

YOU HAVE SKILLS

Evaluating What Skills You Can Bring to Radical Organizing

*[This zine is adapted from Eden's Solo Praxis segment of the
Frontline Praxis Podcast, episode 1.*

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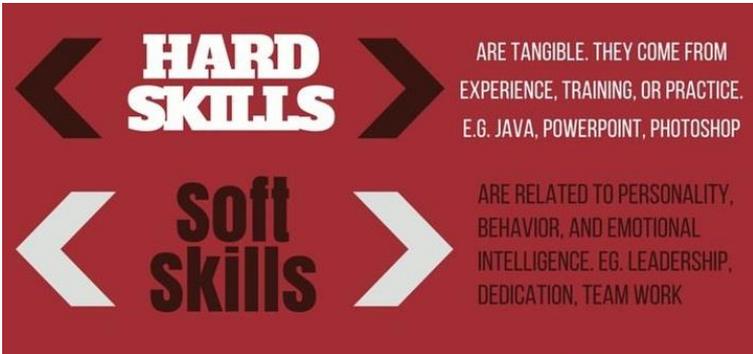
It's really easy when looking at the big picture of organizing, to not know where to start or how to help. It can get debilitating and paralyzing. And I, as somebody with anxiety, definitely look at the big picture sometimes and don't know what to do or how to help and end up getting frozen. Sometimes I don't help because I don't know where to go.



Part of being comfortable giving, volunteering, and working in solidarity with people is knowing how you can give. We are going to talk about different ways that you can look at your skills so you know exactly how you can help. With the combination of knowing your skills and knowing your boundaries, you can fully, enthusiastically consent to whatever you are signing up for.



Not all organizing is intense or glamorous. Skills come from all over. You may not even realize you have skills that can be used for mutual aid organizing. Often, we think only specific skills are used in mutual aid organizing. This is not necessarily the case. We need more than just rally speakers, meeting leaders, and flier makers.



First of all, what do you think of off the top of your head of things that you are good at? What are you proud of, that you know you do well? What is your ideal way to show up and help a friend or organization?

If you were imagining there was a project happening in your area, think of an ideal 30 minutes of time volunteering, what would that look like? Would it be helping greet people as they come in? Giving a training? Signing up people? Cooking in a kitchen? Would it be handing out fliers? Would it be yelling in a fascist's face? Look at what you would think you would feel the most comfortable doing inside of an organization.

You can look at the skills you use in the workforce. What tools do you use? Do you know how to handle construction equipment and build? Do you work on a computer and can organize spreadsheets? Do you handle customer service and sales? Do you have interpersonal skills like conflict resolution, training, coordinating, team building, delegation, or research? What are things that you would put on your resume? I can guarantee you almost everything I have on my resume, I could definitely tool towards mutual aid organizing.



I could put my writing skills into information on a website. I could use my graphic design background on making posters. I could create online forms. I could organize conference calls. There are a lot of different things that we can use from our resumes that can also go into mutual aid organizing. Knowing that you have those skills in your back pocket is really important.



For those of you in school, or recently out of school, what skills do you remember? What techniques did you learn? Bet there was research! What about writing? Dealing with authority? Learning how to work with teachers to find their expectations can easily apply to figuring out the expectations of others that you are going to run into in organizing.

Group projects? Speaking? Were there specific skills that you learned in your classes that they taught you? Were you in a technical program where you learned things that could be applied in a variety of situations?

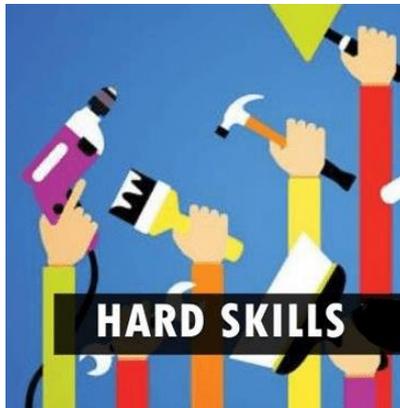


You can look at what hobbies you have. Which of your skills from your hobbies can be applied? Do you cook? Can you build things? Do you like to write? Do you like to make music? Are you big into outdoor survival? There are so many things that we often do in our spare time, that we find a lot of joy in, that are not commodified under capitalism, but are still very valuable skills when we are working in community with others.

Don't forget to look at what other people tell you that you are good at. If you are ever talking with friends or co-workers and somebody comments, "you're really good at explaining things," or "you are really good at finding those detailed questions," or "you are really good at rallying a crowd." Often times we don't look at ourselves the same way that people around us see us. Sometimes others can be a really good resource in finding out what you're good at.



Are there things that you volunteer yourself to do within your family or friend dynamics? If you are making plans for a get-together, vacation, or party with your family or friends, is there something that you usually bring to the picture? Are you the person that makes the menu and coordinates food? Are you the person that likes to book the flights? Or the person that likes to find the activities? Are you the person who is really just great at bringing everybody's mood up and getting everybody hyped? Those are things that you can bring into mutual aid organizing.



What skills have you learned or used with your family? A lot of people undervalue many of the skills that we develop inside of familial situations, especially for people who were gendered female in their childhood. There are a lot of skills that we learned, in managing family dynamics, in cooking, cleaning, sewing, or crafting that can easily be applied. If those are things that you like, you enjoy, and you've cultivated a skill at, definitely bring that to the organizing.



