

If you don't stand up for yourself today, who will?

You see it in your school, university, and community. You hear it in the news about your planet. You feel it every day and know your future depends on it: Things need to change. But how?

Author Patty Dreier remembers feeling the same way when she was a young adult imagining her future. Then, she discovered how to stand up with courage and confidence on issues that mattered and wrote this book so you can, too.

Empowered: One Planet at a Time will give you tools and insights to break through and take control of your destiny. Get set to:

- Shake it up and make changes happen.
- Tap the nature of power within and around you because you already have more power than you know.
- Learn tried and true methods to tackle any social or environmental concern.
- Stand up for your planet and yourself with courage and confidence.
- Smile.

Don't settle. Take charge of your future. Stand up for your planet and yourself. Become a powerful agent for change. Yes, you can. Just take it one planet at a time, starting today. You will never be the same again. Neither will this world. And isn't that what you hoped for?

Patty Dreier deeply cares about people and our planet. Sharing her local, state, national, and international experiences along with her perspectives as a former elected official, she inspires readers to see themselves as capable and powerful agents for change —because they are and because this is the stuff brighter futures are made of. Connect with Patty at www.bluespring.life.

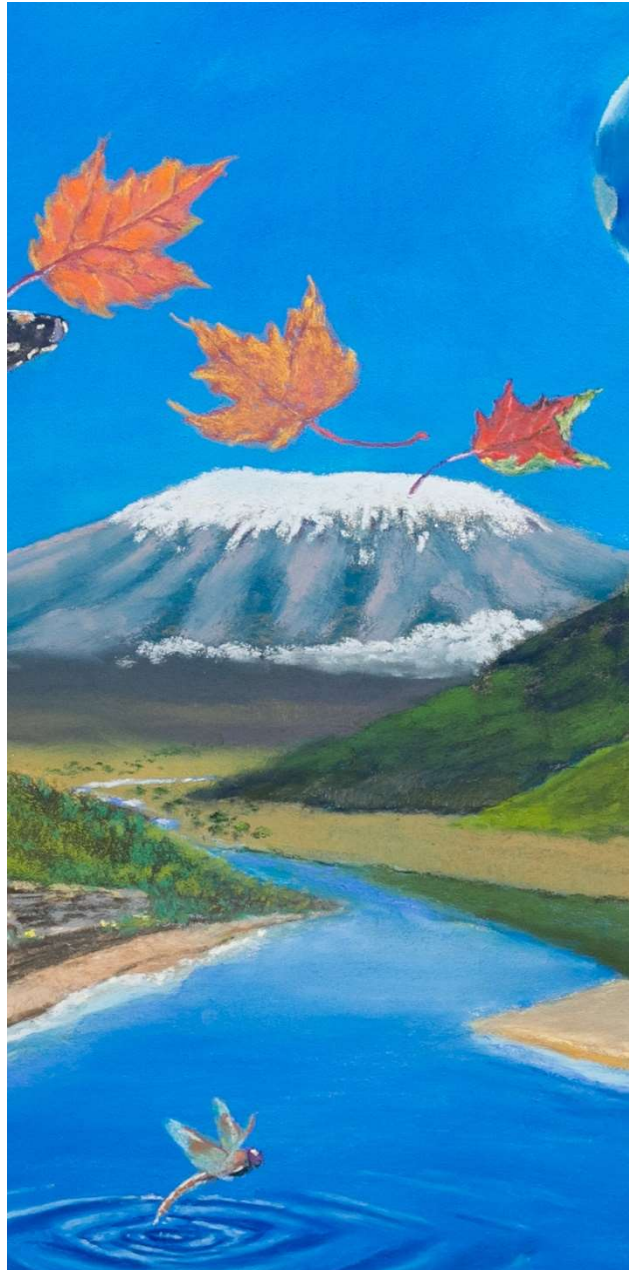
Foreword by Aberdeen Leary, "We Cannot Be Too Loud"

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ACADEMY elite



AAAE

Standing Up for
Our Planet and Ourselves



Chapter Four

Making Change Happen

Your Choices, Your Actions

In order to make change happen, you must build your knowledge base related to your issue or opportunity. It is essential to get down to the facts and verify them using several legitimate sources of information. Try to get information from more than one angle or side on the issue. For example, let's say your idea for reducing air pollution in your community is to increase the number of people using a bicycle instead of a car as a regular mode of transportation. You will need to find out not only why people do not bicycle to work or school, but also why other people do. Both bicycling perspectives will help you determine the difference makers—barriers for those who don't and supports for those who do commute by bicycle. Seek out firsthand sources of information. In this example, you might begin by conducting interviews in certain neighborhoods to narrow the focus.

