadership, an idea that she thought of in multiple ways: as facilitator, creating processes and methods for others to express themselves and make decisions; as coordinator, creating events, situations, and dynamics that build and strengthen collective efforts; and as teacher and educator, working with others to develop their own sense of power, capacity to organize and analyze, visions of liberation, and ability to act in the world for justice. (Chris Crass)

The top-down model of leadership

In the conventional model, leadership flows from the top downward: people who are "leaders" make decisions (business plans, laws, or strategies) and everyone else is expected to follow them. This is also a deeply patriarchal model as it rests on masculinized characteristics such as aggressiveness, self-confidence, and ease with telling people what to do.

Common problems for anti-authoritarians around leadership

- 1. The "we have no leaders" sleight of hand:** We pretend that leadership doesn't exist. This makes it seem like it has vanished when it is really still present, just less visible and harder to discuss, evaluate, teach, appreciate, and share.
- 2. The "we are all the same" fallacy:** We act as if everyone is already pretty much capable of doing everything or will quickly figure it out. This makes it difficult to create structures for intentionally sharing skills and knowledge, and helping people to build experience and confidence.

An anti-authoritarian model of leadership

In this model, leadership is a set of capacities and activities, including skills, knowledge, confidence, experience, and responsibilities. The aim is to develop and share these capacities and activities in order to deepen democracy and widen participation.

The three "C's" of anti-authoritarian leadership

- 1. Clear:** identifying actually existing leadership roles and practices in our work.
- 2. Conscious:** intentionally designating leadership responsibilities, and being accountable and transparent about what we say and do as leaders.
- 3. Collective:** organizing responsibilities and training so that leadership is shared and dynamic.

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Resources for Developing Anti-Authoritarian Leadership

Articles & Books:

Another Politics Is Possible & Communities Organizing Liberation, *So That We May Soar: Horizontalism, Intersectionality, and Prefigurative Politics* (New York & Los Angeles: Self-Published, 2010). Available at: <http://zinelibrary.info/so-we-may-soar-horizontalism-intersectionality-and-prefigurative-politics>

Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max, *Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists*, 3rd ed. (Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 2001), chapter 11.

Virginia Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser, and Christopher Moore, *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution: A Handbook of Skills & Tools for Social Change Activists*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1985).

Chris Crass, "But We Don't Have Leaders: Leadership Development and Anti-Authoritarian Organizing." Available at: <http://www.infoshop.org/page/But-We-Dont-Have-Leaders>

Chris Crass, "Looking to the Light of Freedom: Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement and Thoughts on Anarchist Organizing." Available at: <http://www.infoshop.org/page/Looking-to-the-Light-of-Freedom>

Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." Available at: <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>

Bruce Kokopeli and George Lakey, *Leadership for Change: Toward a Feminist Model* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1984).

Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), chapter 6.

Katrina Shields, *In the Tiger's Mouth: An Empowerment Guide for Social Action* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1994), chapter 9.

Starhawk, *The Empowerment Manual* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2011), chapter 6.

Websites:

Buildthewheel.org: <http://www.buildthewheel.org>

Catalyst Project: <http://www.collectiveliberation.org>

Joshua Kahn Russell's Resources for Organizers:
<http://joshuakahnruessell.wordpress.com/resources-for-activists-and-organizers>

Training for Change: <http://www.trainingforchange.org>