When you see a project that you want to help on, it's a really great idea to think about these skills. It's good to have these already evaluated so you're aware, then when an organizational opportunity pops up, you can go and say, I have this list of skills, where can I apply them to help with this movement? Where can I use my skills of technical writing? Where can I use my skills of gardening? Where can I use my skills of team building? That way you fit into the mechanisms that are already in place. Then you know, hey I'm going to volunteer for something I already know I'm good at, and that helps everyone. You are able to do something that you are confident in, that you don't feel like you are going to mess up, which means you are more likely to volunteer in the first place. It also gives direction to other people because they are able to see how what your skills are applicable and how that can be spread around the community.



In conclusion, I think it's a really great idea, even if you are totally alone, out in the middle of nowhere, to just take inventory of what skills you have. So that when opportunity knocks, you have a set list that you can go and you can say "hey, I'm really good at this. Let me help you," or "hey, I can do A, B, and C, but not really D, E, or F, where can I fit into this picture?"



It gives a lot more direction to existing organizers, than somebody who comes up and says, "I want to volunteer." While that is always appreciated, when somebody knows what they can do and how they can contribute, it really helps.

It makes it easier for all parties to be enthusiastically involved and engaged with delegating out assignments. If they know that you are comfortable in a role, it gives other people the ability to trust you more and gives yourself the ability to fully consent to something.

If we are really hesitant, nervous, or if we feel like we are doing something more out of obligation, than we are enthusiastically consenting, then we really don't put our best work into it, and we don't feel the safest that we could be.

At the end of the day, we need to build these revolutionary relationships with each other as comrades. Part of that is understanding what you can bring to the table as yourself, so that other people don't have to pull it out of you. So that we can all feel safe and in community together.



Transferable Skills Checklist

Check off those skills you already have...

Interpersonal skills

able to interact successfully with a wide range of people; knows how to interpret and use body language

Oral communication skills

presents information and ideas clearly and concisely, with content and style appropriate for the audience (whether one-to-one or in a group); presents opinions and ideas in an open, objective way

Public speaking skills

able to make formal presentations; presents ideas, positions and problems in an interesting way

Counseling skills

responds to what others have said in a non-judgmental way ("active listening"); builds trust and openness with others

Coaching / mentoring skills

gives feedback in a constructive way; helps others to increase their knowledge or skills

Teaching / training skills

able to help others gain knowledge and skills; able to create an effective learning environment

Supervising skills

delegates responsibilities and establishes an appropriate system of accountability; able to monitor progress and assess the quality of job performance of others

Leadership skills

motivates and empowers others to act; inspires trust and respect in others

Persuading skills

communicates effectively to justify a position or influence a decision; able to sell products or promote ideas

Negotiating skills

able to negotiate skillfully; knows how and when to make compromises

Mediation skills

able to resolve conflicts that stems from different perspectives or interests; able to deal with conflict in an open, honest and positive way

Interviewing skills

asks and responds to questions effectively; able to make others feel relaxed and to create a feeling of trust

Customer service skills

able to build a relationship of mutual trust with clients; able to handle complaints and concerns in a sensitive way

Care-giving skills

able to empathize with others; able to give sensitive care to people who are sick or elderly or who have severe disabilities

Analytical / logical thinking skills

able to draw specific conclusions from a set of general observations or from a set of specific facts; able to synthesize information and ideas

Critical thinking skills

able to review different points of view or ideas and make objective judgments; investigates all possible solutions to a problem, weighing the pros and cons

Creative thinking skills

able to generate new ideas, invent new things, create new images or designs; find new solutions to problems; able to use wit and humor effectively

Problem-solving skills

able to clarify the nature of a problem, evaluate alternatives, propose viable solutions and determine the outcome of the various options

Decision-making skills

able to identify all possible options, weigh the pros and cons, assess feasibility and choose the most viable option

Planning skills

able to plan projects, events and programs; able to establish objectives and needs, evaluates options, chooses best option

Organizational skills

able to organize information, people or things in a systematic way; able to establish priorities and meet deadlines

Advanced writing skills

able to select, interpret, organize and synthesize key ideas; able to edit a written text to ensure that the message is as clear, concise and accurate as possible

Research skills

knows how to find and collect relevant background information; able to analyze data, summarize findings and write a report

Financial skills

able to keep accurate financial records; able to manage a budget (that is, preparing sound budgets and monitoring expenses)

Language skills

functionally bilingual; able to translate and/or interpret in a given language

Advanced computer skills

able to use a variety of software programs; knowledge about desk-top publishing or web design

Technological skills

understands technical systems and operates effectively within them; understands technical specifications; reads technical manuals with ease

Performing skills

able to make presentations for video or television in an interesting way; able to entertain, amuse and inspire an audience

Artistic skills

uses color and design creatively; able to design displays and publicity material (print, video, Internet)

Perceptual skills

able to visualize new formats and shapes; able to estimate physical space

Mechanical skills

able to install, operate and monitor the performance of equipment and mechanical devices; able to repair mechanical devices

Adaptability skills

capacity to adapt to new situations and settings and to tolerate change well; flexibility to adapt to the needs of the moment

Administrative / clerical skills

able to operate computers and other basic office equipment; able to design and maintain filing and control systems