

# THE PROTESTING PARENT

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*a how-to for the modern parent*

*written by*

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*edited by* Lisa Duggan & Gregg Valentine

This book is for my dear friend, Helen Kusman, who inspired me to become the woman I am today — and to my daughter, Georgiah Ruby, who inspires me every moment to be the woman I will become.



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# INTRODUCTION

Soon after I decided to become involved with the Occupy Wall Street movement, I started the group Parents for Occupy Wall Street. My intent was to create a platform that offered parents a place to learn about the movement and to help them feel confident about including their family in events and protests. Not long after the group was formed, we organized our first direct action: a family sleepover at Zuccotti Park on Friday, October 21. Not everyone stayed the night, but by Saturday morning, 500 families had come through our registration checkpoint.

Soon after, calls from people all over the country started coming in to ask me how to get involved in their city's movement and how to hold their own events. I was more than happy to share the knowledge I had with everyone who reached out. But, here's the thing: at the time of the sleepover I had officially been a protestor and a politically active person for a total of eight days!

I had no prior experience in protesting before Occupy Wall Street—I never felt like there was a place for my voice to be heard until this

movement came to be. Yet, with only eight days of planning we had created a tremendously successful event covered by every major news circuit, including The New York Times, CNN and (to my surprise) even mainstream TV, like the Daily Show.

Here's what I believe: if you have a passion or a calling to do something and you have the strength to step up and answer that call, you will succeed. I wasn't a political person before Occupy but I had an idea, the patience to organize my idea and the courage to stand by it during the ups and downs. I found that in taking that risk I inspired other parents to stand up and speak up, too.

In this book, I offer everything I've learned in the very short time I've been politically active and in the long time I've been an entrepreneur and businesswoman. This is the book I would have wanted when I was forming PFOWS. I hope that no matter what cause, issue or passion made you pick up this book, you will find inspiration and the tools necessary to raise your own voice.

After all, we as parents should have the loudest voice since we have the biggest stake in the future —our children.

Kirby Desmarais

December 15, 2011

# CHAPTER 1 / OVERVIEW

- What Does It Mean to Protest?
- What Can I Do?
- Passive versus Direct Action
- My Party, Your Party, Our Party

## *What Does it Mean to “Protest”?*

Protesting comes in so many shapes and sizes. From movements that eventually overthrow a government to the rowdy child who tosses a bowl of spaghetti across the room. Honestly, if you’ve ever dealt with a toddler, you should be an expert on protesting. Here’s what the dictionary says:

: the act of objecting or a gesture of disapproval <resigned in protest>; especially : a usually organized public demonstration of disapproval

and

: a complaint, objection, or display of unwillingness usually to an idea or a course of action <went under protest>

Whether you’re a seasoned activist who has participated in sit-ins at your

liberal state college or a newbie to the movement movement, it's very likely that you've protested something at some point in your life. You're protesting when you loudly voice your opposition at the PTA meeting or refuse to step foot in the restaurant where the server blatantly hits on your spouse.

The stereotype that protesters have to be crunchy, clog wearing, earth-loving souls is a thing of the past. Today, with the obvious need for change, even hard-working, suit-wearing people have joined various movements on both sides of the political playing field. It's no longer seen as extreme to voice your dissatisfaction with the establishment and more and more people are looking for ways to get involved with their communities and their government.

### *What Can I Do?*

As parents, we face a particularly difficult choice when we decide to dedicate ourselves to world change. Fitting a sit-in between your kid's school, your job and piano lessons doesn't always work. Many families already operate within tight schedules and even tighter budgets. In my own rapid education and experience in the Occupy movement, I've found that there is no lack of passion or desire in parents for getting involved. Rather, a lack of clarity and focus keeps moms and dads from acting up. As I've learned through our most successful events, if the reason behind the cause is laid out, the action clearly explained and the date is set, parents will participate with enthusiasm. What the world needs now is more awesome parents who step up to make these events happen. I know you're sitting there saying, "Ugh! Isn't donating money enough?!" While every organization needs and appreciates donations, let's be honest: what really makes a statement and gives a group power is the number of

bodies that show up at events.

### *Passive versus Direct Action*

You can do one of two things to get involved with the causes about which you're passionate; support an established organization by attending their events or donate your time and/or supplies. Or, if you're feeling really ballsy, put together your own event in the community, drawing on the strength of your friends and neighbors to support your cause.

Whichever route you choose, you should be familiar with these two types of action within a movement: Direct and Passive Action.

### **Passive Action**

Passive action is often held away from the central area of a protest, but not always. These events are more about inspiring people to get involved by raising awareness and educating about a particular cause. Speakers are often enlisted to share their knowledge or expertise. The most common form of passive action comes in the form of fundraisers.

Some examples of passive actions are: meet-and-greets between group members and leaders, hosting a speaker at a school or community center, musicians touring on behalf of a cause, and silent auctions or bake sales, etc. (Donations are also considered to be passive action within a protest movement.)

Passive actions are the safest and least radical form of protest. They fuel causes not only financially but also by educating the general public and can be the most family-friendly form of protest. A family is more likely to participate in a bake sale than a riot, because of the obvious

safety issues.

To the radical activist, those willing to be arrested ten times over, passive protest may be viewed as “weak” or “not passionate enough” — but if there’s one thing I want you to walk away with from this book, it is the knowledge that in order for a movement to succeed it needs all forms of support.

While the radical might be instrumental in drawing attention to a particular cause, without the less sexy organizational and clerical support of those performing passive action a movement could remain just a bunch of hoodlums chaining themselves to trees. For a movement to truly take shape, variety is key. Not only to ensure the success of the proposed change, but to inspire everyday, not-so-radical people to get involved and speak up about their beliefs.

When organizing events, the fear of judgment can be a big beast within groups and communities. But if passive action is well planned and gracefully executed, even the most radical causes can find support within the most timid of communities.

Have confidence in your beliefs. Even if people don’t agree with you entirely, they’ll be impressed with your courage and ability to put your convictions into action, especially if you can do so tastefully and skillfully.

### **Direct Action**

The more radical and often controversial sister of passive action is direct action. Direct action can be taken to the extreme and may result in the arrest of an individual or group, a violent response from

authorities or on the rare occasion, can prove fatal for the protestor(s). There are many levels of direct action that can be used within a movement. Some direct actions are considered civil disobedience, a form of protest that was referred to as early as 442 BC, in Sophocles’ play *Antigone*, and made famous by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. King. You don’t always have to be breaking the law to be civilly disobedient, according to the Wikipedia definition:

: Civil disobedience is the active, professed refusal to obey certain laws, demands, and commands of a government, or of an occupying international power. Civil disobedience is commonly, though not always, defined as being nonviolent resistance. In one view (in India, known as *ahimsa* or *satyagraha*) it could be said that it is compassion in the form of respectful disagreement.

Often, direct action is a controversial event or statement that draws great amounts of attention by and through the media and /or onlookers — aka, the shake-stuff-up, stuff. Some examples of direct actions are: sit-ins, strikes, marches, property destruction, hacking (hello Anonymous), or any time daily order is disrupted in order to shine a light on your cause.

As a parent, you have to participate in a direct action with a certain grace. I’ll discuss safety issues in depth in Chapter 5, but you must remember that participating in direct action puts you and your family on display

for the public. However, this isn’t always a bad thing\*. I’ve received so many supportive emails and notes from people who’ve discovered Parents for Occupy Wall Street through our direct action and events.



\*There will always be that bully in the cyber or media world. Keep reading and I'll talk about how to deal with those party-poopers.

### *My Party, Your Party, Our Party*

This book was not written to put a particular focus on any one cause. I wrote it to teach parents that no matter what your passion is, there are a number of ways to become involved and create meaningful change.

I'm a big believer in following your gut — if something feels wrong, don't do it. You can support a party without entirely agreeing with their ideals. Don't let yourself be muffled at protests or meetings because your opinion differs from the majority. Someone else in the room might feel the same way as you, but isn't brave enough to speak up.

I find that people, especially here, in the USA, can get wrapped up in their political party's ideology or standing. It is great to identify with a group of like-minded people and feel connected to a greater whole.

But don't let that stop you from doing what you believe in.



## CHAPTER 2 / WHY PROTEST WITH YOUR CHILDREN

- Teachable Moments
- Some Reasons to Protest with Children
- The Most Important Reason for Including Children

*“There is no greater insight into the future than recognizing that... when we save our children, we save ourselves.”*

*- Margaret Mead*

In each family, the decision to include or not include children in protest actions or meetings is a very personal one. For some, it may even be a financial decision! On a few occasions when there was an OWS evening meeting and my husband had to work late, I found myself thinking, “No way in hell am I paying a babysitter four times what I make in a day to sit in the living room while my kid sleeps.” (And that, my friends, is how PFOWS got its youngest member — my daughter, Baby G.)

