

Hello, I'm Terrence McNally. Welcome to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK. I'll be speaking today with Marshall Ganz, lecturer in public policy at Harvard. Ganz helped devise the grassroots organizing model for Obama's 2008 campaign. We're talking today about his life's work and his new book, PEOPLE, POWER, CHANGE: *Organizing for Democratic Renewal*. You can learn more at marshallganz.com, at the Kennedy School site, hks.harvard.edu, or at his organization, leadingchangenetwork.org.

On Free Forum we explore the lives, the work the ideas of individuals that I suspect have pieces of the puzzle of a world that just might work. We look at politics, economics, environment science, health culture - all based on the fact that I believe we can do better and I want to find out how.

The show streams weekly on the Progressive Voices Network on TuneIn. Podcasts are available anytime anywhere on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, most major podcast sites and at my site, terrencemcnally.net.

I was introduced to today's guest when I saw him on Bill Moyers's show in 2013, talking about how social movements can lead to social change. And as I learned his story, he quickly took his place as a hero of mine.

At that point I had been working for nearly 10 years with nonprofits, foundations, government agencies, and businesses to develop more effective and meaningful narratives and to tell better stories. Marshall Ganz, with his real-world history of organizing and his conception of public narrative was a big influence on my work from then on.

We'll talk about public narrative in the course of our conversation, but briefly Marshall says that stories are an essential tool of organizing, that they build relationships, and relationships are the essential foundation of organizing and movements.

And he talks about public narrative as involving three stories: A story of self. Who am I? Why am I called to this work? A story of us. Why does it matter to you? Why should you care? And the story of now. Why is it important and urgent that we act together on this?

I interviewed Marshall for the first time in 2013, and I'm excited to get to share another hour with him today. He's written the book that really lays out his vision of social change, his vision of organizing - but not just his vision. PEOPLE, POWER, CHANGE is filled with practical, detailed lessons learned in his now 60 years of organizing. It is a handbook, a playbook, if you will.

I've seen Marshall present a few times now, the latest being a little over a month ago

in Santa Monica. And one thing that has really impressed me is the way in which he blends scholarship and real-world experience in his communication about organizing and narrative. And I assume that informs his understanding of the work as well. For too many, the academic is not really integrated with the practical. Marshall moves seamlessly from philosophy and history to his lived experience and the lessons for today and back again.

I suspect that his unique biography, which you'll learn more about - he actually lived organizing before he turned to researching, writing, and teaching it - brings both aspects of his vision and his knowledge together in what seems to me a unique and vital way that he's able to share.

He says he's been meaning to write this book since 1985. Well, he's finally done it and we've never needed it more. Plus the delay means we get the benefit of the two decades of his experience.

Marshall Ganz is a teacher, an organizer, a scholar. In 1964, a year before graduating Harvard College, Marshall left to volunteer as a civil rights organizer in Mississippi's Freedom Summer. In 1965, he joined Cesar Chavez in the United Farm Workers, where he worked for the next 16 years. In 1991, he returned to Harvard College and completed his undergraduate degree and eventually his PhD. Ganz now teaches there as Rita E. Hauser Senior Lecturer in Leadership, Organizing and Civil Society at the Kennedy School of Government. He focuses on leadership, narrative, strategy, organization. As I said, he was instrumental in design of the grassroots organization for the 2008 Obama campaign. And his books include *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement*, and the latest, *PEOPLE, POWER, CHANGE: Organizing for Democratic Renewal*.

Welcome, MARSHALL GANZ to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK.

Ganz:

Thank you, Terrence. I hope we are figuring out how to make it work.

McNally:

Yeah, I mean, you've been at organizing for 60. I've been at these, asking these questions on the air since '96, so almost 25 years.

Let me tell listeners, we're recording this conversation Tuesday, November 19th.

You teach that public narrative, as I said, consists of a story of self, the story of us, and the story of now. We'll flesh all that out, but let's begin with the story of you. The first question I usually ask on the show is to have people tell me about their path, because I like listeners to get a feel for the people, not just the books or the works or the projects and so on that we talk about.

So your path... and I ask them to cite mentors, turning Points, moments of decision. Your story of self, Marshall?

Ganz:

Well, you gave a preview Terrence, of sort of the outline of the journey. I think for me in many ways, in many ways, I think there's a certain point in life when you find a calling or you don't.

McNally:

If you're lucky. Yeah,

Ganz:

If you're lucky. No, you're absolutely right.

And I really think of that moment as the work that I had the privilege of doing in Mississippi. And probably the best way to set the ground for that is just before we were going to Mississippi, our mission was to organize a Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and support the work of black organizers in Mississippi who were getting put in jail, beaten or worse. The idea was to bring some people who might bring the law with them, like white students from elite colleges, black students from colleges like Howard and so forth, and to organize the Freedom Democratic Party parallel to the segregated Democrats.

