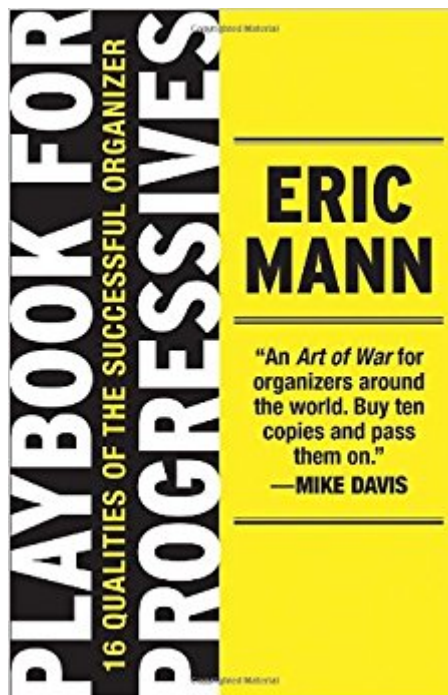




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# Playbook For Progressives: 16 Qualities Of The Successful Organizer



## Synopsis

An organizing manifesto for the twenty-first century, *Playbook for Progressives* is a must-have for the activist's tool kit. This comprehensive guide articulates pragmatically what is required in the often mystifying and rarely explained on-the-ground practice of organizing. Here, Eric Mann distills lessons he learned from over forty years as an organizer, as well as from other organizers within the civil rights, labor, LGBT, economic justice, and environmental movements.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In addition to his descriptions of a successful organizer's qualities and roles, his insider view of activism, and his thorough knowledge of participants and parties through the years, gives this book its value." —*Publishers Weekly*

"An Art of War for organizers around the world. Buy ten copies and pass them on." —*Mike Davis*

"We desperately need change. We need to reclaim and rebuild real democracy. The skills of organizing that Eric Mann shares in *Playbook for Progressives* are the life blood of democracy, human rights, social and economic justice, and planetary survival." —*Vandana Shiva*, author of *Soil Not Oil* and *Earth Democracy*

"Eric Mann has written an essential field guide for community organizers. His voice is crisp and clear, and his footsteps on the pavement are sharp. A pragmatic primer for all radicals." —*Vijay Prashad*, author of *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*

"Eric Mann is a bridge builder, a gifted organizer who unites Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and whites in the fight for social justice and change. *Playbook for Progressives* is

the Rules for Radicals for the twenty-first century. •Rodolfo Acuña, author of Occupied America: A History of Chicanos •“Based on concrete examples of organizers who transformed their countries, communities, and workplaces, Playbook for Progressives is a beacon that effectively illustrates the techniques and skills of transformative community organizing. A must-read for individuals and organizations that want to change the ideological and economic roots of oppression.” •Melvin H. King, emeritus faculty, MIT; author of Chain of Change; and founder of the South End Technology Center

Eric Mann is director of the Los Angeles-based Labor/Community Strategy Center and cofounder of the Bus Riders Union. He is the author of six books and has worked extensively with many organizations, including the Congress of Racial Equality, Students for a Democratic Society, and the United Auto Workers. He lives in Los Angeles.

Mann's case studies are some of the strongest portions of the book that both serve to illustrate his arguments and offer concrete examples for organizers to present to people of times mass mobilization has produced positive tangible change

If you are trying to make a difference in the world, you must read this book. It is one of the best organized frameworks for understanding progressive organizing from an intellectual frame.

The book was new and it was delivered on time

Book was in brand new condition!

This book is a wonderful read about many of the great organizers, providing warm and insightful descriptions on what made these people tick and effective. It spells out the soul-qualities, many of which are truly noble and daunting, needed for being a successful activist, as well as inspiring historical aspects of their struggles, many of which are not well-known.

This is the most comprehensive work available for the community activist. It also presents a wonderful history of community activism.

Eric Mann's Playbook for Progressives is two books in one. The book wouldn't work any other way.