Then, try to look wider at the issue or opportunity. Enhance your understanding of it. For example, are there transportation studies to provide data on the numbers of commuters who bicycle in your community compared to other similar communities? How does your community measure up? Does your community have safe bicycle routes to schools and job sites of major employers? Are there bike racks on buses for longer commutes? Do people know this and know how to use the bus system? Are there road designs that the bicycling public and other users of the road prefer because they are safer? Are bicycle racks available and convenient outside school and work sites? Analyze the information you gather. What can you do to make a difference? Can you find a way to address root causes and support potential solutions?

Clarify Your Scope and Define Success

As you consider which action(s) to take, you might need to do more research to refine or narrow your scope. For example, if you want to try to improve the bicycling routes and the availability of racks, you will need to do related research to pinpoint the players, potential partners, and resource organizations connected to your strategy. Perhaps, there is a bicycling club that is already working on the issue. Can you verify they are making a positive difference and then find a way to support their actions? Or, can you raise awareness of your interest in working on this issue and recruit others to join you?

No matter what, being clear about the scope of your initiative is important in giving you a chance to make a meaningful impact on your issue. If your scope is too broad, it may diminish the value of your actions. If your scope is too narrow, it may prevent you from making a positive difference on the issue. The more clearly you define your scope, the more clearly you will be able to define the concrete steps you will need to take on the path to making changes happen. Also, the more clearly you understand your scope, the more clearly you will be able to define what “success” looks like so you know when you get there!

<callout> Define your scope clearly.

If your issue is local, your root causes or opportunities for solutions may be local—or they may not be. For example, using the bicycling issue above in a community in the United States, imagine you have determined you want to focus on improving road design (such as adding bicycle lanes).

Looking into it, you will discover some roads are managed locally. That is, decisions about changes to those roads are local decisions made by public officials in local towns, villages, cities and the local county. For other roads, decisions may be made at a higher level of government such as the state level.

Gauge Your Readiness for Action

How will you know you are ready to stand up on a specific issue? The *Individual Readiness Checklist* below will help you determine where you are clear and where you need to do additional work before you begin. As you assess your readiness to take action, you will see how it builds on your *Courage and Confidence Self-Assessment* from Chapter Two. Ideally, when you “agree” or “strongly agree” with every item on the checklist, you will be ready to act effectively on an issue that matters to you. Rate your readiness on the scale provided. (Free downloads of this checklist are available at www.bluespring.life.)

Scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly Agree

Individual Readiness Checklist

- 1. I understand my chosen issue well because I have researched it.**
- 2. I have narrowed my scope appropriately so I can be more effective.**
- 3. I know what I stand for on the issue.**
- 4. I have courage to stand up on the issue.**
- 5. I know where my courage on the issue comes from.**

- 6. I know my strengths on the issue.**
- 7. I know my weaknesses on the issue.**
- 8. I have determined what my method(s) and pathway(s) for action will be.**
- 9. I have determined my timeline.**
- 10. I know how I will review or evaluate my actions so I can identify ways to adjust and improve.**
- 11. I have determined what my measure(s) of success will be.**
- 12. I have the resources I need to be an agent for change on this issue.**
- 13. I am confident in my knowledge and abilities to bring about change on this issue.**

For some paths to action you choose, it may seem natural to act alone. For other actions, it will make more sense to gather strength in numbers and team up with others around the same cause as we discussed in Chapter Three.

When you team up with others, how will you know you are ready *as a group* to begin taking action? The *Group Readiness Checklist* below will help. Building on the concepts in the *Individual Readiness Checklist* above, it includes team-related perspectives and additional points that must be considered for successful teamwork. Ideally, when your team “agrees” or “strongly agrees” with every item on the checklist, your team will be ready to act effectively as a group. (Free downloads of this checklist are available at www.bluespring.life.)

Scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly Agree

Group Readiness Checklist

- 1. We understand our chosen issue well because we have researched it.**
- 2. We have narrowed our scope appropriately so we can be more effective.**
- 3. We know what our group stands for on the issue.**
- 4. We have collective courage to stand up on the chosen issue.**
- 5. We know where our courage as a group comes from on the issue.**
- 6. Our group is clear about who leads us.**
- 7. Our group knows how we will communicate to keep everyone in the loop.**
- 8. We are confident we know our group's strengths on the issue.**
- 9. We are confident we know our group's weaknesses on the issue.**
- 10. We have determined as a group what our method(s) and pathway(s) for action will be and who will do what.**
- 11. We have determined our timeline.**
- 12. We know how we will review or evaluate our group's actions so we can identify ways to adjust and improve.**
- 13. We have determined as a group what our measure(s) of success will be.**
- 14. Our group has the resources it needs to be an agent for change on this issue.**
- 15. Our group is confident in our knowledge and abilities to bring about change on this issue.**

Choose Methods for Action from SMILES

How will you know what method(s) or pathway(s) to action are right or best for your plan to tackle the issue you are concerned about? Certainly, it depends on your issue, but it also depends on your goal, scope, comfort level, and resources to pull it off. I have compiled a list of common methods activists use to address social and environmental issues. The list is categorized to create an acronym, SMILES, to help you remember the choices:

S – Serving People and Nature through Hands-on Projects

M – Modeling the Change

I – Influencing Community and Government

L – Litigating for Justice and Change

E – Educating People in Support of Change

S – Standing Up on Consumer Choices

Within these categories, there is something for everyone—no matter who you are or where you live. Let's drill down to look at each of these six categories for action with some examples of each—including some examples from my own life:

Serving People and Nature through Hands-on Projects: Just as its name suggests, this category for action involves being immersed in service to others to make the world a better place. It might be a project created by others or one you organized on your own. It might be a one-time service

project or involve you in regular service and support for a cause or organization you believe in.

Some examples in this category for action are:

- Planting trees and community gardens.
- Feeding the hungry at a local soup kitchen.
- Doing a streambank restoration project.
- Beautifying a park.
- Working with solid waste authorities to get household hazardous wastes like paint thinner or varnish disposed of properly.
- Doing a citizen science project to gather data about natural resources.

One example of a citizen science project is becoming trained as a stream monitor for a stream in your community, then submitting your data points regularly to an organization such as the Izaak Walton League of America which maintains a database to track water quality trends.ⁱ There are many other examples of citizen science initiatives going on across the world.^{ii, iii, iv, v, vi, vii} This category for action might also include fund-raising for a cause or organization to support your goal. The results of actions taken in this category are often tangible—that is, you can see the difference you are making. Longer-term benefits are possible when projects build new capacities and skills in other people so they can better help themselves going forward. Lasting benefits also result when projects improve the environment.

<callout> You are here to enrich the world and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.

—Woodrow Wilson^{viii}

One of my recent projects to serve people and nature was to share information with my neighbors about an invasive plant that I had recently discovered in our neighborhood—teaching them about it, offering fact sheets I had obtained about the species, and partnering with them to eradicate it from their property.

Modeling the Change: Through this category, you demonstrate through your voice and actions what matters to you. It is a way of living your values—of walking your talk. Ideally, you want others to model your choices, your actions. You may be a silent model, or you may use your example to teach and perhaps persuade others. Some examples in this category for action are:

- Sharing with a neighbor how easy it is for you to do backyard composting of your kitchen scraps.
- Bringing your own reusable plates and silverware to a community picnic while encouraging others to do the same.
- Eating more locally grown foods and having your friends over to share the bounty.
- Using public transportation.

The results are immediate when you “live the changes” you want to see in the world.^{ix} Results may also be long-term when you adopt and sustain new behaviors and lifestyles—and inspire others to do the same.

One of the ways I model my values is to collect organic waste such as banana peels and eggshells while I am staying at a family member’s house where they don’t compost table scraps. We keep the scraps in a bag in the freezer. When I leave, I take the bag with me. At home, I add the scraps

to the compost in my backyard. I've also brought home organic waste generated in my office at work. Why let organic nutrients for our garden go to waste by throwing them in the garbage?