And we were in Oxford, Ohio where we were being trained, and it was the night before it was time to go to Mississippi and we got word that three of our party had disappeared. Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Cheney. They had gone down a couple of days earlier to investigate the burning of a black church in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where there'd been civil rights activity and hadn't been heard from since.

Bob Moses, the lead organizer, called us together in a high school auditorium, about 300 of us there, and he was a very soft-spoken guy. He got up on the stage and he says, we heard what happened to our brothers. We don't know exactly what happened, but we think they're gone. And sure enough, two months later, their bullet riddled beaten bodies were found buried in a dirt levee where the clan had buried them after executing them when the county sheriff had turned them over to the clan for that purpose. Now, we didn't know that, but we kind of knew that. And so Bob said, look, I'd like to say just you don't need to go. He said, but I can't. I have to ask you to go, but I can't take the whole responsibility. He said, everybody here's got to decide.

Well, I sank into my chair just like everyone in there. It was utter silence. You could hear a pin drop. And you begin to ask yourself, "What are you doing here?" My father was a rabbi. My mother was a teacher. We lived in Germany for three years after the Second World War, and a lot of his work was with survivors of the horror we now call

the Holocaust. But my mother was very... She'd grown up in Virginia and had gone to college when not a lot of women were going to college. And she was very clear about certain things. One was that this horror that we really were within, wasn't simply a matter of antisemitism. It was a matter of racism. And that racism kills. I'm very grateful for that because the civil rights movement was, of course, challenging the institutionalized racism. It's been part of our country since before it was founded. So that was a connection.

Another... I don't know if there's folks out there who are PKs or RKs or IKs, preacher's kid, imam's kid, my case rabbi's kid. You have to go to all the stuff, and you're also supposed to be perfect, which is a different set of issues, more for a support group. But I did love the Passover Seder, the telling of that story from slavery to freedom, the Exodus story - with food as a plus. But they would point to the kids and say, you were slaves in Egypt. So I've never been a slave, I've never been to Egypt. It took me a while to figure out that what it meant was that that story is not of the past, it's of the present, and you have to figure out where you are. Are you with those guys, with the horses and the chariots? Are you with those people trying to find their way to a land of promise?

Well, Dr. King described the civil rights movement as yet another chapter in that story. Now, I was 20 at the time. Others were 18, 19, 21, 22. The Civil Rights Movement was a young person's movement in many ways, and there's a Protestant theologian, Walter Brueggemann wrote a book called *The Prophetic Imagination*. And in it he argues that transformational vision or the prophetic vision occurs at the intersection of two elements. One, he calls criticality - a clear view of the world's need, of its pain, of its hurt - and coupled with hope - a sense of the world's promise and possibilities. One without the other goes to despair or it goes to complacency. But together they can create a powerful tension that can move us into possibilities that we otherwise might not engage with. And young people come of age with a critical eye on the world they find and, almost of necessity, hopeful hearts. So there's a deep affinity between generation change and social change. And that was how it was for me.

So, as we're sitting there in silence, a young woman named Jean Wheeler stands up in the back and she starts to sing. "They say that freedom is a constant struggle. They say freedom is a constant struggle. Oh Lord, we've struggled so long, we must be free. They say that freedom costs too much dying, freedom costs too much dying. We've died too long. We must be free." And as she stood up and began to walk out of the room, everybody filed in behind her, and the next day everybody went to Mississippi.

Now, I think of that really as a choice point. That was a critical choice point for me because it was in Mississippi that I would really discover my calling. I mean, for one thing, it was where I got my education about race, power and politics in America. With all due credit to Harvard, it was in Mississippi because the inequalities were so stark - in housing, healthcare, education, you name it.

And it was when I began to learn the difference between charity and justice. Charity says, "What's wrong? Let me help." And justice says, "Why is it happening? How can we change it?" And when you ask that second question, you get resistance. And you realize that things are the way they are because some people want to keep them that way because they're benefiting from them.

So it became an instruction in really the basics of organizing, because what we discovered - and this was really I think what drove the Civil Rights movement - was that there's a big difference between resources and power. And that, while many communities were lacking power, they weren't lacking in resources, if you understand resources more broadly.

And that's what the Montgomery Bus Boycott taught all of us in the whole Civil Rights movement. The buses were segregated. Blacks in the back, whites in the front, no man's land in the middle, armed deputized bus driver in the front. If you were a black person, you had to walk past all that, find a seat in the back, and then, if a white person wanted the seat, you had to get up and give it to them. And that was going on twice a day. And you can imagine the kind of anger in that community.