For some families, the decision to include their children in a protest

is as simple as, “We do everything together, including practicing our civil liberties.” Other families may have a separate agenda or reason for including their kids that fall outside the primary goals of the cause in question.

### *Teachable Moments*

When the question of whether or not it’s wise to include children in a protest action or bring them to a public event comes up, many people will say, accusingly, “You’re forcing your morals on your children!” This statement always confuses me. Isn’t that the exact job of every parent? Isn’t it a parent’s job is to live in a way that sets a positive example for their children and that teaches them how to live a moral life?



We demonstrate our values to our children every time we, as a family, step into a religious institution or practice any form of discipline and choosing to be active in a movement or fight for a cause is equally instructive. How we act in every single moment that their little eyes are upon us conveys our ideas about what behavior we hold to be “right” and “wrong.” Even if I disagree with another mom’s beliefs, I have tremendous respect for any parent who engages their children, who offers their kid an explanation for the world around them —as I’ve seen with every single parent I’ve crossed paths with at OWS.

### *Some Reasons to Protest with Children*

#### **To demonstrate religious values**

Often when you hear the word “protest,” your mind automatically conjures a liberal extremist when, in fact, conservative, religious people throughout history have been the impetus for many major cultural movements. In contemporary history, religious organizations have been at the forefront of the anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage movements with powerful, organized constituencies and lobbyists in Washington. Religion inspires people to act and including children in those actions can be considered in line with a moral code. Just because videos of protesters outside abortion centers haven’t gone viral on YouTube or they haven’t been pepper-sprayed by police, doesn’t mean these people aren’t protesting.

#### **For purely academic reasons**

I’ve met quite a few parents involved with Occupy Wall Street that don’t confess a personal investment in the movement other than providing a living history lesson for their children. Often these are parents with older, school-aged kids. When asked why they brought their son or daughter



down to the epicenter of action, a common response has been, “This is history in the making and I want my kids to see it as it’s happening.”

As Zuccotti Park grew in population and popularity and the movement became more widespread, I noticed teachers bringing their middle and high school students down to the park for history and economic lessons. Teach-ins became a daily event and, as our group became known, an overwhelming number of teachers approached us to donate their services. I have seen lectures being given and college classes being taught right in the middle of the many activities taking place at the park. Among the many hands-on methods for approaching education, exposing children to protest movements may be unparalleled for teaching lessons in advocacy, human rights and social justice.

#### **To make a positive statement about a cause**

Let’s be honest, if you organize a public event and add children to the mix, it will draw more attention as well as cast a more, positive light on your cause. Why do you think so many leaders and politicians, including presidents, are photographed with their family? Do their kids or spouses help them to vote on bills, fight wars or make the big decisions? I highly doubt it, although the Clintons might be the exception.

Including families and children in a movement can add gravity and a sense of wholesomeness or trustworthiness to any situation, event or appearance. But, there’s a fine line between including kids for their ultimate good and benefit and exploiting their presence. Unfortunately, there are people out there who use their children to garner sympathy or support for a cause, but within OWS, I’ve found more parents who include their children because they truly believe that they are making a difference. They consider their families’



participation a necessary duty to ensure the success of the movement. Older kids are often able to express their own ideas about complex social problems and it's been inspiring to watch them in action at marches and rallies.

So, what about the littles who are too young to even remember they attended an event? I believe that children are a product of their emotional environment and are positively affected by parents who are true to themselves and to their core beliefs. When I see contented parents, grateful to be surrounded by like-minded people and who have been provided a space and time to speak-up, I wonder if their lives have been profoundly changed by their participation in an event. Have they themselves changed? Will they become better parents because they feel some power over and hope for their children's future?

### *The Most Important Reason for Including Children*

The single most important reason for involving your children in a protest movement has nothing to do with you or your family at all. It's the inspiration you provide for others that is most important.

Every movement has a diverse group of supporters, yet you almost exclusively see only the youngest and most radical factions within a group: that's because most activities do not respect the sacred naptime. This strikes me as even more of a reason for us, as parents, to get involved.

If we want change, we need to set an example. If you can only make it to one event in support of your cause, your presence will carry a greater weight than the participant with less responsibilities who shows up every time. You send the message that those of us with the most to lose, but the least amount of time to protest that loss, can and will show up and, by doing so, will inspire other parents to do so, too.

## MARK D'S STORY

The thing I remember most about the Columbus Day long weekend this year (aside from the fact that I actually had the day off) was being so unsure of what to expect and questioning my judgment as a parent. After all, I was bringing my child into a place full of riots, radicals and junkies — and/or — educated, privileged white kids with polo shirts and mac books — depending upon how the media was trying to spin it.

I was uncertain of what my sometimes-crazy wife was leading us into, so I had my guard up for two reasons; one, for my family's safety and, two, for my temper. I'm really not one for unnecessary crowds, especially when I have a baby strapped to my chest, which puts my center of gravity in an unusual place. However, within 15 minutes of being there I realized that this crowd was necessary, not only necessary but organized, polite, informative, and peaceful — nothing even close to the stereotypes the press created.

The collective calm of the crowd in Zuccotti calmed my inner a-hole and defensive instincts and re-enforced an awareness of my purpose for being

there: my daughter.

You see, among the myriad of things wrong with the structure of this country lie a common theme: everything is a business. The main objective of any business is to grow and make more money than the previous year. Businesses make their \$\$ from people, either by charging them more or paying them less. This causes people to work their entire lives and live in an endless cycle of constantly needing to pay something.

This cycle imposes a ludicrous mental value on money that often makes us compromise or settle for less to save a buck and this is not how I want my daughter to grow up. Don't get me wrong, in life you need to learn how to compromise, but you shouldn't have to settle for a sub-par version of necessities such as health care, education and even the food you eat.

I should have mentioned we left the house with so much kid's stuff that it was a miracle that we were able to carry it all. Some stuff was crammed into the stroller, other stuff squeezed into back-packs and even more stuff cleverly positioned under arms. We got to Zucotti, claimed some ground space and rolled out about 15 feet of paper and — in crayon — wrote “kids safe zone.”

We proceeded to put out some toys, a baby-changing pad with diapers and wipes and a bin of crayons, markers and coloring accessories. Before we could even take a breath, we noticed that like-minded parents who were there with their kids were attracted to our makeshift kiddy-zone. It was a place for them to put the little ones down for a few minutes to do something they enjoy and for the adults to meet one another.

Within the organized zoo that was Zucotti park, passersby were silenced at the sight of kids coloring and having fun, the sight of innocence hard at work with a “canyon clay” red crayon and the awesome girl from DC who set up her face painting supplies — all of which simply showed everyone the next generation that will be affected by this country's addiction to business.

Among the constant hum of people talking, cameras clicking, protest chants, and mic checks, Zucotti had a new sound. Although low in actual volume, the sound of kids laughing and playing was the only thing people heard as they walked by. Being small and low to the ground, you couldn't really see the kids until you got close and I made a little game of counting the number of “oh my god looks” as people came within view of the little ones. I eventually lost count.

The media, the people who were telling the world that this was an unsafe, dirty, smelly place started to approach us and, honestly, we were afraid and cautious at first, wondering and worried how they were going to spin this. Were they going to make us look like child abusers, unfit parents or hippie lefty's exploiting our children?

But, we were there for our children's future. Let's face it, the likelihood of damages being repaired, wrongs being righted and essential services becoming actual services and not businesses in our lifetime as parents is a little on the slim side. If we don't get this ball rolling now, these changes won't be there for our kids either. To me, this is more important than any potentially false picture a media outlet was going to paint.

With the help of the media, we accomplished something much bigger than setting up a kid's safe zone. After thousands of photos, countless

videos and media interviews (regardless of original intent), the cat was now out of the bag and Zucotti Park was not just degenerates, junkies and rioting radicals. The images of cute kids and everyday parents started popping up all over the place and, in my opinion, was a big part in letting the world know that this was a “middle class” thing and that chances are you, the viewer, are just like us —overworked, underpaid and uncertain about your family’s future.

This was the first of many OWS experiences that I am proud to have been a part. More than just proud to have had the common sense to have shared with my family, this experience is another moment that will forever bond us as a family. I hope that one day our daughter will benefit from this movement and be equally proud to have been introduced to peacefully standing up for what one believes.

*Mark D. is Canadian born, working-class father residing in Brooklyn, NY, with a strong passion for a socialist health care system.*

## CHAPTER 3 / HOW TO SPEAK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS

- Monkey See Monkey Do
- Explaining the News
- Censorship
- Keeping Kids Safe and Feeling Safe
- What about the ‘Littles’?