Influencing Community and Government: This category involves honest and appropriate ways of seeking to influence community leaders and government officials to make policy changes or other adjustments favorable to your issue. The leaders or officials you seek to influence may or may not be elected. Community leaders you might want to influence include those heading up non-profit, business, educational, or religious organizations. They might also be thought leaders or influential people who are organizers in your community or in the wider world. They might be government staff who can help you influence elected government officials. The scope might be local, state, national, or international. Some examples of actions to influence community and government are:

- Providing testimony at a public meeting.
- Communicating with elected officials and their staff to share your views.
- Gathering community leaders together to discuss an issue and collaborate on a solution.
- Expressing your viewpoint publicly through the general media or social media.
- Organizing listening sessions on an issue and presenting your results to policy makers.
- Gathering signatures for a petition.
- Conducting a community survey and sharing results with local leaders.
- Organizing a demonstration.
- Voicing your opinion at a summit.

When I was an elected government official, people influenced me on issues that mattered to them and I influenced them, too. One time, a ten-year-old wrote me a detailed letter about our library and what it meant to have his library located downtown. (We had been considering if we would build a new one somewhere else in the community.) He later testified confidently at a county board meeting on the same issue and made a great impact on everyone. At his young age, he did what many adults have never done in their lifetime: stand up at a government meeting to voice their views to help shape their community's future. I share this story here to encourage you. Speaking up at local government meetings is often as easy as raising your hand and sharing a few thoughts. Having your ideas or concerns written down beforehand will help you speak with more confidence.

There are many ways to exchange ideas and influence government or community leaders besides speaking at public meetings. One time, I asked to be on the agenda of a teen leadership event and got to spend a couple of hours with young adults gathering their ideas for development of our county's first strategic plan. Since these young citizens literally *were* our community's future, their viewpoints were priceless to me and greatly influenced the way I carried on with our countywide strategic planning process. Community and government leaders may be willing to attend your group's meetings, too. Invite them.

The numbers of people and diversity of voices often add strength when seeking to influence community or government changes, so build a strong team. Also, it is important to engage people who are voters in the district of an elected official you want to influence. Results of policy changes can be longer term if the policy remains "on the books" and is enforced. It can be weakened or reversed by whomever is subsequently elected so you must be vigilant (and always exercise your

right to vote). Without watchdogs or other people monitoring compliance with a policy change, your efforts may not have a lasting impact. Be sure to address how compliance will be monitored as part of your solution.

Hands-on or “field” activities can also be very helpful when you want to influence others. One citizen invited me to his rural property to show me how water was backing up on his land because of an old town road nearby which needed a culvert improvement. He wanted me to talk to leaders in his town. I did. The culvert improvement was made. Another citizen, a vegetable grower, invited me to his land to teach me about how his farming operation worked and how he irrigated his fields. On many occasions, I used the insights he shared while helping others understand the challenges faced by farmers.

On a different occasion in my own efforts to influence elected leaders at the state level, I organized a “Water Field Day for Legislators.” This involved hosting a bus tour with local elected officials, state legislators, media members, area experts in water related fields, and other interested citizens to highlight water science and water-related issues around our county. For example, we stopped at a location where there was a test well used to measure the depth of groundwater in that area. Everyone got to see how water depth data was gathered. We also stopped at a local county park to discuss how pumping millions of gallons of groundwater to irrigate crops was lowering our water table and affecting groundwater-fed lakes and streams. At another stop, we caught macroinvertebrates and shared a stream ecology lesson. Through this field day, we influenced a state legislator who mentioned what she learned at our event when she stood up to explain her vote about a proposed change to Wisconsin’s water law at our State Capitol.

A contrasting example was when a family asked me to meet them at their kitchen table with their neighbors to talk about water quality issues in their rural area—just five of us together for a couple of hours. They also wanted to show me the device used to treat their well water at their kitchen tap in order to make it safer to drink.

Perhaps most memorable was when I learned of gaps in serving Hmong Americans in our community and county government. Leaders of the Hmong community met several times with me over a year or so to discuss and address various concerns and issues. Together, we wanted to see what we could do to improve the ways our community and government served them. It was very exciting to learn when one member of our work group decided to run for public office herself! She won the election and became a county board supervisor, a legislator in our local community, who went on to break cultural barriers and more directly serve members of her Hmong community in her elected role. Even more fantastic was the fact that another member of the Hmong community followed her lead and ran for a position on a local school board. She was also elected. What began in our discussions around a common table led to empowering one who empowered another, and the rest is history.

I don't want you to feel intimidated by elected officials. They are regular people. They may be more well-known than you are, but they are people just like you. There is no reason to be nervous. As the above examples illustrate: Reach out to them. Invite them to experience your perspective firsthand. Teach them. You may be surprised at where it can take you on your way to finding solutions on your issue. Don't get discouraged if you don't get the attention you think your concern

rightfully deserves. Keep trying. Strengthen your team and approach. And remember, if you live in a democratic society, voting is one of the most powerful ways to evaluate the performance of elected officials! Don't miss voting in *any* election. They all affect you.