Well, when *Brown v Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruling in '54 said segregation was unconstitutional in schools, they got the idea, let's take it on with buses.

And so I imagine most of your listeners have heard of Rosa Parks - not a lady who one day just got tired and didn't give up her seat. She was secretary of the NAACP chapter. She was trained in organizing, and it was all a strategy to create the grounds for a lawsuit that could then extend desegregation to transportation. But when she was arrested, the women's committee of the Black college said, this doesn't work, that she goes to jail. We got to show more solidarity. And so they went and talked to Dr. King and persuaded the leadership there to call a one day boycott of the buses. And so Monday morning, there's a great account - Dr. King gets up early in the morning and sees these buses going by, and there isn't a single black face on a single bus. Now, at that moment, that community saw itself differently.

Powerlessness fragments you, but that kind of unity empowers. So that night they decided, well, we stayed off one day, we're just going to stay off until we win. And it took a year, but they did win. And what they discovered was that, in fact, everyone in that community had resources that could become a source of power.

What am I talking about? Turns out everybody had feet. Now, if they used their feet to walk to work, deny the bus company the bus fare, instead of using their feet to get on the bus and give the bus company the bus fare, they could turn their individual dependency on the bus company into the bus company's dependency on a united community.

And that transformation from individual dependency to collective power, that was the heart of what I learned was called organizing. And I got hooked on it. And I got hooked, I think, because for me, much of the work was working with people to support them in finding their own voices, in finding their own sources of courage in themselves and others, and then how that could be then transformed into a collective power, and then into affecting the institutions. But a critical part for me was always what now we call leadership development, enabling people to find their voice and to find their strength in relationship with others. And my mom was a teacher, but she called herself an educator because the word education comes from the Latin *educare*, which means to draw out, not to put in.

Education is to elicit, to develop, to enable, to grow those with whom you're working, as opposed to trying to fill their heads with stuff. And I found that that worked for me. It connected. And when it came time to go back to school, I actually wrote them a letter. "How can I come back and finish studying history when we're busy making it?" - which was arrogant, but also true.

And that's when I went back to Bakersfield where I grew up in California, and Cesar Chavez had just started organizing his grape strike to organize migrant farm workers. And I think for me, the key thing was that I had acquired what we called "Mississippi eyes" to go back home, see another community of people of color, also without political rights, also without economic protections, and California, with its own very rich history of racial oppression going back to the native peoples, the Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and of course Mexicans.

It turned out that Mississippi was not an exception to America. It was an example of the America we needed to change. And that's what led to joining Caesar for 16 years, which is where I really learned the organizing craft. The calling came from Mississippi, but the craft was working with the farm workers.

McNally:

Very good. Thank you. Thank you so much. Yeah, it was interesting. I had questions that you hit the answers to before I could ask, which worked very well. But I do want to ...One quick digression, which... I entered Harvard in '65, so you're like seven, eight years older than I, something like that.

Ganz:

Well, I was class of '64, and when I graduated, I was class of 64-dash-92. But yeah, no, we're pretty close there.

McNally:

We're pretty close in age. One question I just wanted to ask about how do you explain the cultural and political activism of the sixties and early seventies? And as you said,

youth is a time when they have both a critical eye and a hopeful heart, but it seemed to come together at that moment. And then I would just add you are working with young people in your classes ever since, I mean, ever since you've been at Harvard. So what do you think birthed it then? And do you see the same sort of spirit now?

Ganz:

Well, it's kind of like what I was saying, that young people come of age with a critical eye and, almost of necessity, hopeful hearts. And there is often affinity between generational change and social change.

McNally:

Right

Ganz:

Now, when I was coming of age and growing up, this was the end of the fifties when the big deal was conformity, the organization man, all of that stuff. And there were those of us who found that very uncomfortable, even at Bakersfield High School. I mean, we were sort of cultural rebels, music, theater, that sort of thing.

Our heroes were the beat generation, like Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Jack Kerouac up in San Francisco, which wasn't that far. But it was sort of pre-political. But it was clearly this response to this feeling of suffocation that the fifties were all about. And so one current was young people reacting to that and, "No, I want to find my own way. I want to be my own person." And out of that, things like the Port Huron statement come, SDS's charter. "No, I don't want to be used. I want to be an agent and I want to explore what that means." But that overlapped, of course, with the civil rights movement and the civil rights movement was, "Oh, look at that. This is how you can do this stuff." It wasn't like there was no example of how you could actually organize to create change. There it was."

Now we knew nothing about the labor movement, the 1930s. I mean, it's just such a gap. But we did see civil rights movement and admired the people involved enormously.