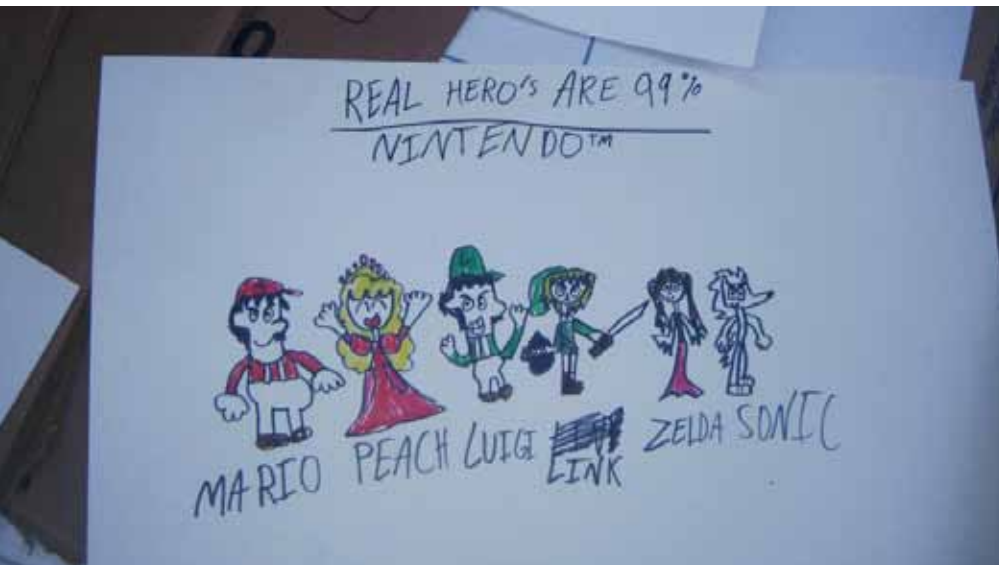
*“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”*

*- Margaret Mead*

There are a handful of moments that have stuck in my head since jumping on the roller coaster of the OWS movement and most of them are about how older children are processing and communicating about their experiences.

One little girl whose family participates in our events has made various

art and protest signs featuring her favorite video game characters. She sees conflict and processes it like the conflict in her games where the “good guys” will eventually come out on top. Another child from the same family told his mother he didn’t like that the “men in blue” were pepper-spraying people. Being a child, it didn’t even occur to him that the men in uniform were police because we teach our children police are good people who protect us.



*Good guys vs. bad guys.*

These are powerful, conflicting messages that need to be explained carefully by an adult. Not every movement will have these same issues, but chances are that if you’re protesting something, there will be at least two “sides” and sometimes more, all with opposing opinions that can be confusing for a young brain.

### *Monkey See Monkey Do*

It’s important to keep your children up-to-date on what’s happening in the world and, more specifically, around them in a way that’s easy for their little heads to process. It’s also SUPER important to talk to your kids about how they are feeling, too. Parents can help children connect the dots between what’s happening around them and what’s happening inside them. To not do so is potentially damaging. Equally important is talking to them about how you feel.

If your child witnesses you engage in a heated argument over how much a particular government official is acting like an idiot (cough... Bloomberg... cough), take them aside afterward and explain the thinking behind your passionate discussion. Set the example that a person can feel angry and upset yet handle it in the right way, i.e., passionate discussion vs. physical violence. And no name calling! You can criticize the behavior of another person without dismissing the entire person. Conflict can be a great opportunity to instill moral values and demonstrate good behavior to your children. I’m hoping the example I’m setting will stop my kid from doing the terrible two tantrums! A girl can dream....

### *Explaining the News*

If your house is anything like ours these days, the news is always the first thing spoken about in the morning. Between Twitter, YouTube and the radio about half way through my first cup of coffee, I’m often ranting about something that happened while we were warmly tucked into our beds. While our daughter isn’t at the age to have a conversation with us (she’s a toddler), she’s not too young to start processing our conversations and the emotion we’re expressing when we do talk.



Here are a few starter questions for talking to your kids about current events and/or your involvement in a protest \*:

- What do you think the people are upset about?
- Why do you think Mommy and Daddy feel so strongly about these things?
- What do you feel strongly about?
- Have you studied anything in school similar to what we're participating in?
- Do you talk to your friends about what we're doing?

Start the conversation and your child will follow your lead. Remember that kids want to know your thoughts but they also want to feel heard.

Remember too that each child is different and age often has nothing to do with maturity level. You know what and how much information your child can handle. You can judge what your child is ready to know by how the conversation about current events is going. If your child seems interested and unfazed, maybe she's ready to be challenged more and to be introduced to more complex thoughts.

Keep your statements basic and easy to understand:

“Some people at some banks did something unfair and stole a lot of people's money. We believe stealing is wrong and today we're letting them know it's not OK by marching.”

This statement could have included your outrage over housing foreclosures, sub-prime mortgage bundling, taxes, etc., but that would have washed your simple message out. Kids don't need to know all the details of an

indictment. It's more about simply defining what has brought so many strangers together acting very passionately.

### *Censorship*

I believe it's important not to shelter your children from everything that's bad. Doing so can create anxiety-ridden adults if, as children, they never developed the skills to deal with and process negative events. Yes, it's a hard to find the balance between safe and overwhelming, especially when you're passionate about a cause, but it's possible. Don't jump into the conversation about a current event or your involvement too quickly. Set aside a good chunk of time and a quiet, calm place to approach sensitive topics.

I would caution parents to be careful about watching the news in front of your children -- either on TV, the computer or your phone. Witnessing violence is upsetting and can be very difficult for children to handle. Even if they are in another room, overhearing a disturbing or violent clip might lead to misunderstanding.

A cool thing that's happened with the little girl I mentioned above is her new-found confidence since becoming part of the movement. She was always very shy at school but her mother told me that she's gained a new, positive energy and the confidence to speak up for herself after her family's involvement with OWS. This is HUGE for this little girl's future.

They have explained to her in the most simple way what is going on and she has, in turn, made her own decision about how she feels about these events and has become empowered. I'm not going to credit the movement for this, but her wonderful parents who have done an excellent

job of guiding her through these complex topics.

### *Keeping Kids Safe and Feeling Safe*

The biggest concern parents have, once we begin telling our children about some of the horrors in this world, is that they will not feel safe anymore. I believe those fears come when there is too much, too soon, i.e., not having enough of those talks where current events are broken down in a very simple way or by witnessing media for which they were not ready. Younger children have trouble seeing the difference between fact and fantasy and when they see something they don't understand, their creative little brains will run with the concept.

Always stress to your children that while you're standing up to make change, they are safe and the people they love are safe.

Another important way to keep your children feeling safe is to never lie to them. Children are highly intuitive, they sense when something isn't right or when the facts don't line up. If your child asks you a specific question and you tell them a blatant lie, they could find out the truth later on — and, in the future, they won't trust you to talk honestly about these or other important topics. That's not to say you can't tiptoe around a topic that is not appropriate for their maturity level, but do your best to avoid outright lies when doing so.

An awesome way to make children feel safer when bad things are going on in the world, including natural disasters, is to enlist their help. Organizing an action (even just sending donations to people in need or thank you letters to the protesters at the center of a rally) lets children know two things: yes, we are in the same world but they are there and that's their

life and we are here and this is our life and when disaster strikes, people come together to help each other out.

### *What about the 'Littles'?*

This whole chapter has focused on talking to older children, but we can't forget about the littles and the toddlers that can't yet speak.



All children, no matter their age, pick up on the energy and emotion being put out into the world. At meetings where the conversation can get heated or at big events such as marches, I recommend that parents keep the little ones close to their chest in slings or in baby carriers. Even if

there's passionate energy in the air, these little guys know they are safe and sound, snuggled close to a heartbeat.

At low-key events (and in general), I also feel it's important for these little guys to be showered with as much positive attention as possible by the people around them. I will go out of my way to shower the littles with some cuddles and smooches every single time I see them. We may be working to change the world, but we're all just people at the end of the day.

Now, for the toddler. I'll never forget an amazing story a friend told me about their little girl. When she had learned how to speak (very early on), they asked her if she remembered before she could speak and what it felt like. She told them she felt "stuck" and would get sad when she couldn't make the words come out of her mouth. In observing my own daughter, I can see there's a big truth to this statement.

The excitement she shows when I figure out a word she's been trying so hard to pronounce or when I understand what she's been trying to tell me for over an hour is amazing. So again, this brings up the question — what do we tell them, especially at such a young age?

From my experience, skipping the political explanation and moving right to the emotional description of things is the way to go. Saying things like; "See those people? They're mad. Remember when you felt angry when you didn't want to put your jacket on? Well, that's how they feel right now but they will feel better soon, just like you did."

