

## 6 TOOLS FOR THE WORK

By Pamela Sparr © 2017

Those of us who are engaged or want to be engaged in just-making and repairing the world need tools and capacities that help us to be resilient as well as emotionally and spiritually grounded. How can we help ourselves to be strong enough to stay the course – to not get distracted, discouraged, or defeated? Rather, to be able to experience joy as we do this sacred work? What will enable us to stay open to criticism when we need to hear it? To enable us to learn and grow as we engage? To keep our hearts open and loving so that we create and maintain right relationships and cultivate possibilities -- openings for change when before there may have been none?

Listed below are six tools and capacities – “6 Cs” – that help us approach whatever comes our way with an open heart, groundedness, and confidence. As you read the descriptions, you’ll see that these tools and qualities are inter-connected.

Consider reflecting on the 6 Cs regularly – alone and with others. Making this reflection an ongoing practice can build strong bonds of community and produce invaluable insights.

### COMMUNITY

Communities provide us with much needed support and accountability. They can take many different forms. We may have biological families, families of the heart, friends, neighbors, a favorite group or workplace-related colleagues, and, maybe, a faith community. We need all kinds of communities to provide emotional and sometimes physical care and support. We also need communities to lovingly flag for us when we mess up, to encourage us to get out of our own way and to stretch and grow -- to become the fully magnificent, unique gift to the world that we are called to be. Activists need to be grounded in communities too. We can’t do this work alone – we have more fun, we can see a larger chunk of reality, and we can be more effective when we do this work together, learn together and reflect together. We can join one. We can create one. We can strengthen one we may already be in. Being in community is key.

### COVENANT

This is all about accountability. Human beings need boundaries. We know that good parenting involves knowing what kind of healthy, developmentally appropriate boundaries to set for our children at every stage of life. Adults need boundaries and agreements too – in intimate relationships, with close friends, at work, with neighbors and in other kinds of group settings. How do we want to be with each other? What will enable this relationship to thrive? When we do spiritually-grounded political work together we need agreements as well – to be explicit about such things as how we make decisions, how we talk to each other, what kind of processes we want to use when we are in conflict or when our feelings are hurt, and how we reflect together. Clear, explicit understandings with people we want to be in right relationship with are essential: they provide emotional, spiritual & practical guidance to help us through hard times and promote our mutual flourishing. Covenants are also essential as we build bridges to collaborate across major differences.

## COMPASSION

For ourselves, for all other beings, for this beautiful Earth. Have you ever been at a political meeting or stood around after worship services having a conversation with a friend, when it feels like the locusts have descended? Committee chairs, leaders of various groups zoom around the room or a very determined individual hits you up to attend a meeting, checks if you did what you promised to do, recruits you to the latest rally and sign a petition, etc. In our enthusiasm, our passion, our dedication we can push, push, push ourselves and others in ways that aren't productive or conducive to long-term relationships and well-being. Depending on our personalities and our cultural upbringing, we can be highly demanding, highly critical of ourselves or others -- perhaps blind to our needs and feelings or those of others. We may make tons of assumptions that are not true – and not realize we are doing that. Can we take a breath, slow down, bring a full heart to the situation? To our relationships? Can we appreciate ourselves and each other more?

## CLEAR THINKING

This is all about developing and maintaining a focus and a game plan. We are in an unprecedented moment of froth. The speed at which we obtain, process and spread information is much faster than ever before. Much is irrelevant or unhelpful. Some is false. Much is just plain distracting. Various media outlets as well as the administration of the current US president excels in offering us the tweet or the crisis of the moment. Just trying to stay on top of things can be daunting. This encourages us to stay in reactive mode – which, depending on your analysis of the situation, could be considered a political tactic to keep us worn out and ineffective. This is like going to Starbucks and ordering a lot of froth for your favorite drink. You are consuming a lot of air and not much substance. Being resilient and being effective as activists means we need to keep our eyes on the prize. To have a focus. We can't tackle everything. What is ours to tackle? Let us do that really, really well. Let us be strategic and have a game plan. We may need to change that plan, but without one we are like bumper cars – we run into each other and don't really go anywhere. (This can be difficult because we have big hearts and care about a lot of things. Saying no is really tough. But if we don't say "No," we can't really give a meaningful "Yes!" to anything.)

## CONTROL

We all have different temperaments and life experiences and so, we have different approaches to controlling things in our lives. For example, some people delight in planning a vacation in minute detail in advance and have everything lined up before they step out the door of their home. For others, that approach might feel like the kiss of death – they want spontaneity. They get in a vehicle and see what happens. Therapists and spiritual teachers from many disciplines are pretty unanimous in telling us that the only things we can control are how we express our feelings and our behavior. To try and do otherwise produces unnecessary anxiety and tension. It wastes our precious energy. And, it often results in what we perceive as failure.

So, how does this square with the advice to have focus and a game plan? Focus is like setting an intention. A game plan is setting some goals, objectives and perhaps some milestones along the way. However, life and the process of social justice does not follow MapQuest. The route may need to change along the way. The vehicle may need to change. Our travelling companions may need to change. Being resilient means being open to changing as circumstances evolve. Hopefully, we and our travelling companions are evolving as we take this journey together. That's the whole point! Remember our Universalist heritage – none of us is saved until we all are. Our liberation is tied up

with the liberation of others. Change is not only inevitable but is highly desirable! The key is being limber, being open-hearted to accept change, and being attuned to and wise about what is required of us in each moment. Be present in the moment. And then, delight in the ride!

## **COURAGE**

The word “courage” comes from the Latin root for “heart.” Having courage means we take heart. It doesn’t mean you aren’t afraid or nervous or a bit anxious; it means you acknowledge whatever challenging feelings you have and not let those hold you back, not let those diminish you. For someone who does not like to speak in public, it might mean going ahead and signing up to testify before your city council on a critical issue being considered. It can mean taking a personal risk and having a frank and difficult conversation with someone where you fear a possible confrontation. It can mean admitting you were wrong, you made a mistake. Courage takes many external and internal forms.