And then there was this matter of the war in Vietnam, and what that meant was that every boy who turned 18 had to register for the draft, and had to decide, "Let me see, am I going to go to Canada? Am I going to go to jail? Am I going to go to Vietnam?" The draft really radicalized the whole generation in the context of the war. And so you have all these convergences there in very dynamic ways. And so young people were certainly playing an important role, but it wasn't just young people.

McNally:

That's right.

Ganz:

It wasn't just about any one thing, but it was this odd, I don't know, this combination between "I want to do my thing," but also this need to challenge the powers that be that we're sending people off to die. And so all of that came together.

And I'll just say that my roommate in Mississippi was a young man named Mario Savio.

McNally:

Oh my God.

Ganz:

And Mario grew up in New York, and we would have these all-night conversations about faith and right, wrong, and so forth. But Mario had a terrible stutter. And so when he went back to Berkeley and set up his table to sell buttons, and the university said no... In a very interesting way, he began a movement to free his speech and to free speech generally. And that's exactly what happened.

He became the voice of that whole movement at that time. That was his moment. So it's just another example of how one movement bleeds to another to another. The women's movement had a very important source of origin in SNCC in the civil rights movement. One thing was leading to another and rippling, and, of course, it produced a whole lot of change in our country.

McNally:

The other thing that I think contextually played a role there was that the country was doing pretty well economically. That was the era of the Great American Middle Class. And so you weren't graduating from college with \$50,000 in student debt.

Ganz:

No, but if you couldn't get a deferment...

McNally:

Yes...

Ganz:

...you were graduating to go to Vietnam.

McNally:

What I always thought was that some of that middle class privilege that was widespread allowed people to think they were a little freer than they might be.

My question also was what do you see in your students and how are things similar and different? And then we'll jump forward back into the book.

Ganz:

Well, for me, teaching turned out to be a real blessing because it was a way I could integrate my life experience with the social science I was learning in a pedagogical conversation with the rising generation. I mean, it was like I get to go to class twice a week and have a conversation with the future. I'm learning as I'm teaching. And I actually think if you stop learning, it's time to stop teaching because you shut something down - the kind of curiosity that drives the whole enterprise.

McNally:

By the way, Marshall, let me cut in for a second. When I describe what I do in these conversations, it's exactly that. I started out as a school teacher. I teach while learning or I learn while teaching. And that that's what this is. That's what this time with you today at this moment is.

Ganz:

Well, maybe that helps explain why we're both still at it.

McNally:

Yes.

Ganz:

I think the greatest gift I had from my mom was curiosity. That's been a real blessing throughout my life and seeing it operative... I guess what I'm saying is that I'm in school with rising generations and have been for some time.

McNally:

Yeah.

Ganz:

And more recently, well, I would say since the Obama campaign, much more internationally as well. And so it's sort of like a sustaining education. Now, I do think the case is that young people come of age with critical eyes and hopeful hearts. Now how that plays out, it plays out in different ways, different times.

I think one of the most hopeful happenings in the world right now is the global women's movement. And it's everywhere - from places like Saudi to places like the U.S. There's something very important happening there. My classes, they used to be sort of 50/50, now they're generally about two-thirds women. My teaching team this time is we have one guy, and it's not because we're discriminating against guys. It's just that there is an energy for deep change that's connected with identity. Not identity in a label way, but in who I am, who I understand myself to be, and conditions under which I do not intend to continue living. We work with a group based

in Malaysia and Sri Lanka, an Islamic feminist movement called Musawah. They've mastered the text within their own faith tradition to challenge...

McNally:

Wow...

Ganz:

And they say, "You have to use a beard to cut a beard." And that's exactly what they're doing.

McNally:

Wow.

Ganz:

That energy is very real and it's playing out in lots of different ways. Young people, I mean, what was the climate stuff? March for Our Lives? I mean, yeah, they want to have a future. They'd like to live if they can. And so there are these sources of energy. And happily, there seems to be some more recent reawakening within the labor movement, like the UAW with Sean Fain's victory there that has really opened up all kinds of new possibilities. And then the whole immigration thing, which Trump has used to demonize others, that's not going away exactly. I mean, right now there is tremendous sense of loss and fear about what in the hell he's going to do. But how can I say? It's going to stir something up...

McNally:

Yeah...

Ganz:

...and he may be sorry for what he's stirring up.

And I guess the most distinctive thing about our time, and I'm not going to say social media, I mean I think that it's important, it's interesting as access to information. It has challenges as well as strengths.

But I was impressed when I was studying history and the revolutions in Europe, 1848, in which almost every country had a revolution and very close to one another. And I was trying to discover the technology, and it turns out it was a guy on a horse with leaflets. So we shouldn't get totally carried away that sharing information is brand new. And so certainly this is new...

...but really more so for me is the fact we're in what Adam Tooze and others have called a poly-crisis. I mean, we're in the midst of radical uncertainty, and youth have a stake in figuring that one out if we can. And probably the most significant source of

radical uncertainty is the change in climate and the fact that all these technical economic fixes.