Making short, simple statements where they can connect the emotion

with the action is important. They may not be able to understand why something is happening, but, if they can at least understand WHAT they are seeing, they are on the right path.

\* \* \* \* \*

Talking to your children and teaching them about current events is very personal for each family. One way of doing so may work for one child, while it may not work for another — even among siblings. Every child is their own amazing combination of different levels of maturity, curiosity and willingness. As parents, it's our job to foster all of the above so our kids can grow up to be the happiest and healthiest adults possible.

When deciding how and when to talk to your kids about world events or your family's involvement in a movement, take your time and figure out what works best for you and your family.

\*I found useful information for writing this chapter in the following online articles:

[HuffingtonPost.com](https://www.huffpost.com)

[Behavior Therapy Center.com](https://www.behaviortherapycenter.com): Talking with Your Child about Troubling Current Events

[Kids Health.org](https://www.kidshealth.org)

## MYRA TERRITO'S STORY

It was October 10, Columbus Day. For about a month, we had been watching the media coverage regarding Occupy Wall Street taking place in Zuccotti Park. Although we live a good drive away, my husband and I had been talking about going down there to check it out and see for ourselves what it was really all about. Being a school holiday, we asked the kids if they wanted to go for a ride. Our constant travel companions, they were excited and anxious for our next adventure.

When we arrived at the park, we were surprised to see that it was much smaller than we had expected. Unsure how to proceed, I held our 9 year-old daughter's hand, my husband held our 5 year-old son's hand and, as a family, we started to make our way through the crowd. Together, we read the various placards and talked about the messages and signs of protest. We found a little space to throw down our blanket and have a quick snack. I was feeling a bit lost and wanting to better articulate this experience to the children.

For them it was quite foreign, nothing like the open space and wilderness they were accustomed to in New Jersey or anything like the past six years we spent

on the island of Bermuda. We were, for the first time, introducing the children to an environment where people were questioning authority and the direction of our country. It reminded me of a time almost twenty years ago when I first met my husband at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Growing up as a first generation Asian American, it wasn't until I went away to college that I found the courage to lift up my voice in protest for what was right and what should be. I felt the blood from Tiananmen Square coursing through me.

Looking around the park, I saw the same determination and youthful passion I so treasured from my collegiate years reflected in the faces of the young protesters. After living for six years as an ex-patriot, for me it was an important point to share with our children the greatness of being American and living in America. It is more than just our constitutional right to assemble together and protest, but, more importantly, to feel passionate and create action for whatever change we feel is needed in order to make our society better. It was my first lesson to them that it is ok and, in fact, part of our civic duty to criticize our government and to speak out when we see injustice. The seed was planted and I was grateful that Zuccotti Park allowed me a safe place to start this conversation with our children.

The following Saturday we returned to the park and attended our first march with Kirby. Much like parents treasuring their child's first smile, first word or first step, my husband and I will always share the pride we felt when we first heard our daughter shout out in the crowd, "Tell me what Democracy looks like?" And they roared back to her, "This is what Democracy looks like!"

*Myra Territo currently lives in Freehold, New Jersey with her husband Rob, and children Shea and Chase. She balances her family, career and love of travel by working at home as a Virtual Assistant to the Travel Industry.*

# CHAPTER 4 / BECOMING A LEADER: HOW TO ORGANIZE A NEW GROUP

- Establishing Your Group
- Establishing Your Group's Identity
- Creating a Website
- Growing Your Group
- Using Social Media Responsibly and Effectively
- Social Media Rules
- Organizing Events
- Promoting Your Event
- How to Deal with Stoppers

What separates leaders from followers is the decision to act — and the willingness to say, “I’m going to do something!”, in the face of a crisis or problem. However, many people don’t get any further than this first step because fear creeps in; fear of failure, fear of judgment and rejection and self doubt. These are all real and serious concerns.

However, none of these fears should stop you from following your heart and from standing up for what you believe in. Some of the most successful people in the world were first thought to be crazy and went on to change lives and make history.

Well-behaved moms and dads don't make history. If your heart is telling you to go for it —take the leap!

### *Establishing Your Group*

Before I got involved with OWS, whenever I saw a protest or revolution on TV with thousands of people in attendance, I always thought that they had just “showed up.” Imagine my surprise to learn that marches and protests are strategically planned and organized. There is a lot of detailed work that goes behind creating an action. Sometimes even the confusion we witness is intentional.

What I do understand well is how to start something — I'm the founder and owner of a music-consulting business. The cornerstone of any successful company, group or product is branding. Before OWS was a movement, it was an idea tossed out into the world by adbuster's mastermind Kalle Lasn. To shape and bring power to the idea, it was very intentionally turned into a brand.

When I got the idea to establish a group for parents in support of Occupy Wall Street, one of the very first things I did was reach out to my graphic designer friend. (The second thing I did was to brainstorm about the name with my husband.) When your biggest goal as an organization is growth fueled by public involvement, creating a memorable visual identity for your group — a name + a logo or image — is critical.

You want your image or logo to be as professional as possible but you don't need to spend a ton of money on graphic design work. Start by choosing an image that people can easily and readily associate with your group as soon as they see it. Then, choose a winning name. Picnik is a great, free online editing program where even the most-technically challenged person can edit photos, add text and build simple logos.

### *Establishing Your Group's Identity*

A Brand = Consistency and Dependability

The two most important virtues of any successful brand are consistency and dependability: does your brand deliver the same message and image over and over again? In an age where information is free and available at the touch of a button, if your brand is not both consistent and dependable it will quickly get lost in the shuffle.

Use the image or logo you create across your entire online identity for profile photos, website pages, e-flyers, in email correspondence, and on any printed material. Some people are embarrassed to start a Facebook page when it's just a handful of people (or just themselves) involved, but fear not. The 'inner hipster' in all of us is out there— and loves to be the first to discover something cool. You must create an awesome public



profile and put it out in the universe (or in this case, the web) in order for your group or idea to grow.

When choosing a name for your organization or group, consider what ranking it will have on Google when someone goes searching — how much competition is out there for your name or part of your name? A good thing to do before finalizing your group's name is to “Google it” and see what comes up. If nothing, you're in the clear. If a few things come up that are either out of date or not of much relevance, you will also most likely be OK. But! If a ton of results come up with identical or very close matches to your name, it's best to move on to another.

### *Creating a Website*

It's great to have social profiles for your organization (Twitter, Digg, Facebook, etc.), but for a true web presence, you should have a website with at least a ‘splash’ or landing page to make your group's information and social media links readily available in one place. Checking for the availability of your website's URL (uniform resource locator, or web address) when deciding on a name is important. You can do an URL database search through services like GODADDY.com.

Putting up a website used to be a lengthy and costly project, but now there are many free or low cost companies that offer a variety of pre-designed templates to choose from and almost all include a place where you can Blog. From Tumblr to Squarespace, the options are endless.

Another word to the wise: try to register URL's on all your social networks before going public. There are people out there who buy URLs that never intend to develop them but hope to sell them someday (for ridiculous sums of money) to a desperate website developer who's locked in on

a name. I always believe in setting up your whole platform and then introducing it to the world to prevent fire starters from getting in the way.

### *Growing Your Group*

Now you have your group name and concept and an awesome, sexy platform: time to grow your group! There are two ways to do this.

#### 1 / HOST AN EVENT

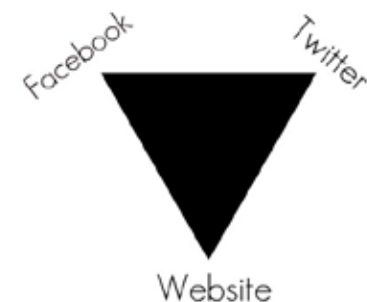
Invite people to participate in a direct or passive action, (see Chapter One for a description of each), that will generate interest in the group and/or interaction online. You can also generate interest by attending another group's event and distributing promotional materials for your group.

#### 2 / GENERATE INTEREST ONLINE

Using your website and social media identities, you can network virtually on the web and bring people who have in an interest in your cause together online. Once you establish a following, you can host an event IRL (in real life).

### *Using Social Media Responsibly and Effectively*

It doesn't matter what type of group or brand you're marketing, your online identity is your lifeline so it's important to keep it healthy.





You need to stay active and communicative in order to succeed, which means writing or blogging regularly and responding to all comments, posts and inquiries. While the world of social networking changes week to week, you need to know your base pyramid:

Right now, these are the three most effective ways to engage people on the web. Be willing to go the distance! Don't get too comfortable with any one social media platform. Their popularity and relevance can change quickly. Be ready to move your conversation — and your online group — to the best, most popular platform at the moment.

### *Social Media Rules*

There are thousands of books, companies and coaches who claim to have the answer to Social Media success, but the people I've seen succeed are the ones who were willing to tough it out and study the field before choosing a way to go. They are also the ones who taught themselves how to use each platform.

