

Spirit in Action

CHANGING THE WAY WE DO CHANGE

Linda's Tip

I think of myself as an environmentally conscious person. I recycle, use my own bags at the grocery store, and practice permaculture. But a few months ago, I found another way that I'm contributing to the degradation of the earth and its inhabitants.

With a small, plastic straw.

Though it may not seem like a lot, when its usage is added up—500 million straws in the U.S. every day—that's a lot of trash.

Straws are consistently among the top 10 of ocean debris collected every year during the International Coastal Cleanup. Straws can't be recycled in most places and it takes up to 200 years for plastic straws to decompose.

It's harder than you think to quit using straws. They come automatically in restaurants to most tables when they bring you a soda or iced tea. But it's worth learning the practice of telling people not to bring you a straw. It often starts a productive conversation on the environment. So while I still use straws, now I bring my own reusable ones, made from glass or bamboo.

Every time I refuse a straw, I know it's only a tiny step, but it's a daily reminder of how we can work toward a cleaner and sustainable world.

Here's a resource for alternatives to the plastic straw:
thelastplasticstraw.org/resources.



As we face the dysfunction of government and disintegration of our values in Washington, people ask me all the time,

“Why are we in this mess? How did this happen?”

Dear Friends,

I can see how it happened every step of the way. There are breadcrumbs all over the place.

Go back with me nearly four decades, when the Right created a plan to change what we teach our kids. In the 1980s, the Rev. Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition encouraged social conservatives to run for education boards around the country as a way to influence school curricula. Many were successful, and immediately began pushing to revise curricula and textbooks to reflect conservative Christian values.

They stopped teaching civics and how government works in grades 9–12, as part of school cutbacks—saving money to sow misunderstanding and misinformation.

People got out of their white robes and infiltrated politics at the local and state levels. Racist policies were carefully planned and implemented. As they got more sophisticated, they used class AND race to separate people into categories: low-income folks from unions, straight women from lesbians, Americans from immigrants (the ultimate irony), and all from their own best interests.

Add into the mix gerrymandering, voter restrictions and suppression. Think of the attacks on women like Anita Hill (and now, Christine Blasey Ford), on gender issues and equal rights, the singular focus on defeating

Roe v. Wade and the singular success in defeating the Equal Rights Amendment. If you think identity politics is something new, you are wrong—this mess was built on the Right ruling by identity politics, on dividing us from each other and spreading mistrust.

In the 1970s, I was trying to get an apartment in North Carolina and to do that, I had to establish that I was creditworthy. Landlords advertised that they would only rent to single men or married couples. As a single woman, I was under suspicion. I was making more than my male colleagues at work, but I couldn't get a credit card. I had to ask my boss to call the apartment owner to vouch for me.

I was astounded, I was embarrassed, I was upset. But let's be clear-eyed about where we have come from and where we are going, and what we need to stop. Spirit in Action has been dedicated to bringing people together and countering the politics of division, which are at the root of all the “isms” we can think of. Yes, there may be a mess today. But this is no time to give up. It is time to sweep up the breadcrumbs.

Peace, Power and Love,
Linda Stout
Linda Stout
Executive Director

In this Issue

Training Around the World

Building Solidarity and Sparking Collective Liberation



Training Around the World

Spirit in Action has been working with United Religions Initiative (URI), a grassroots, bridge-building organization that unites people of all faiths to create an enduring global force for good.

The year-long online training and coaching program for their global staff is intended to mobilize the collective power of interfaith change-makers around the world.

“This is like magic!” says Emmanuel Ande Ivorgba from Nigeria. “The training was participatory and engaging.”

URI calls their program of passion and initiative Cooperation Circles. The name tells the story. There are a thousand self-funded Cooperation Circles in 80 countries, and half a million people are working together to transform religious tension into positive, peaceful change; address urgent human and environmental needs; tackle poverty, social conflict and disease; and build cultures of peace, justice and healing.

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After performing an extensive needs assessment, Linda Stout initiated a series of customized workshops in July, beginning with “Collective Visioning.” These webinar workshops are offered twice monthly to accommodate URI staff on four continents, with various time zones from India to Argentina. Later workshops will focus on “From Vision to Action,” “Developing the Leadership of Low-income and

Disenfranchised People,” “Building an Inclusive Movement,” “Building Strong Collaborations and Networks,” and “Grounded in Vision for the Long Haul.”

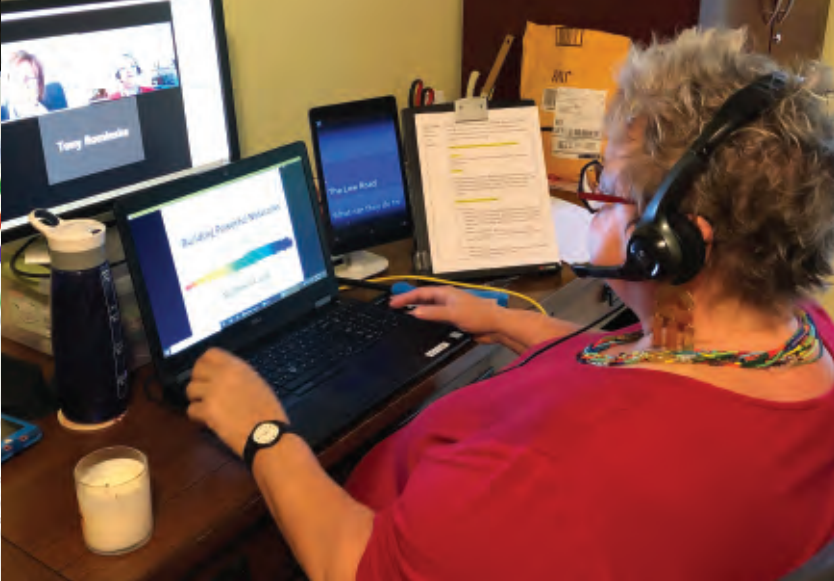
On-going coaching is also integral to the program. One month after each training, Linda engages in group coaching to debrief on recent trainings and review successes. She addresses questions, challenges, and any issues in implementation of learnings. This is essential to ensure that the training is actually consistently used and becomes part of the culture of how Cooperation Circles work toward their stated vision and goals.