It feels like we're at an inflection point, and unfortunately, those who share our values have been doing a very poor job of engaging people in finding the courage and solidarity to see opportunity in the uncertainty. Whereas Trump has been taking advantage of the fear in uncertainty.

McNally:

Yes, I will say, and we won't talk much about the election, but for me towards the last few weeks, it finally occurred to me that the basic platform of Donald Trump was, "Are you angry about something? Vote for me..." if you know what I'm saying. It became reduced to "Pissed off at your job? Pissed off at the price of food? Pissed off at whatever it is? Vote for me." And very challenging for an opponent to actually counter that kind of visceral sort of approach. And it turned out enough people were angry enough to put him over the top.

Ganz:

I see it a little bit differently.

McNally:

Go ahead.

Gaz:

I think that when you're struggling to live your life and nobody sees you, nobody hears you, you begin to lose hope, and you doubt your own meaning and significance and value. And within that, of course there is anger, because, "I don't want to be treated like crap."

Well, so along comes somebody... And see you can mobilize around fear or hope. Along comes somebody like Trump and says, "Boy, I see you. I hear you. And guess what? This hopelessness you're feeling, not your fault. It's their fault." Then the other is identified as responsible for everything, which takes any responsibility away actually from those who are feeling the most hopeless. And they're saying, "But identify with me your avatar and I'll be your avenger." And it's a classic fascist formulation. It's not new.

McNally:

And the other becomes defined as the government who's helping people break in front of you and the immigrant who you feel is so other, becomes those two things. And they work very well if you can make the election about,

Ganz:

But other also includes the educated elites...

McNally:

That's true.

Ganz:

...that are making out like gangbusters. Thomas Piketty, a few years ago wrote his book on capital, and he calls it The Brahman Left, a so-called Progressive dimension or parties that are increasingly defined by education. And his argument was that, beginning really with Clinton or even before in this country, Democratic party just abandoned its commitments to egalitarian concern. And so yeah, chickens come home to roost.

McNally:

Right...

Ganz:

And what Piketty argued was, well then what he calls the Merchant Right will then offer, not equality, but offer identity. Identity, race - classic for the U.S., been going on for ever since...

So I guess what I'm trying to say is that, you can mobilize around fear, which is what that's all about, or you can mobilize around hope. Now, Obama did a decent job of that in the first campaign because when you mobilize around hope, you're lifting up people's capacity. It's kind of like, "Yes, we can" not just, "Yes, I can."

The problem here has been that ever since Obama's first two years, what alternative pathways have been growing, articulated, told as narrative and so forth, that's rooted in people's daily lives of having to live paycheck-to-paycheck. And it's not just that, but it is all that goes with that. And so you have galloping inequality. This campaign didn't even mention economic inequality. I mean, didn't even get on...

McNally:

Hey, they hardly mentioned climate and they didn't mention inequality. And those are the two, to me, the two biggest threats we face.

Ganz:

Yeah - and so then what you've got is this... See, people talk about polarization. I don't think... We have a highly polarized Hard Right, no question. That's an anti-democracy movement. But then everybody else is fragmented. I don't see any equivalent Hard Left.

McNally:

That's right. Let me tell people... This is FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK. I'm Terrence McNally speaking with Marshall Ganz, lecturer in public policy at Harvard. We're talking about his life's work and his new book, *People Power Change: Organizing for Democratic Renewal*. And *PEOPLE, POWER, CHANGE: Organizing for Democratic Renewal*. You can learn more at marshallganz.com, at the Kennedy School site, hks.harvard.edu, or at leadingchangenetwork.org.

I think what we're doing right here, what we've been doing just in the last few minutes is fleshing out the moment. I think we share this to some extent, which is that, basically we've been in a neoliberal sort of paralysis for way too long, you could say, starting with Reagan, through Clinton, through Obama, wasted opportunities, a loss of the labor movement, and so on.

And we're at a moment now where, as you said, the chickens have come home to roost and democracy... and the blinders are off, and as you say, an inflection point. So that's why I think your book is so timely. Talk a little bit about the relationship of organizing, practice, and democracy.

Ganz:

Okay, that's a modest... Let's see. No, I think that, well, first of all, I think democracy is not something you have. It's something you do. In other words...

McNally:

...a verb.

Ganz:

It's a verb. And in fact, I'm on a little campaign against nouns because

McNally:

I think I saw that structure. You think structure is a verb, and

Ganz:

Yeah, because nouns pretend to be permanent, but they're not. Nothing is.

McNally:

Reality is dynamic. Yes.