<callout> Don't miss voting in any election because they all affect you.

Be careful about political action committees (PACs) which support certain candidates or issues. Their names are often deceiving! Some PAC names make themselves sound like they care about the environment or are heroes on community issues when in fact, they are not. They have their own agenda and have chosen a name or slogan to try to make themselves look good and fool people into joining them. Think *propaganda* and *misconception* until you drill down to prove them otherwise! Actions always speak louder than words, so find out about their track record. Don't just blindly follow their claims without doing your homework first or they may lead you down a path contrary to your own values.

When tackling widespread or planet scale problems or issues, it will require influencing numbers of communities and governments. Don't let this challenge turn you away. Start where you are with local efforts. Widespread issues are often very serious matters affecting your future. This makes them worth an investment of your time and effort. Sometimes, as we get key leaders or governmental units on board, others follow suit creating a cascading effect and the chance for making tremendous headway on the issue.

Litigating for Justice and Change: This action category involves being part of a lawsuit to seek a resolution on an issue through a court of justice or tribunal. Some examples are:

- Becoming directly involved in a legal case.
- Filing a petition for an injunction to suspend an activity that you must prove will cause irreparable harm to people and/or the environment if it is not halted immediately.
- Participating in a tribunal or mediation which specializes in your area of concern to try to resolve a legal dispute.
- Joining one or more organizations seeking justice through a court of law on your issue.

Some organizations make it their mission to fight for change through a legal process. It may take quite a long time, but the results can be powerful and set precedents which shape future decisions—not only the decisions made in your case. Certainly, litigation requires extraordinary expertise and resources, but don't count it out as a choice for action on your issue!

Be cautious of misleading organizational or foundation names that sound like they stand for justice or environmental or community causes when in fact they do not. Once again, think *propaganda* and *misconception* until you drill down and prove them otherwise. Find out the facts about organizations *from other sources, not just their own websites and their other communications*. Look into their track record and actions before you support them!

Educating People in Support of Change: This category for action involves sharing information to increase awareness of the facts about an issue to teach others and help them learn how they can become part of a solution. Some examples of actions in this category are:

- Teaching business owners how to reduce waste in their place of business and why it is good for business to do so.
- Creating an educational video series for social media to encourage your peers to shop at a farmer's market for locally grown fruits and vegetables and challenging them to take the "Buy Local" challenge you have designed.
- Delivering an educational program on pollinators for youth at a school in preparation for a community service project when you help them plant a pollinator garden.
- Hosting a backyard habitat workshop during a special community event.

Helping people build their awareness and knowledge about an issue are good starting places, but you will also need to make sure they have the *skills* for action. What will they need to be able to *do* to be successful in taking the specific actions you invite them to take? Here are some skills you may need to build within your target audiences for the examples of the four educational projects described above:

- For business owners to be successful in their waste reduction efforts, you may need to give them tips about how to organize a waste reduction program in their business setting.
- When promoting a *buy local* campaign among peers, you may need to help them learn how to shop at a farmer's market.
- In preparation for planting a pollinator garden, you may need to teach the students about how to do a pollinator inventory.
- When hosting a backyard habitat workshop, you may need to help your participants learn how to properly plant and care for trees given free to them at the event.

Here are a few other examples of skills you might need to build in your target population as you work through other kinds of educational projects:

- How to register to vote.
- How to communicate effectively with elected officials.
- How to make safe alternatives to household cleaning chemicals.
- How to properly sort waste for recycling in your community.
- How to gather and submit data to be a citizen scientist.

Get the idea? Let the question of “How?” lead you to help others build skills that can support them in turning their knowledge into action successfully.

Often, informal ways of assessing knowledge and skills gaps work fine. You might simply ask your participants on the spot what they already know or feel they need help on. You might also let them self-select from options or tools you provide. For example, you might have a template available for people to use in writing to their legislator. Participants will take the template if they feel they need it.

If you want a more formal way of assessing the knowledge and skills of your target audience, you can conduct a short pre-survey. Pre-surveys allow you to find out what your audience knows about the topic and what they may need to be ready to participate as a change maker. Another formal method is to gather a focus group of your intended audience to ask for their input and feedback before you develop the program.