“Many people told me that a webinar could not facilitate the interactive type of training Spirit in Action is known for,” says Linda. “But folks—especially young folks—now do everything online. And there is no way I could get to 20 different countries!”

Just like the location you would create for a video game, Spirit in Action creates a virtual classroom, with people working in an onscreen circle, interactively participating together, with visuals and whiteboards covered with blank sticky notes that they write on. People can move about in the room, working in smaller groups and participating individually. Linda uses three screens for the webinars, one for looking at the participants (who can all see each other), one for her PowerPoint presentation that everyone can see, and the other where she can see an outline of the session. Assisting her are Spirit in Action staff who make sure the technology works smoothly.

“One of the goals the staff at URI had was to get to know each other better from across the world,” says Linda about the benefits of using this technology. “Indeed, it is a very important initiative by URI in all these years, and I would highly recommend to participate without any fail!” comments Kutub Jahan Kidwai from India. “This will enhance our knowledge and build our capacity to work more effectively. An opportunity not to be missed.”

www.spiritinaction.net



POSITIVE AND ACTION-ORIENTED

Spirit in Action has taken the experience of 35 years of organizing to create trainings that develop the skills to build vision, power and a base of informed, low-income, multi-racial activists that will impact generation after generation of organizing. In addition to URI, we have worked with:



Maine Equal Justice Partners, low-income leaders across Maine who are working on issue of health care, living wage, homelessness, criminal justice, LGBTQ, etc.

Down Home North Carolina, raising the voices of working people in small town and rural North Carolina in order to take action on the issues that matter to them.

Alliance for Appalachia, supporting the Peace Development Fund's capacity building program for community organizers, The Sustainability Project.

Peoples Hub, an online movement building school that offers live, interactive trainings and workshops to build community power and make grassroots work more effective.

Standing Up for Racial Justice, at their national retreat for low-income/working class SURJ leaders about organizing, with an interactive Q&A.

A series of customized trainings by Spirit in Action is training leaders to listen and respond to the realities of the issues they work with in our current political environment, and gain the skills and tools they need for a constantly changing society.

Our trainings are positive and action-oriented. Topics include the fundamentals of organizing and management, fund-raising for small and large organizations, strategic planning and collaboration, such as:

- Letting the Light In: Visioning and Strategic Planning
- Don't Give Up! Creating Hope and Vision in Hopeless Times
- We're in it Together: Building Strong Collaborations and Networks
- Rise Up: Developing the Leadership of Low-income and Disenfranchised People
- What Do We Want and Who Is It For? Building an Inclusive Movement
- Changing Behaviors and Outcomes: How to Create Cultural Shifts
- The Best Defense: How to Prepare for and Deal with Attacks from the Right within our Organizations
- Difficult Situations: Toxic People in our Organizations
- Stronger Together: Building across Differences
- Popular Education Makes for Community Participation
- Training of Trainers

Email spirit@spiritinaction.net for more information, to request a training, or receive a complete list of our webinars. You can also call us at 413-256-4612.

WHO WE ARE

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WHAT IS SPIRIT IN ACTION?

Spirit in Action catalyzes broad-based movement building. Our vision is a world in which people live sustainably, power is shared collectively, and peace and justice flourish. We work nationally and regionally with diverse communities, grassroots groups and social justice organizations, training and supporting people to generate a positive future for all. Your gift supports our programs that help grassroots organizations connect to each other and learn to work together, so that we can build strength and momentum for deep and lasting social change.

spirit in action

CHANGING THE WAY WE DO CHANGE



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Building Solidarity & Sparking Collective Liberation



Few words can adequately capture the many moments of profound self-realization and interpersonal connections that occur in Standing in Our Power retreats. Having survived personal and professional trauma, many join Standing in Our Power at critical junctures in their lives. Members seek healing spaces to reconnect with self, the earth, humanity and spirit as they release trauma and shift from surviving to thriving in their efforts to foster transformative change.

Last year, Standing in Our Power launched their national Train-the-Trainers Institute. Thirteen alumni members came together for a year-long program to build a base of people trained in Standing in Our Power's model. They will serve as facilitators, trainers and coaches for social justice movements, future Standing in Our Power programs and capacity building engagements. Merging the Institute with their Women of Color Business Incubator, Standing in Our Power is supporting participants to spark their own entrepreneurial fire and self-determination by building or strengthening their own consulting practices and small businesses.

In 2018, in addition to their core work of supporting the transformative leadership development of trans and cisgender women of color, and gender nonconforming folks of color, Standing in Our Power has been leaning into the potential of building solidarity across identities and lines of power/privilege.

The solidarity work they launched this year, from building black/brown solidarity to exploring solidarity among women of color and white women, has given them deep insight and inspiration.

Participants like Crystal Middlestadt, executive director of the Chinook Fund in Colorado, illustrate why resilient leaders, working in solidarity, are needed now more than ever. Crystal reminds us, **“When we invest in people, we invest in movements to build power to win.”** In an era of increased political pressure, daily traumatization, cuts in resources and more, Standing in Our Power's work is imperative to ensure that leaders are well, empowered and sustainable, and that our movements are interdependent, strategic and resourceful.

“WHEN WE INVEST IN PEOPLE, WE INVEST IN MOVEMENTS TO BUILD POWER TO WIN.”