Ganz:

It's very dynamic. And so all of this... If we say, what is democracy? It's not what you have, it's what you do. It's a practice. It's a way of doing things. And of course, it's rooted in the idea of the infinite worth and equal worth of each human being, and therefore their capacity to come together, figure out common concerns, argue, whatever, and translate that into political power, public power. I mean, *demos*

gratos, rule by the people. That's kind of the whole idea.

The problem is that we don't have a representative democracy, and we never have. The way the Constitution was created - to protect the interests of a slave holding South, it created institutions that could guarantee the protection of the South, like the Electoral College, which is utterly undemocratic. And its consequences. I mean - campaigning in six states, a sliver of people in six states decide who's going to be president. Nobody campaigns in California and New York because it's irrelevant. Or the Senate, I mean, two votes in California, two votes in Rhode Island.

McNally:

Well, Wyoming with 600,000 people.

Ganz:

Yeah, no, I think your California vote is one 600th of the value of a Wyoming vote.

McNally:

Yeah, yeah...

Ganz:

No, it's so...

McNally:

We've done many shows here, by the way, on minority rule. It's one that we've been tracking for years.

Ganz:

It's very important to understand so that we don't get our diagnosis of what's going on wrong. It's kind of like all Americans are now for Trump. Well, that's not the story. In fact, it's been years where people wanted all kinds of reforms that just couldn't happen because of the structure, the unrepresentative character of our government.

The other key element was the Supreme Court decision, *Buckley v Valeo*, which meant there could be no constraints on campaign spending, which created infinite demand. And based on that infinite demand, a whole new industry emerged called political marketing. And it's a multi-billion-dollar industry that's actually transformed what we do when we do politics. I mean, we would do politics at one point where you engage with other people and you find common ground, you argue, you do whatever, but now it's all about data points, not people.

McNally:

Right. Well, let me just say, by the way, when I saw you speak in Santa Monica in October, the thing that stuck with me the most was the distinction you make between marketing and organizing. The industry of politics engages in marketing when what's

needed to even attempt to make society work for most people is organizing. If you lose an election campaign dominated by marketing, you have nothing to show for it. Pack up, go home, raise more money for the next one. Instead, you lose an organizing battle, you have learned lessons, you've developed leaders, all of that sort of thing.

Ganz:

Terrence, spot on. I mean, and see, it's this thing in organizing, we think of having three outcomes, not just one. One is you're trying to win the campaign you're involved in. But the second one is, did you come out of it stronger than you went into it? I doubt I'm the only person that had the experience of maybe winning something but never wanting to see anybody ever again who was involved. And so what you wind up with, you come out weaker, not stronger, because the move from campaign to sustained power is organization. So unless you're campaigning to build, then you're not building a future.

This kind of struggle with turning mobilizing into organizing has been a huge problem out there. And the reaction to the first Trump election, they're mobilizing all over the place, but it did not turn into organization.

And we had the same challenge with Obama. We built an organization of a million and a half people. But when Obama started to govern, instead of trying to maximize support, he turned to a strategy of minimizing opposition. And it became basically a technocratic regime...

McNally:

And transaction rather than transformation.

Ganz:

Absolutely. Transaction and also people losing their homes. But the bankers did fine. Thank you very much. I guess what I'm trying to say is, there is the constitutional problems. We need to acknowledge those. There is the insane transformation of the political process itself. I mean, you can think of it as the change in the political means of production to quote some tradition. Because really that is what's happened. Aside from all the money, but it changed the process itself to make it thin. And then is the question of, if we're going to fight, what are we fighting for? I sort of have issues with the idea of resistance because to me it seems like they got all the power.

McNally:

That's right.

Ganz:

It's defensive.

McNally:

Resistance is all defense. Let me just throw one thing that I think you'll appreciate, which is I talked to George Packer recently about his cover story in *The Atlantic* about Phoenix, Arizona. And what he said was that in the '80's, Phoenix was able to come together. The players in Phoenix were able to come together and make water decisions that actually lasted. But the crisis has gotten so much worse, Phoenix has gotten so much larger, there are areas that weren't covered, they've got to do it again - and now it feels impossible. And he said the difference was, in the '80's, you had competing interests, now you have enemies.

Ganz:

Well, it's interesting. You had a whole different social infrastructure. In other words, when Bob Putnam was writing about social capital in the '90's, it was sort of seeing something that had been happening for a long time, which has been this kind of fragmentation, this transformation of relationships into transactions. And people will say, "Oh, but I feel over-connected, but under-committed, because relationship is about commitment. That's how you build a future. Relationships build a future. Organizations are how you build a future. And if you're not doing that, well then it's all just kind of sand. And that is a core problem. And that's really what organizing is all about.

McNally:

I'm just going to say we've got about 10 more minutes and I'd love you to just go organizing from here to the end. As I said, this book offers vision, but it really is a playbook, a manual.

