

# Gloria



*Activism /'aktə, vizəm/  
The policy or action of using  
vigorous campaigning to bring  
about political or social change*

I don't have all the answers. I had thought I did. God, I was so judgmental when I was young. In the sixties my sister and I were activists, and we were out there registering people, doing sessions with farm workers, reading Saul Alinsky. We formed an alternative press called *Chicano* that was all editorial. We were campaigning to make sure that the Hispanic community was represented and heard.

What we didn't understand very well at the time was the system. You can't just march into a business or an office or a community and demand that your ideals be accommodated. You need to have your act together if you expect to be taken seriously, you have to play by the rules, and you need to wear a certain uniform in order to get a seat at the table.

I remember one of my biggest failures as an activist. As a part of the governor's Commission on the Status of Women we were going to go out and save all of the farm workers, by organizing them. Oh my God, we were sure it was going to be a stellar project, and once they'd meet us they were going to automatically love us. We were going up,

knocking on doors, speaking in Spanish. But they refused to talk to us! We had thought that we knew how to make their lives better for them, but we hadn't gone through the proper channels to communicate, or done the research to understand their perspective. How arrogant of us.

I'll give you another example - I was on the first negotiating team for a faculty contract at Crafton Hills Community College. Everyone around the table was a classroom teacher and our attitude was just, "We're gonna show those S-O-B's." We were so damn idealistic, and we spent all of our time reacting, instead of putting together a contract. In the end it wasn't a bad result, but when I had to later implement that contract as a Dean, and later as President of the College, I saw how our good intentions were no substitute for legal expertise.

There were a lot of important lessons for thinking about activism that I learned while an administrator. Another example is that we would have meetings with architects to plan new buildings. They would produce these beautiful renderings, and we thought that was what we were gonna get. Then the value engineers would come in and say "it's gonna cost a fortune and it's not functional," and they changed everything. So when we got the finished product of course we were upset. That was a key lesson for me in the importance of understanding how processes work, and what can happen when expectations are set up based on ideals.

With each role that you take on, you have to transition and understand what you can and cannot do, and where you can and cannot have influence. Now as an elected official, one of my biggest concerns is the lack of connection between generations. Many

of the young activists I meet with, nobody is training them in strategic thinking and planning. There was a group that I was speaking with the other day that was really upset because of a letter the Mayor sent to the President. I said, "Well, what is it that you want to get out of this?" They said, "We want a better x, y, and z." Well, is embarrassing the mayor going to accomplish that? No. You need to focus on the outcome you're after.

The other thing is that you have to walk the talk. I ask my activist friends - young and old - what are you personally doing? Even if you only have a nickel, are you investing it in your community? Do you invest time in your community? If you're an environmentalist, have you changed the lighting in your home?

When I was twenty, I felt different. When I was twenty, I was content to make coffee for the men at the table who were doing the activism, because



"Someone, teacher or administrator, submitted my name to the local American Legion Post for consideration as the 'Outstanding Student' I won, and it was mine. It was the first acknowledgement of my achievements, and it became a symbol that someone other than family and teachers had faith in my abilities. It gave me such encouragement. Over the years I accumulated many awards and still do receive acknowledgments, but none of them have had the impact of that first award."



The American Legion medal is awarded to recognize the development of courage, honor, leadership, patriotism, scholarship, and service. This one was earned by Gloria when she was in middle school.

I was "helping." I stopped making coffee in the early seventies. You want coffee? Make it yourself.

Some of the activists I meet, I wonder if they're really even angry about the social or political situation they're fighting, or they're just angry, period. It seems that, for a lot of activists, once their own situation improves they drop the cause.

The people I grew up with, we're in the last quarters of our lives. I look back and I'm thinking, "What did we do? What did we leave behind? What did we put in motion?" I don't have an answer. I can only tell you that, on the whole, I keep doing what I can to make a difference, every day.