Mann is true to his title and introduction, presenting a 74-page section on the roles of an organizer. Included in this section are 12 specific yet overlapping responsibilities that are representative of political organizers -- foot soldier, evangelist, recruiter, group builder, strategist, tactician, communicator, political educator, agitator, fundraiser, comrade & confidante, and cadre. The second section of the book, "16 Qualities of a Successful Organizer," takes the roles of the first section further by building on the earlier descriptions with substantive portraits of "strategy and tactics" that are crucial for successful radical, political, organizing. *Playbook for Progressives* is not two books because it includes distinct sections, but rather because Mann combines theory and action, with biography and autobiography, to bring alive, through real lives, what radical organizing means in the struggle against racism and class disparity in the United States and throughout the world. Eric Mann one of the founders the Labor/Community Strategy Center (LCSC) in 1989, has been the organization's Director since its inception. His earlier political work included being a Field Secretary for The Congress of Racial Equality, an aboveground member of Weatherman, and a radical, activist/organizer in automobile and airplane production plants throughout the country. Many of the examples of radical organizing in the book are the stories of Mann and other organizers at LCSC. Mann explains in the introduction of *Playbook for Progressives* that the organization was launched as "an experiment to reassert the powerful, positive impact of progressive ideology and transformative organizing." As an aspect of the rationale for the Center, Mann writes about 'activists' wanting seats at the tables of power -- an issue that might be even more problematic at the present time. Labor and community organizers began talking about 'empowerment' rather than power, 'a seat at the table' rather than concrete demands and political independence, and 'public-private partnerships' rather than a challenge to the profit motive and corporate power. Throughout the book there are also stories of many other organizers, some whose names we know and others that we don't, but all examples of people fighting class disparity and racism -- locally, nationally, and globally. LCSC's largest undertaking is the Bus Rider's Union (BRU). Founded in 1992, BRU's membership comprises mostly black people and Latina people who have organized to fight against the two-tiered discriminatory system of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and BRU's success is legendary beginning with a 1994 suit against the MTA that concluded with the court rescinding raised fares and bus passes. The successes remain to this day -- of course the need for continuing this particular struggle illustrates the necessity of ongoing activism and organization. Much more can be read about the BRU in Eric Mann's book. While LCSC has various initiatives, the other one that I will highlight is the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline. Briefly, LCSC is part of a coalition that has fought to

de-criminalize truancy in Los Angeles -- again more of the story in *Playbook for Progressives*. Mann is clear on the hard work, discipline, human warmth, and expertise necessary for progressive organizing. He is very detailed describing and analyzing the theory and dispositions of radical activism. "In the United States in particular, and among organizers in general, there is a pragmatic, antitheoretical tendency... The problem is that theory is an overview that gives you a map as to where you are going." Mann's detail is important, but the people's lives that he portrays wed the details to human actions. I want people to read and re-read *Playbook for Progressives*. Thus, until I come to this review's conclusion, I will provide brief portraits of Eric and a small sample of the other organizers he brings to his book. As a young man in the mid-sixties, Mann worked with the Newark Community Union Project (NCUP) going door-to-door asking people to become involved in meetings and protests against racism and oppression. There were sobering moments that might still occur in 2013. Mann writes about one of the people he met: She wanted to offer me food, but her refrigerator was almost bare. She would bring me hot coffee, and we would sit and talk. Once, perhaps influenced by Martin Luther King Jr.'s metaphor, I asked her if she had a dream of what her life could be like. She told me, "My dream is that I am able to walk in front of a car and leave this life and God will not punish me for abandoning my children. This is the "exceptional" United States of America. And of course, the above quote speaks to the importance of *Playbook for Progressives*. While talking of the successes of the BRU, Mann speaks of four key elements for radical organizing. Before citing the list Mann's caveat is the Cabral quote, "Tell no lies and claim no easy victories."<sup>1</sup> 1. Listen very carefully and let the person talk 2. Show a deep concern about very specific conditions people face 3. Present very concrete demands 4. Frame the conversation within an up-front worldview of those fights as part of a larger social transformation The process is exemplified in Eric's meeting and continuing work with Eduardo Fuentes in Wilmington, California where the toxic emissions of the oil companies was causing serious and sometimes fatal health conditions for the Latina (o) population. LCSC's project was called Watchdog. Eduardo approached Eric at a meeting and told him that his local organization, Parents Against Pollution, shared the values of Watchdog. As Eric attempted to build a coalition of the two groups he learned that Eduardo was the group. "I asked him how many parents were in the group and he said, 'One. Me.'" More importantly, Eduardo was reticent about joining Watchdog. Eric had written a book on the topic and the values and actions of LCSC on the issue clearly corresponded to those of Eduardo Fuentes -- yet he was leery. As the two men met Eduardo asked about the action part of Watchdog -- picketing, sit-ins. He then explained that in his native Guatemala "the government, with the support of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, kidnap and