Ganz:

In what I've been learning over the years with organizing and teaching organizing and so forth, is to understand that it's not about models. In what's called alignment theory, they say that all models are wrong. And I agree with that because a model is an abstraction. At best, it's a lens on a complex world, but it is not the complex world itself. And when we confuse models with reality, we get the economics profession for the last 67 years, because then we start shaping the world to fit the model.

So models are not the approach. The approach is practices. And it's practices, meaning human capabilities that we are able to do, that we learned, that combine what we value with the skills we need, and the concepts through which we understand how we're using those skills. So for me, organizing itself is a practice of developing leadership, building community around leadership, and building power from the resources of community.

And so how that happens... We've been focusing on five particular practices of: Relationship building - but actual relationship building means making commitments that enable a future to grow, not just a transaction, which is so much of what goes on. Storytelling, which is not just about entertainment. It's about how we've learned

to access the emotional resources embedded in our values for sources of courage and hope and solidarity and all the rest of it. Values are feelings. Values are not abstract ideas. And narrative is a way we can communicate the emotional content of our values when confronted with disruption for which we're not prepared, and how to respond hopefully as opposed to fearfully.

That's kind of the essence - our own stories, the stories of our movements, that's where the heart comes from. And then strategy is basically how to turn what you have into what you need to get what you want.

McNally:

And let me just jump in for a second because that one line is so much the kernel of this. And to jump back to the bus boycott. Take that line you just gave us, that recipe you just gave us, and apply it to the bus boycott, to remind people how this works in the real world.

Ganz:

Yeah. Well, they figured out how to turn what they had, namely feet and some bus fare, into what they needed, which was power. In order to get rid of the segregated buses. And see, this power thing, Terrence, is so important to understand because power is also not something you have. If you need what I've got more than I need what you've got, who's got the power? Me or you?

McNally:
Exactly.

Ganz:

It is an interdependence, and we live in an interdependent world. And so the question is what are the terms of interdependence? And if they're more or less balanced, well then, we can create more power with each other than we can by ourselves, and we create a credit union or whatever. But if resources we need are being held by those who are using those resources to replace our will with theirs and our interests with theirs, then we have a power over or a situation of domination, in which we have to find the resources we can use in order to affect their needs.

This relational dynamic that operates. The creativity of finding resources... Look, American colonists, they went for tea. And the farm-workers, we went for grapes. We came up with a way that lots of people could contribute something potent, real economic power, by joining together something that growers couldn't do.

So it's the David and Goliath thing. It's looking to your own resources. David was given a sword, a shield, and a helmet to go fight Goliath, but they were so heavy, he couldn't move in them. And he realized as a shepherd, he knew how to use a sling and a stone and took Goliath by surprise. It's sort of understanding that we build from

resources we have into the power we need, and we are natural strategists. I mean, anybody ever overslept? You still had to get to school on time.

You figured out a different way to get where you needed to go. So relationship as a foundation, then storytelling, which is the heart work, strategy, which is the head work, and then action, which is the hands work. How are we actually doing this in facts on the ground? And finally, structure, how do we make commitments to how we're going to work with each other so as to be able to make decisions, hold ourselves accountable, and do all that other building work that we need to do.

And driving the whole thing is leadership development. And by leadership, what I mean very specifically is accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose under conditions of uncertainty. And when it comes to organizing, the first question then is not "What's my issue?", but "Who are my people? What is the change they need? And how can we work to build the power needed to achieve that change?"

So that was sort of like, I don't know, a five or ten minute summary of a semester.

McNally:

Yeah, I know it was. I know it was.

Ganz:

...or a lifetime for that matter.

McNally:

That's true. That's true. As the lessons were learned.

One of the keys that I think runs through all of this, is that thing you sort of said at the start of this last question, which is that models are not reality. I long ago kind of came up with this - that the usual definition I see of reality is that it is dead, separate, and static. And in fact, reality looks to me to be alive, dynamic, and interdependent.

Ganz:

Absolutely.

McNally:

And I see that running through your thinking, your work, and this book. Narrative is not a script that you settle on. It changes in the moment. It changes with whom you're talking to. Leadership is not a position you attain. It's a process through which you are able to empower people and help them be more than they can be. It's all of these things. It seems to me there's this thread of dynamic willingness to kind of roll with it and run with it, because you know... You've got your goals, you've got your needs,

they're clear, but you've got to be engaged in a very dynamic learning-as-you-go process.