The more you break down barriers that might otherwise get in the way of action, the more results you can expect to achieve from your educational and outreach efforts. Though certainly not required, incentives can invite people to break down barriers for themselves. For example, if you teach a composting workshop and give participants a discount on the purchase of a compost bin for their backyard because you arranged for the discount from a business partner, your chances of helping them take their education to action will increase significantly. As another example, imagine you are conducting an educational program urging more people to use public transportation. You could offer free bus tokens. The point is to make it as easy as possible for people to get involved.

Educational outreach projects may rely on face-to-face communication with individuals or groups. They may also rely on communicating through social media, news media, the internet, or even billboards. You might try to persuade people to change their routine, donate to a cause, make different choices, or vote a certain way. The sky is the limit. It is all about educating *for action*—not just information sharing.

There are important considerations when you seek to focus on children and youth with your education efforts. The best educational programs for children and youth engage them in age, ability, and culturally appropriate ways. Involve teachers, youth leaders, and families when you can. It may be appropriate to share your personal experiences and why you feel compelled to stand up on your issue. However, stop short of telling them how they *should* feel or what they *should* do because they need the opportunity to discover those things on their own.

No matter if you are educating adults or youth to support change, results are sometimes hard to gauge because you may not be able to see those results immediately. A quick pre-survey of a few questions before your program followed by a repeat of the same survey at the end of your program can give you a sense of what people learned. You might ask adult participants to express their commitment to change their behavior or make a pledge to take a certain action after you have finished your outreach to them. Or, you might ask people to self-report the changes they make over time—perhaps on a certain social media site. Benefits can be lifelong when you help people change their ways! That’s why it is so important to break through barriers which prevent action.

The excitement of this category is what I call the “multiplier effect.” This is what happens when your education equips and inspires other people and they take actions of their own. It multiplies or magnifies your impact—not just for this one issue this one time—but potentially for many other times and in many other ways, too.

Standing Up on Consumer Choices: This action strategy is one with more power than most people may realize. It is about exercising your power as a consumer of goods and services. Everything you buy or avoid buying is the same as speaking your mind. When you buy a product or service, it is the same as saying you approve of it and you approve of the practices of its makers or providers. Buying a product or service is a way of showing your support for a business. Alternatively, when you avoid buying a product or service even when you can afford to pay for it, you send a message it is not needed, not preferred, or not worthy of your support. Examples of actions in this SMILES category are:

- Doing your homework before you buy anything so you can make an informed decision.

- Boycotting a business with unhealthy products or practices.
- Recognizing businesses being good stewards in your community.

Each of us has an ecological footprint which measures the annual demand we place on global natural resources because of our way of life. Not only is it about what we consume and how much we consume, but about processing the waste we produce.^{x, xi} The greater our footprint, the more we demand from our planet. Our consumer choices go hand-in-hand with our lifestyle choices. Together, they figure greatly into how much pressure we place on our planet's finite resources. The results of standing up on consumer choices are passed along through the sales figures tracked by businesses. The more people involved in making the same consumer choice such as using a more environmentally friendly product or boycotting a company doing bad business on our planet, the greater our chances for more immediate impact and change.

On the way to developing your best action plan, consider all SMILES categories, then zero in on the most appropriate action(s) for your issue. This way, you'll be sure not to overlook a better strategy for action than the first one you thought of. Don't feel like you need to stick within one of the action categories, either. Challenge yourself (and your team) to review the choices within and across SMILES strategies. Integrate them if you can. Then, develop a well-rounded, concrete plan with a clear idea of how you will define success. Make sure it is a plan with constructive and respectful steps for moving forward as opposed to simply demeaning those with differing views. When you can, affirm what is already working, then build on it. This reinforces a common

direction and will increase your momentum. The readiness checklists presented earlier in this chapter are tools to help you get there. The SMILES categories will help you stay on track for getting results.

As we wrap up this chapter, I want to offer a story with an example of an action project which began with a cultural divide and a recycling challenge and ended up enhancing international relations and forming lifelong friendships. Perhaps, your action plan will help you discover whole new horizons and friendships, too!

Let Collaboration Lead You Forward

In 1991, I was hired to work for the U.S. Army Environmental Office of the 98th Area Support Group in Würzburg, Germany. I had joined my husband in Würzburg while he was serving a military assignment. I became the coordinator of the Separate or Recycle Trash (SORT) Program, a new solid waste program serving about 60,000 Americans living in military communities around Würzburg.