The most important piece of advice I give, to my own clients and in my activism work, is: if you remain real in your online postings you will not fail. What does being real mean? It means not linking your social media accounts to blast the same information across all of your platforms. It means giving equal and specific attention to all of the followers on all of your accounts and taking the time to engage with and actually listen to every person who Tweets or comments.

It also means not spamming. People often think that the more followers you have, the more successful your group will be. This is not the case if all those followers are spammy filler! It is better to have ten active,

engaged members in your organization than 1000 empty heads. Be real and real people will engage.

\* \* \* \*

I'm not saying using social media is easy. It took me years to grow my blog, yet less than a month to build an impressive following for Parents For Occupy Wall Street. The trick is just to do, do, do — and to say 'So What!' if, in the beginning, you're Tweeting in the wind. Keep at it and you will eventually see a return on your investment. One more thing: don't wait for people to come to you! Interact everywhere possible

with as many like-minded people as you can find. Re-tweet, re-blog and comment, comment, comment. If you do this, while being real, you will generate online interest and create that community of your own.

### *Organizing Events*

The best way to generate community involvement and grow your cause is...to involve your community!

There are two types of events you can create to attract new members; the first type of event is where people come out because they know you or the cause directly. These are often low profile events (not covered by media).

The second type of event is one that is press worthy — interesting or controversial enough to attract new interest and new participants. In order for an organization to be successful, you must plan both types of events while growing your group membership.

Once you decide the nature of the event, start planning and hashing out the details.





*Dan Zanes and Friends performing at the POW Family Sleepover, Zuccotti Park, NYC, October 21st, 2011.*

What is the mission of your event?

- To raise money
- To gain awareness for your cause
- To bring in new supporters
- To make plans within the organization

Once you have this question answered, you need to decide who will most likely come to the event and what you will need for them once they are there.

- Parents — coffee?
- Media — media area? Media rules?
- Children — toys, arts and crafts, snacks?

The next, most important set of question has to do with logistics. Where

will your event be held and how many people can the space accommodate?

- How many people can you expect?
- Do you want it to be open to the public or will it be a closed event?
- Do you need multiple spaces or areas?
- If there is a central meeting space for your movement, would you like the event to be held there or in another location?

What supplies will you need?

- Banner?
- Balloons?
- Printed materials?
- Craft supplies?

If you're organizing a march or actions in multiple locations, you'll need to consider these factors:

- Where will families find toilets? At the start of the march, at the end or along the route?
- Will it be easy to find or get water and food once the march or action starts?
- Will it be possible to push strollers on the selected route or get them easily from place to place?
- What will the weather be that day?

Best to advise parents to bring slings and carriers along with strollers -- to be prepared for anything. With proper planning you will have a well thought out event.

I like to jot everything down in a notebook as I'm thinking of it and then go back and fill in the details. Another exercise I like to do when planning

an event is to envision how the event will run from start to finish and to imagine every single little thing that can go wrong. This helps me plan and be prepared for every scenario. I must warn you: something will go wrong with every event—it's to be expected. There will be that one bag of supplies forgotten, creating the Great Popsicle Stick Shortage of 2012. Don't let little mishaps get you down. Things can go wrong and the event will still be a success.

My bigger piece of advice; don't lose your cool or freak out. Ever. No matter how bad it seems. This was HARD for me to learn. But after I lost my cool a few times, I realized that I often said something I regretted or the problem wasn't as big as I thought it was in the beginning. A little trick I use to gauge the severity of the problem is to have a talk with myself. I step aside and have an internal conversation, like this one; "This is the problem, yes. And these are the possible fixes." My inner dialogue gives me time to cool off and prevents me from saying something I'll regret later.

### *Promoting Your Event*

We'll cover how to contact The Press in Chapter Six. Meanwhile, there are a lot of excellent ways to promote events yourself.

Obviously, you can promote an event using your awesome and sexy social networks, but in-person promotion is effective, too. Printed materials are a great tool. You can print out bookmarks and leave them at local libraries. Handbills or fliers are also excellent options.

This is also an excellent way to involve "helpers." You'll often have friends wanting to help out but who don't have a ton of time to dedicate to you or your cause. Give these people a handful of flyers and ask them

to invite their families, friends and workmates to your event.

Keep in mind that every little piece of promotion you do is another potential person at your event, so it's important to be a hustler. I know it can be exhausting, but on the night of the event you'll be thankful you did everything you could think of.

### *How to Deal with 'Stoppers'*

A long time ago, when I had started my first business and shortly after I had received my first piece of hate mail, a friend of mine told me, "If you're not pissing someone off, you're not doing anything." I've often thought about this quote in my professional life. This doesn't mean you need to go around pissing people off in order to be a success, but, rather, when you're dealing with a large group of people, you will not be able to make everyone happy. It's just not physically possible.

Some people, who we call "stoppers," are simply un-pleaseable. They will have some critique or issue with your plans no matter what you're doing. This is not usually the case when a group first starts out — because people are shy at first — but once everyone gets comfortable, that's when the real guns come out. It's best to not engage with any people of this nature. They will not be swayed.

To prevent Stoppers, don't use your social networks when planning events — keep that for face-to-face group interactions — and people will behave better. People get ballsy behind a computer screen and it's not always nice. Make sure your events are well planned and set in stone before going public with them to prevent these Negative Nancys from getting in the way and causing you extra stress.

# JOHN CROCKER'S STORY

Why am I protesting with my daughter?

At first, I wasn't sure why I was protesting. I've never protested before except maybe by association when the Seattle police tear gassed my neighborhood during the WTO protests. Besides, I don't have any reason to protest — in my 20s I was working as an uneducated janitor and now I own a house in one of the most expensive cities in the country and have a great job in a growing industry. American dream alive and well, correct? Not really.

I'm a father now. My primary responsibility is to instill my values about what a decent human being is supposed to be, not just to teach her right vs. left but also right vs. wrong. When she's old enough, she can freely choose her politics, but for now, sharing is good, hitting is bad, stealing is wrong, and the government is in place to protect and serve the population. I'm not seeing that in the news or from the actions of our government. So, I get off my couch on Sunday, miss the 49ers game and go protest with my family.

When we take her to the protest, she simply wants to see the other kids and looks forward to it. There are scary things there like homeless people and drug addicts, but they are there whenever we go downtown and that never stopped us before. At the first Family's Group pumpkin carving protest, we identified some challenges and adapted them. We have a construct in place to watch the children and participate in discussion and exercise our rights at the same time. When I saw the police pepper spray college-aged girls, I was thankful my family is still home with me. If I find myself living in a country and in a city where I can't safely exercise one of the fundamental rights of this country, then I will start protesting alone.

*John Crocker is a father and husband working as in internet engineer in the silicon valley.*

## CHAPTER 5 / SAFETY MEASURES. BE SMART.

- Establish a Kid-Safe Zone
- Precaution and Preparation
- How to Stay Safe in Large Crowds and Marches
- The Yellow Balloon Campaign
- Know your Local Laws
- On Being Smart
- Surveying the Area
- Provocateurs
- Childcare

Because we're talking about creating family and children-friendly events, safety is our first priority. You wouldn't let your toddler run around a high foot-traffic street fair and peaceful protests are often very similar to such events, namely, there are lots of people everywhere. Living in NYC, I truly believe most OWS events don't pose any greater risk to me and my daughter than getting on public transportation does or being in, say,

Chinatown during rush hour.

I've actually felt safer at most OWS events because they're watching out for their own, especially the children. I've also felt safe at our events because there's a shared feeling of caring among people joined together for a cause.

### *Establish a Kid-Safe Zone*

Big events should be particularly focused on extreme safety measures. One, because there's more of an opportunity for something to go wrong at a more complicated event and two, because the press will be looking to catch you doing something "wrong." At the October 21 family sleepover in Zuccotti Park, we marked off a big area for the kids, set up adults around the perimeter and did ID checks in and out of the area. Of course, legally you can't "restrict" a public area but I've found that when it comes to children's safety, if you ask kindly, the public will comply.

Honestly? At big events it's not the public or random strangers you have to look out for—it's the press. They will do everything they can to speak to the children and they are not always well intentioned. The press doesn't like to be told "No," but it is very, very important you learn to do just that. I'm definitely not saying that all press is bad, but I am cautioning you not to give them free reign when talking to your kids.

At the sleepover, there was one press person who was very snappy with me about the kids area and said she would talk to all the kids she wanted to. As she tried to push past me into our safe-zone, I called a "mic-check," a form of amplification OWS uses to communicate to large groups without sound equipment. I said, "This media person is not respecting



*Zuccotti Park Child-Safe Zone, days before the NYPD cleared the park.*

### *Precautions and Preparation*

As I wrote in Chapter Four, when planning an event I try to imagine everything that can go wrong and how I can prevent it.