Ganz:

Amen. I'll be your amen corner on that. And I think one of the challenges we have in working with some of the students is, that to go out to talk to people, they think that they have to have a plan to propose,

When what you have to do is, go out and talk to people, and listen, and draw out of that real world, and in the context of the real world, things will change. And so it's an ongoing kind of learning engagement. I've been quoting Eisenhower of all things after D-Day, somebody said, "Planning must really matter." And Eisenhower said, "Yeah, planning's really, really important, but plans are useless." In other words, once you enter into the future, which we cannot predict... We can't. There's always a risk involved in acting because we can't predict the future. What we can do is prepare for it by developing the emotional, cognitive, organizational capacity to see in uncertainty and surprise, possibility as opposed as to fear. And boy, this is so relevant in these days.

McNally:

Let me ask you, this will be sort of a final question. How would you organize if your client was broadly the common good? Is it possible or realistic to think of organizing a change in perspective or worldview? Or is organizing always about tangible, real life, small steps, one after another?

Ganz:

It's both. It's kind of like...well, one example - in Tahrir Square in Egypt, Wael Ghonim, the Google guy, was here for a couple of years, who was all involved in that.

McNally:

I interviewed him for sure. Yep.

Ganz:

Oh, cool.

McNally:

Yeah.

Ganz:

Well, what he was saying is, that the young people there use the social media and they mobilized very, very effectively. They got rid of Mubarak. But the ones that walked away with the whole thing was the Muslim Brotherhood because they had organization and the young people did not build organization.

They were mobilizing but not organizing. And so organizing is building the capacity for a future. And so its relationship to democracy is fundamental. You go out there right now and all over the country when you say we're fighting for democracy, so many people have no clue what you even mean. After World War II, Frank Sinatra recorded a song called *The House I Live In*.

McNally:

Right, and there was a short film about it.

Ganz:

And it was real in people's lives because they'd just fought this war against authoritarianism. Democracy meant freedom, it meant prosperity, it meant a lot. If you go out there now and you say democracy, it's been decoupled from the real needs and cares and desires of most people. So it becomes kind of an empty word.

McNally:

Why should I care? Right?

Ganz:

Exactly.

And it's a result of not taking seriously what people do care about, and engaging in ways in which democracy can be - probably the best that we know of - way of self-governing ourselves to achieve those things. But if there's no things that we're trying to achieve, no values, then it becomes this abstract kind of thing, which we saw.

In this campaign, the saddest thing was the campaigns ended up seeing who could scare the people more. I mean, all you do is create more fear. And so it always comes back to the question, we can fight, but we got to know what we're fighting for. And that's where we have a lot of work to do with each other, with our institutions, with our values, and how we cultivate the power we need to really launch more of a movement, I think.

Movements historically... Dan Schlozman's book, *When Movements Anchored Parties*, a very good book, shows the relationship between social movements and parties as sources of change in this country. Rarely coming from within the electoral system, but almost always being generated from outside. And I think that's kind of where we are right now.

McNally:

In other words, we need something more and different and certainly more dynamic and less stuck in the past than what anybody's offering these days - although Bernie comes close.

Ganz:

No, I agree. And the sad thing is that again, it was another mobilization that didn't turn into organization, and this is a persistent challenge that we really have to have to...

McNally:

Yeah, we didn't mention the word "Occupy" yet, but that was clearly...that was fairly anarchistic mobilization, which almost was threatened a little bit by structure and those sorts of things, and...

Ganz:

I'd say more than a little bit. I think when your individual autonomy is the highest good... And see this comes out of the Left too. Markets do that. So does a lot of the sort of "my way or the highway" thing that reduces the role of collective reality. And democracy is a system of collective governance. It's not a poll of individuals that you aggregate. It requires the work of discerning common interest, common goods, and all the rest of that. And if we don't have institutions and organizations that are facilitating that process, and instead what we have is a whole bunch of individual opinions that get aggregated in a poll and say that's what people want. We have a lot of work to do.

McNally:

Yeah. Well, that alienation is a wonderful feed source for authoritarianism.

Ganz:

You bet. You bet.

McNally:

Okay, we've got to bring it to a close. This has been great Marshall and could go on longer...

So again, the websites are Marshall Ganz dot com - all one word - marshall ganz.com, the Kennedy school site, hks.harvard.edu, and the organization site, Leading Change Network - all one word - leading change network.org. The book is *People, Power, Change: Organizing for Democratic Renewal*.

Thank you, Marshall Ganz, and keep up your good work. 60 years is not long enough for you to be organizing.

Ganz:

Yeah, I'm with that program. Or to be doing the kind of educational commentary work that you are doing. So we have to make a pact here to hang in there.

This transcript was exported on Dec 03, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

McNally:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you, Marshall.

Ganz:

Thank you so much. Take care.

For this conversation and many other interviews and articles, and to join me in pursuit of a world that just might work go to terrencemcnally.net or aworldthatjustmightwork.com. They're the same website.

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