Germany was (and still is) advanced in the field of solid waste management with strict laws and norms related to reducing waste and recycling. Würzburg's German communities did a superb job of sorting their waste. They had adjusted to those laws and practices in their homes and

communities. In contrast, military service men and women and their families living in the Würzburg area came from many different communities prior to living in Germany. They didn't necessarily know the German laws. Communities in the U.S. and around the world where they had lived before coming to Würzburg didn't recycle the same things. There were cultural and language barriers also preventing Americans from understanding German laws and norms. In short, we, Americans, were making a lot of mistakes with our waste. Without meaning to, we were making it difficult for our host nation to manage its solid waste efficiently and effectively.

Enter the SORT Coordinator—me! One of my jobs as SORT Coordinator was to improve American performance in sorting waste on military installations where many military members lived and worked. I also had the job of reaching out to service men and women and their families living in German neighborhoods.

Some connections were made with our local city officials in solid waste management and at the local university in Würzburg. Before we knew it, we were learning from each other. I taught them about environmental education—a relatively new field of study at the time—and they taught me about host nation laws and practices. I taught them about the Central Wisconsin Environmental Station at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources, my alma mater, and they taught me about leading edge waste incinerators and community-wide composting programs. I taught them about Earth Day and they taught me about *Umwelt Tag* (World Environment Day celebrated in Germany). Together, we worked to improve the performance of Americans sorting their waste. Together, we worked to try to help our German neighbors become more patient and understanding of Americans learning new systems and ways.

By this time, we had tapped all the SMILES action categories except litigation (thank heaven). We had done waste sorting service projects including a waste assessment on our military installation. We had government officials informed and involved in cooperative ways. We had modeled and educated and tried to help Americans make better consumer choices by avoiding waste when they could.

That's when we began to see there was an even more important opportunity for our partnership—to bring the people of our two countries closer together. The U.S. military had a presence in Germany because it had been invited to be there after WWII. Americans living in Würzburg needed to see themselves as ambassadors because—like it or not, recognize it or not—we were! This was a grand opportunity to act more like guests in our host nation. At the same time, some citizens of Würzburg could be better ambassadors of their country and help the Americans feel more welcomed, too.

<callout> How often I found where I should be going by setting out somewhere else. –R. Buckminster Fuller^{xiii}

We needed to build a common understanding and what better way to do that than by celebrating being in it together—sharing one home, one Earth? We decided we would participate in each other's environmental holidays—Earth Day and *Umwelt Tag*. This led to co-founding the first German-American Earth Day in 1991 followed about a month later by celebrating German-American *Umwelt Tag*. Our first German-American Earth Day event brought 150 elementary

school children (eight and nine years old) and their teachers together with military officials and City of Würzburg officials at an American school for military families at Leighton Barracks, an Army installation. Seventy-five children were from German schools and seventy-five children were from American schools. We chose third graders because this was the grade when the German children began to learn English in school.

If you would like to learn more about German-American Earth Day, the Appendices include more of the story.

When it was time to participate in *Umwelt Tag* festivities, the American children went to the *Umweltstation Würzburg*, the Environmental Station in the City of Würzburg. This was a place much like a nature center in America where they were immersed in hands-on activities with the German children. German and American dignitaries were once again present.

I never imagined where this collaboration to help Americans sort their waste properly in Würzburg would lead! The German-American Earth Day tradition continued for fifteen years until the military drawdown and American military families were no longer stationed in Würzburg. Not only did we improve solid waste management and recycling in Würzburg, we improved international relations. Not only did we serve U.S. Army communities, but before I left Germany in 1993, I was asked to make a presentation to the U.S. Navy because they wanted to learn from our model.

Ripples May Become Movements

I continue to connect with my German colleagues—Dieter, Bernd, and Helmer (Charly) almost thirty years later. We have developed lifelong friendships and have grown to be part of each other's family. Together, we have written the Afterword of this book and will continue our collaboration as we share *Empowered: One Planet at a Time* across the Earth.

You'll never know where your journey will take you until you get started and let the SMILES categories lead you forward as you develop your plan for action. Once you get going, be ready for an amazing life as a change maker! What starts as a ripple today may become a movement tomorrow. You might shape traditions that last longer than you ever imagined. You might create life-changing and world-changing friendships, too. When we see ourselves as *one* and *in this together*, it changes everything—for the better.

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