Here are a few important precautions to take when planning large family events:

- Have parents be clearly identified. We gave parents bright neon yellow shirts with our logos to wear.
- Communicate safety measures to everyone attending before the event. We actually post "rules" on the website, include the rules and restrictions on the press release and print them out for distribution at the event itself.

- Tell local law enforcement your plans for the group's safety. Talk to the police on duty at your event and work out an exit strategy with everyone if something were to go wrong.

### *How to Stay Safe in Large Crowds and Marches*

This is a big one as you're more likely to participate in marches than events for your cause. Here are a few things we do to keep our group safe on the ground:

- We meet up beforehand at a location different from the main meeting point and explain to the parents and children what we are about to do and the rules.
- We stick together as a group, with adults surrounding kids, so no child can slip away.
- We march holding a banner to announce our and our kids' presence, to clear the way for the kids, and to make sure no one runs into them.
- We try to be positioned at the front of the marches. Most organizers really like this because it's wonderful imagery and it's the safest place for the kids. It also clearly points out to law enforcement, "There are children here. Behave."

### *The Yellow Balloon Campaign*

We've recently launched The Yellow Balloon Campaign. (We didn't create this campaign and we're not the first to work this program.) The idea is, if you are marching with a child, pregnant or are any other type of

## The Yellow Balloon Campaign



Encouraging Protestors with  
Children to Carry  
Yellow Balloons  
Across the Country to Help  
Law Enforcement to Identify  
Children Within Large Groups



**There's Safety in Numbers  
There's Safety in Identifying Yourself**

vulnerable person, you should carry a yellow helium balloon. Most (but not all) law enforcement organizations now know what the yellow balloon means and it allows them to see where the most vulnerable people within a large crowd are at all times.

The campaign was also designed to protect children and families from mass arrest situations, but it's a precaution, not a law —so it doesn't



guarantee anything. The fun thing about the yellow balloons, since we launched the campaign, is helping our group members find each other at large meet-ups. A few of our member have been greatly excited about that.

### *Know your Local Laws*

It's important before you organize any event or march on public property to know your local laws on such happenings. Under the first amendment it is unlawful for a government or governing body to act in ways:

“[A]bridging the freedom of speech, infringing on the freedom of the press, interfering with the right to peaceably assemble or prohibiting the petitioning for a governmental redress of grievances”. (WikiPedia)

You want everything to run as smoothly as possible, especially when including children. Take the time to learn what the laws are. Sometimes it's just a matter of filing for a permit. Knowledge is power. Know your local laws so you know how to peacefully break them! Just kidding, guys! Breaking the law is NOT a good thing to do as a family and sets a bad example for your children.

### *On Being Smart*

When I speak to strangers and tell them about the work Parents for Occupy Wall Street has done, like our sleepover at Zuccotti Park, a common response is, “Didn't you see what happened in Oakland?! It's too dangerous for children!” And this is where I sigh and slowly shake my head.

Deciding to involve your children with a particular movement does not

mean tossing them into the most dangerous events and actions within that movement. You don't have to be on the front lines, opening yourself up to a possible pepper spraying to support a cause.

Unfortunately, what most makes the news and often goes viral on the Internet is all the scary stuff. The general public doesn't usually dig deeper beyond the scary stuff and thinks that's all there is to a protest event. There are days upon days of peaceful protesting for every roll of negative footage circulated— and that's what it takes to make change. What's exciting is the possibility that peaceful events led by or involving families can get the press —and the world — to sit up and notice the message behind your cause.

Regarding what happened in Oakland, where occupiers were violently evicted and people were injured: that was not an unplanned incident. The cops planned to come in the middle of the night, the protesters had been warned and just about everyone down there expected conflict with the police. This was NOT the place nor the time to have children attending and any level-headed parent would have come to that conclusion.

There's nothing wrong with protesting if you do it right!

### *Surveying the Area*

Even if we're heading down to peaceful OWS meetings or rallies with the kid, first and foremost, I always do a little area sweep. I make sure my gut feels OK, I make sure I know where the exits are or an exit route and, more importantly, I check out who's in the area.

Here, I would also like to stress that you must check EVERYONE. Once a group of us were headed to the subway to do some mic-checks and the

police were there at the meeting point. I immediately noticed that none of the cops were wearing their badges. This is not legal. I spoke up and five minutes later they all had their badges on.

Police officers have been known to remove badges or cover their badge numbers with black tape when patrolling protest marches and events. Just because people are “safe” figures in your community doesn’t mean you should overlook them when doing a safety check.

### *Provocateurs*

Another scary thing we have witnessed at OWS is the planting of provocateurs. This is an age-old practice where the opposing team places one of their members in the middle of the action to start trouble. An example is a person assigned to toss a brick through a shop window at a peaceful protest, sending the peaceful protest downhill from there.

Provocateurs intentionally act in a way to give the police an excuse to use excessive force, end an event or generate negative attention on a group. I’m pretty sure there was a provocateur at the family sleepover—the guy who climbed a piece of art in Zuccotti Park at 5am, overlooking our family area—trying to ruin the event. Did he ruin it? No way. We planned for everything that could go wrong, the kids were safe and there was almost no press on this guy. Be skeptical when accepting new members into your group. It’s not a knitting club and your family’s safety is at stake.

### *Childcare*

I’m often asked if there was a “childcare” area at Zuccotti Park or if we provide childcare for meetings. This is a very bad idea.

First, because there are so many state laws that monitor childcare. Even

if you have a parent’s consent, setting up childcare without a license might break local laws (each state is different).

It can be labeled as “child abandonment” — leaving your child in an unsafe situation with unknown people —and that’s the last thing we would want to do. Just because someone is a parent and you are working together for a common cause, doesn’t mean they are safe to leave your child with. Treat this in the same way you would treat any childcare situation. You wouldn’t leave your kid with a nanny or babysitter on whom you didn’t do a background check, why would you do it in this situation? My best advice; say no to organized childcare within your organization to prevent headaches and potential issues down the road.

You’re going to face a lot of judgment for getting involved with controversial actions and issues. You can participate without risking your family’s safety.

Plan, follow your gut and be smart.



## ROB TERRITO'S STORY

I was following the OWS right from the start and delivering the information directly to my students at Cooperative Tech (in NYC). They were very interested in the fact that people were willing to fight for their rights. Being from low economic and ethnic backgrounds, my students often feel that people do not care. After a few weeks of following OWS, I wanted to get involved but didn't know how to do it. I wanted to take my students, but when I approached the school administrators, they told me I absolutely could not take them there even if I tried to hide it as a class trip. In speaking with my wife, she suggested that we go as a family. On a beautiful Columbus Day, we embarked on our journey.

I was so impressed by how well organized the protest was and how these incredibly young people were so concerned that our experience be positive. It was more than positive, it was inspiring. After we met a young parent, Kirby (who I can only describe as a spark plug of righteousness and love), my wife and I instantly became a part of OWS. Now, we are not only members of OWS but POWS as well... and we'll never look back.

As a teacher and an artist, I am interested in all these people getting together at this time in history and creating something new. I have reconnected with an old college friend who I haven't seen in over 15 years. She is now my co-writer and editor of a book I have been working on for the past two years. I am also fascinated by the perceptive artwork of my children and their take on the protest and marches.

My daughter, who is 9, has created a series of posters in which she combines the real world of OWS and her world of heroes. The posters show the protestors as her favorite characters from various video games. My son, who is only 5, has come up with the slogan, "I don't like it when the guys in all blue spray pepper." As this movement progresses and changes, so does the art of my family and me.

*Rob Territo is a teacher of Roots of Success, Environmental Literacy Program and Green Construction at the School of Cooperative Technology, 96th St, NYC. He lives in Freehold, New Jersey with his wife Myra, daughter Shea and son Chase.*

# CHAPTER 6 / MAKING YOUR CAUSE KNOWN

- Self Promotion on the Web
- Hiring a Publicist
- Be Your Own Publicist
- The Research
- Talking to the Media
- How to Deal with Press Backlash
- The Big Judgment

In Chapter Four, we talked about creating your group and your group's online presence aka your brand. Now we're going to talk about promoting your group and your group's events by using publicity and engaging the press.

## *Self Promotion on the Web*

Once you have your awesome, sexy platform (website + social media profiles) established, it's important to keep it up to date. This can be hard if you're not familiar with the different social networking "languages." (There's no

shame in asking for help with this. I have different people running my organization's Twitter and Facebook accounts.) One tool that I've noticed works very effectively with my music clients is to set up a calendar with the goal of posting content every single day of the week.

If you make a goal of posting to your social media accounts on a daily basis, it will eventually become second nature and you may even find yourself becoming addicted to the real-time networking these platforms provide. Keep the lines of communication open with all your social media supporters and continue to post relevant information and your group will quickly gain momentum.