kill indigenous peoples, union leaders, and revolutionaries." Eduardo was also concerned about the anti-immigrant movement in the United States. But Eric Mann had followed all four of the key elements of radical organizing cited above and spoke about the safeguards for the 'undocumented' in Watchdog actions. Not only did Eduardo Fuentes join the project, he became a local leader in Wilmington. Mann writes of strategy and provides more real life examples. An illustration is the work of Manuel Criollo, who directs the organizing at LCSC. There are stories from the Bus Riders Union and that of Deloros Huerta, the legendary United Farmworkers leader. The third chapter of Section Two has the great title, "Sings with the Choir but Finds Her Own Voice" the perfect mantra for organizing and a people's socialism. Another chapter, "Generosity of Spirit: Take Good Care of Others" tells the early 1960s organizing story of The Newark Community Union Project, but also extends the camaraderie to the present as group organizers, living throughout the country, fight for the housing rights of Terry Jefferson, one of their comrades, now 87 years old. Mann tells the tale of his activist work with Mark Masaoka at the Van Nuys General Motors plant in the 1980s. And finally, not really as there are additional personal/political vignettes, Mann tells the story of the coalition of New York Domestic Workers and Shalom Bayit "Jews for Racial and Economic Justice" that culminated in the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. Corresponding to the people's stories, Mann connects theory and practice and the many intricacies and complexities that they include. The importance of the individual and the group is connected to conversation and reflection. At the Strategy Center, I am fortunate to have close comrades who will take me aside, which I appreciate in itself, and explain to me things I have done that were arrogant, chauvinist, insensitive. They will point out ways I have been inconsistent and even vacillatory "changing my mind and contradicting something I said only a few days ago without realizing it. They show me instances when I did not listen to or respect the ideas of others and assumed I was right, when in fact they understood the situation far better than I did. Mann suggests that commitment and hard work needs to be connected to expertise with both national and global examples: Organizers who are ill-informed about their issues can speak only the general truths of the revolution and are outmatched by the scientists and expert witnesses marshaled by their opponents. They are usually unpersuasive, unable to effect actual change, and are used as caricatures by the system to discredit the movement. After writing of expertise, and using more biographical and autobiographical examples, Mann explores militancy, bravery, and courage as necessary elements of radical organizing. After telling the story of "Maria Guardado: Salvadorian saint," Mann explains: "The courageous example of

individuals is critical, but courage must be found in a collective context. Finally, Playbook for Progressives portrays the deeds of more well-known struggle leaders such as Audre Lorde. Mann quotes Margaret Meade as a connector of organizing and revolutionary theory and practice and the comrades whom he portrays. “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Eric Mann’s weekly radio show on KPFK-Los Angeles, Voices from the Frontlines, is archived and can be heard at [...] Alan Wieder Portland, Oregon (Alan Wieder is the author of Ruth First and Joe Slovo in the War Against Apartheid, Monthly Review Press, 2013)

In Playbook for Progressives there is the structured foundation of solid, academic understanding of the theory of organizing balanced by the evocative feeling of being drawn into the powerful stories that are used to illustrate, educate and challenge the reader. The prose is warm and comfortable and reading the words was like being lucky enough to be seated next to the most interesting person at the dinner party. I find myself rereading passages, once for the theory, again for the emotional wallop of the powerful history of more than 40 years of struggle and then finally again just for the pleasure of the delivery. In this time in history when "ordinary" people feel the call to action and pour into the streets, this book is a timely guidebook to make those words and actions have impact and meaning beyond the passion of the moment. I recommend it to organizers, both new and experienced.

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