

Passion-Driven Engagement for Social Change

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When people find a purposeful passion for an issue, they are more likely to engage in matters related to that issue, both socially and politically.

As communities become more competent and public awareness is raised, there are moments when **there becomes a need to create programs that challenge public policies perceived to marginalize the disadvantaged.**

I recently read a book by Leonard Jason, [Principles of Social Change](#), where he provides five principles for social change that transform passion into action which include:

- Determining the nature of the change desired
- Identifying the power holders
- Creating coalitions
- Learning patience and persistence
- Measuring your success

The book focuses on how to apply these principles, utilizing research and empirical data, and translate that data into action-based, results-oriented solutions to solve problems central to local communities through public engagement, spearheaded by ordinary citizens.

Jason's third principle, *creating coalitions by identifying partnerships through common goals*, is particularly useful when **groups can identify similar passions that require lasting, long term solutions or what can be considered "second-order change."** First-order changes seeks to eliminate problems through short term-solutions that don't necessarily address the root of the problem. People are attracted to these strategies because they are simple and may provide immediate relieve in adverse times. Second-order change involves a change or shift in power relationships with alternative goals in mind. Community resources are redirected to support preventative measures for societal problems and traditional roles for problem solving are redefined for more effective collaborations.

The key here is that citizen engagement and participation is organized with the goal of influencing the social and political landscape to effect change.

Community members must have *meaningful* involvement and be given the opportunity to influence decisions that affect them. Levels of individual or group involvement should be determined by the participants rather than co-opted by external forces.

When grassroots organizations form coalitions with researchers and professional organizations to develop pragmatic solutions to cyclical problems that persist in communities, innovative solutions are born.

Coalition building and collaboration allows citizens to become more skillful and develop sophisticated approaches that can be transformative in addressing some the most pressing problems faced by those that are most vulnerable.

Jason's last principle – measuring success – is vital in that it identifies accomplishments and reveals strategy weaknesses. Program evaluations allow for the recognition of changes in attitudes, behaviors and policies and determine which engagement strategies are successful and which fall short. Short- and long-term results can inform what's left to be achieved and where future efforts should focus.