Another great way to help people discover your organization online is to buy Facebook ads. They cost little money and are effective for increasing the number of people who know about and are interested in your cause. At this point, you should have your brand figured out so you'll be able to easily set up the ads and an ad campaign using Facebook's simple-to-use program.

### *Hiring a Publicist*

Beyond social media, it's important to get the mainstream press involved with your cause, especially when promoting events and actions. Besides getting listed on local public calendars, the press can assign feature-stories about your organization that can generate interest in and attendance at your events. Mainstream press can increase awareness for your cause quickly both online and off.

You can create press for your group one of two ways; the "easy" way is to hire a publicist. This will cost you a chunk of change but will be worth every cent because generating press is very, very time consuming. (I have included the

name of a wonderful publicist in the Resources chapter.)

A publicist's role is to create press releases, guide you through writing a great bio or profile for your group and to use their magic contacts list to get you in the papers, on TV and all over the web. Once the publicist releases information about your group and your event by blasting it out to the universe, their next job is to aggressively follow-up for results. An important thing to consider when hiring a publicist is to make sure they have experience working on public campaigns like yours and if they can stand behind your cause. If someone is passionate about what you're doing, they will work 100x harder at their job.

Be selective when hiring a publicist— don't only weigh the cost or you may be disappointed with their work.

### *Be Your Own Publicist*

If hiring a publicist isn't an option for your group, jump in head first and do it yourself! Don't be afraid: if your organization is interesting and your event is fun or radical, people will be interested in writing about it. Generating publicity is a LOT of work so you may want to ask for help on this project. If you're the one planning events and publicizing them, it can become overwhelming.

Your first step is to write a killer and professional press release. There are thousands of examples online of great press releases, just Google "how to write a press release." Often, I find myself turning to these and plugging in my own information. A very important thing to remember when writing a press release is that it's NOT about your voice; it needs to be direct and short and include the basic information about your group and/or event. The

Press doesn't like to waste time, so make the press release as easy to read as possible. Remember to include a contact name and phone number—90% of people interested in an interview will call you, rather than email you, first.

After you write your killer press release, the fun begins!

### *The Research*

You need to find every, single news, blog and TV program in your area to pitch your story. I wish I had a secret tip for doing this, but there's really no way around doing the hours of research it will require. I like to do this with a BIG glass of wine! Some of the contacts will be online forms, which is okay—you just plug in your contact and release information and hit send.

There's no magic to doing effective PR except to keep pushing. Make follow-up calls to the outlets for which you can find phone numbers. You're not going to be able to find a contact for every media outlet on your list and you won't get a lot of answers from your outreach efforts, but this is not a reflection on your group or your event—this is just how the press works. I do PR for a lot of the bands with whom I work and it's a constant fight to get attention.

If your event is big enough, don't hesitate to contact national news organizations—you never know who will be interested in what you are doing. Oh, and don't forget about those bloggers! More blogs are moving more interest in news events than ever before.

### *Talking to the Media*

Talking to the media is a truly a learned skill. It's all about confidence. It's taken me years to become skillful in this area. If you don't feel like you're the best at public speaking, you should pass this job off to someone who is.

The most important thing is to have your organization's goals clearly worked out in your head and to be able to state your goals in multiple ways, under pressure. You want to be kind to the press and upbeat. Smile often, except when speaking about something serious (when people get on TV, it's a bad nervous reaction to smile the entire time).

Above all else, remember that the press has their own agenda and they will try to sway you away from the positive, awesome things you have to say about your group. Don't let them do it to you! Stay on your toes and remain relaxed. Even if the person interviewing you is an aggressive a-hole, don't let it show how much he's irritating you. It can make you seem like a poor leader or event organizer. There's also nothing wrong with saying, "I don't know" if you're sincere. NEVER lie to the press or it will come back to haunt you, I promise.

A great trick I've used in the past with a press person I don't want to speak with is to act really busy. Let them get a couple sentences from you then act like you've forgotten to do something really important, run around frantically and repeat your original statement. Never blow someone off completely, which could result in bad press or minimal to no contact in the future.

There will be certain press you'll want to blacklist. This is an important thing to look for in advance. For example, Fox News and the NY Post have been particularly horrible to the Occupy Wall Street movement. I have seen them publish lies about events I attended. During the family sleepover in Zuccotti, I refused to talk to them altogether and denied them access to any of the children or families there. Because they would have given us bad press no matter what had actually happened that night, I didn't fear blowing them off. The cameraman actually tossed a fit and went on a cursing rant in front of

the kids! And he wondered why I wouldn't let him into the area.

The more press coverage you get, the easier it will be to get more and I'm sure you'll figure out little tricks of your own for getting noticed. Don't forget that you may not be the only one from your group talking to the press. If children from your organization talk to the press, they should do so with a parent next to them and they should be prepared beforehand.



We covered much of this in Chapter Three, but it's important to review the guidelines with your group before an event. You should let kids know that the press might ask them questions and go over how they might answer them. The worst thing would be for a New York Times reporter to ask your lively nine year old why he's there and be met with a shoulder shrug....not good. Keep everyone, including the children in your group, informed.

### *How to Deal with Press Backlash*

It's inevitable; you're going to deal with some press backlash when you

involve children at any sort of protest.

From my experience, blogs can be the worst. The comment section alone can be heartbreaking, especially when you've worked so hard and made some amazing things happen. When people can hide behind a computer screen or anonymous identity, they can get really nasty. When this first happened to me, I went on a commenting rampage, trying to defend every little thing and prove my point, pretty much wasting my breath and my energy with all that typing.

I know it's tempting, but I've found it best to just not read the negative articles at all. It will only bring you down and you can't change the fact that they are out there anyway. I stop reading and exit the page once I realize the writer is negative or personally attacking my character or my parenting. Everyone will have an opinion about what you're doing, but they didn't take the time to know you before they wrote about you, so how much do they really know anyway?

One place I do draw the line is when a writer is being negative and using my child's pictures. I found the best way to deal with this is to report them for copyright infringement. If they swipe photos off your site or blog, you can do this by contacting Google and the hosting manager of the writer's website. Through Google, you can also request that the link to your post be made unsearchable. If they didn't grab the photo from one of your sites, you can track down the owner of the photo and request that they file for copyright infringement. Generally, when children are involved, people are usually very kind and comply easily with your requests — except for those few bad apples making personal attacks.



## *The Big Judgment*

There's another kind of backlash you might experience as you become more and more involved with your cause; random speculation and judgment about who you are. If your agenda is a hot topic in the media, like the occupation movement is, you will encounter judgment from people you've never met.

I was surprised to find that people were making random assumptions about me. Because I look young, the public assumed I was the “radical college student” without a job and wasting my life away. In actuality, I'm a five-year business owner, a four-year wife and two years a mother. People will most certainly jump to conclusions based on what you look like. I actually started to develop a bit of anxiety when I was walking to and from meetings on Wall Street— I felt as if every single businessperson or cop was judging me.

It's awful to feel like that when you've worked so hard to make something of yourself. It's as if all the “credit” for your hard work has been taken away just because of the way you dress. There were other instances where people, without knowing a drop of information about me except that I was involved with OWS, would assume that I didn't pay taxes or that I am poor...and the list goes on. Prepare yourself to be assigned every negative stigma that goes along with your cause.

The upside to this is the opportunity to prove those people wrong and, perhaps, even help them realize that their view of a particular movement is way off. If I'm able to convince even one person, through my actions, to look a little deeper into the occupy movement and possibly to begin supporting the cause, I've accomplished my mission.



## MARK H'S STORY

When I was eight years old, I had to do a school project. The subject could be anything. I picked “The USA.” It was basically a scrapbook of magazine and travel brochure cuttings of things that I thought looked awesome, like Disney World, The Grand Canyon and New York City. On the last page, I concluded it with the statement, “One day I will live in America.”

Today, I'm a 34 years old, married to my wife from New Jersey and have a three year old daughter. I'm from a small rural town, 20 miles outside Belfast, N. Ireland and have now been living in New York for seven years. When I first moved here in 2005, it was during the “Dark Times,” the second term of Bush/Cheney's illegal Neo-Con Empire-building experiment.

With trepidation and dismay, I watched the elimination of habeas corpus, indefinite detention, warrantless wiretapping, and government-sanctioned torture. I hoped that after being lied into War, that come the following elections, the American people would waken and “deliver the world from republican evil” at the polls. During the 2008 campaign, I too was swept away with the rhetoric of the young State Senator from Illinois and when

President Obama was inaugurated, it felt like a collective sigh of relief as well as his much hyped message of Hope. Everything was going to be OK now that “Change” had come to Washington...

Cue 2009.

Horrible, loathsome, apathy is setting in. It's become apparent to me that this two party system is fucked and rotten to the core.

Time and time again the Democrats have shown nothing but weakness, caving and conceding to the increasingly right-wing Republican position. Selling us out with inadequate and watered down Healthcare and Financial Reform. Selling out the environment through inaction on climate change. Selling out Main Street after Wall Street killed the economy and ran off with the Treasury. Monied interests commanding and funding the campaign coffers of the politicians that then legislate and protect said monied interests, both sides terminally diseased with corporate cash, now unlimited — no thanks to the Supreme Court and the Citizen United ruling.

It would seem our only escape route would be to cut the head off the beast and remove all the money from politics. To clean it all up and move to public campaign financing, but with these parties that will never happen... so with the current status quo we're doomed!

Cue Sept 2011.

Occupy Wall Street has inspired me as the people of the 99% began standing in solidarity to call out and confront the huge social, economic and environmental injustices we all face together. We've realized that

politics as normal can't go on and that it's up to us to form new methods of consensus-based self governing. For me, it's been a gradual transition of submerging myself into the movement. I first went to Liberty Plaza at the start of October after hearing about it, but not really knowing what it was, and then got swept up by the energy of the place, the amazing diversity of people and ideas that were being expressed.

As I'm a stay-at-home-father who is responsible for looking after a toddler 24/7, we'd visit about three times a week and, although the visits were brief, there was always something for my Little Miss to do. Whether it was sign painting, drumming with the drum circle or watching one of the many musical performances, she always loved going to "Protest!"

During the eviction and subsequent actions, notably #N17, the NYPD have continued to crack down on protesters with unnecessary violence and intimidation. The brutality has been nothing short of repulsive and as I watched pacifist advocates for justice being barbarically assaulted, it reminded me of British troops rounding up and arresting Irish Republicans during our "'Troubles.'" Their inexcusable "Internment" policy would become the biggest recruitment tool for IRA support and volunteers. I can't help but feel that NYPD's continued thuggish behavior will also (paradoxically) be to OWS' gain.

I want my child to grow up in an America where her voice and her values (through her vote) are held more important than any amount of money a corporation can throw at a politician. I support Occupy Wall Street because The Corpocracy stole our Democracy and it's time to take it back.

*Mark H. lives in the greater NYC area and can be found pushing a stroller at OWS events and organizing events for New York City Dads.*

## CHAPTER 7 / INVOLVEMENT FROM AFAR

I wrote in an earlier chapter that the best way to support a protest or movement is to be a warm body at events or to organize your own events within your community.

But, for some people, for a variety of reasons including financial, work related or due to time or other physical restraints, showing up in person is not possible. But not all hope is lost! There are a number of things you can do to support your favorite cause and remain involved from afar. Here's a short list:

### *Donating Skills or Goods*

Do you have awesome graphic design skills? Are you an excellent chef or baker? Everyone is good at something or really enjoys a particular thing. If your "thing" can be done in support of your cause that's great for everyone! Design flyers or bake cookies and send them to rallies. If you have goods to donate, contact the group to arrange delivery or pick-up.



### *Donate Money*

This is the most common form of support. Every organization needs funds to stay afloat! Just make sure the money gets to the right person within an organization when handing over your hard earned cash.

### *Help with Press*

Press coverage is a very important piece of the puzzle for any type of organization to grow. If you're passionate about a cause, write a letter to your local paper. They might print the letter or you may even inspire the paper to do a feature about your cause.

### *Donate Internet Work*

If you are tech savvy at all, donate a few hours a week to your favorite group or cause to provide any online support they need. This is an often overlooked but very useful way to donate your time. The web is such an important pathway to communication and growth. I know the media department of OWS is extremely busy and spread thin.

### *Teach Others About Your Cause*

Here's where I pressure you to bug your friends! If you feel you're the only one who knows what's going on or cares enough to know what's going on, figure out a way to do outreach among your friends and family. Sometimes, just offering up your argument for the cause is not enough. With information readily available online and the technology to easily spread it, there are many ways you can inspire the people closest to you without being overbearing. Remember that everyone learns in their own way and at their own pace.

### *Donate Supplies*

Donating your old stuff will not only help the cause you're supporting but will

also rid you of clutter! A win-win in my book. One of our group's members is actually in the process of organizing a multifamily garage sale where all the proceeds will go to OWS. How cool is that?

### *Write letters LOTS of letters*

You can write letters, have your kids write letters, have your kids' school write letters and send them to everyone. Send them to the protesters in support of your movement, send them to government officials, send them to your local government explaining why they should support your cause, and send them to people who have been trying to tear your cause down. Again, your voice can't be heard unless you speak up and letter writing is a very personal and direct way to reach out to people — more effective than an impersonal email.

### *Show Your Support*

The most meaningful calls and emails I have ever received are the ones where people are just calling to be encouraging and to offer their support —no more and no less. It can get taxing trying to affect social change, so call or write to those people on the front lines and give them some extra love! (Love can be sent online too, through Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm sure after reading these few creative ideas that you have a thousand of your own ideas running through your head. Remember:

No particular action in support of a cause is more important or more relevant than another. Every single, little thing matters. So, if you can only send one letter out, then DO IT. If everyone who cared sent one letter, it would become a very, very influential event. You can be the person to inspire that happening!

## CHAPTER 8 / STAYING TRUE TO YOURSELF

I've done a lot of things in my short life.

While Occupy Wall Street is my first government and protest-related cause, I have organized countless events, start-ups and tours. They are very much the same.

The world has greatly changed in the past twenty years. The internet has leveled the playing field in every single opportunity, including music, books, humanitarian work, and education. Knowledge is our power and it's SO readily available to us. With a level playing field, the opportunities are now endless for us all. You don't like how something is being done? Do it yourself! Change the world!

The thing that makes people successful is not "the big idea" (while that doesn't hurt), it's the passion to make it happen and a thick skin to get through it all. My knowledge of the music business has put me ahead

in my field of work as a leader. I didn't get there by waiting for someone to teach me or by going to school. I jumped in head first doing it how I thought it should be done. I have made SO many mistakes over the years and I'm sure there are more to come. Some mistakes were extremely heartbreaking. It's taken so many tears and bridges burned to get me where I am today. But, looking back on it all, I wouldn't change a single thing. I am a better person now for what I have done in my life -- even the mistakes.

One thing you will need to keep you motivated is support—not with help directly on the project —but emotional support. Despite the power and ability we now have, it's hard changing the world. You can find support from your friends, your family, other group members, or even an online community you may not know directly but believes in your cause, too. Take it all, don't be shy! You deserve to be supported in everything you do in your life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Making things happen and making change in this world is not easy and doesn't happen quickly.

Keeping working hard. One day, you'll sit back and look at everything you've accomplished and you'll be shocked to learn what you're capable of getting done.

We all have the power to make change, not only in the world, but in our own lives. Wherever you come from or the challenges you were born into, we all can learn, we all can create opportunity, we can all overcome. The time is now! We have the knowledge, now it's just a matter of doing it.

As parents, we must have the loudest voice because we have the biggest stake in the future: our children.



## RESOURCES

The following resources were useful in building Parents for Occupy Wall Street and in writing this book:

*Cucumber Press Studio, L.L.C.*

Wonderful Graphic Design

Contact: brei@cucumberpress.com

*GoDaddy.com*

Search for and buy your URL here

*PressBooks.com*

We built this book using

PressBooks, a book publishing tool that makes it easy for authors and editorial teams to collaborate

in the cloud. Contact: support@pressbooks.com

*Grit PR*

Great and affordable publicist.

Contact: gritpr@gmail.com

*Squarespace.com*

Easy to use and cheap website builder and hosting

# TIES THAT BIND

## *Gangstagrass*

You may not have any money  
Work all day just to pay the bills  
You can't afford nice things for your honey  
You can't get sick because you can't afford the pills

You say the rich man and the bosses got it made  
And poor folks like us ain't got a say  
But there's more poor folks than rich ones  
So how can they stand in our way

It's a case of divide and conquer  
The way they get us one by one  
They can beat us when we fight each other  
But they can't beat the union

Ties that bind what makes us strong  
Ain't got no money but we get along  
And if you want that power, build them up

If you want that power build them up

Those right wingers sure do talk a lot  
about the family values we ain't got  
but it's the value of the stocks that feeds their children  
And the subsidies and write-offs help a lot

So if you just aint' that lucky  
Your family is gonna need a hand  
Well you know they say it takes a village  
Cause it's communities on which our families stand

If we all just stick together  
In this time of free market greed  
We'll survive all the stormy weather  
And we'll fight till we get what we need

Ties that bind what makes us strong  
Ain't got no money but we get along  
And if you want that power, build them up

If you want that power build them up