

8 Traits of a Good Political Organiser

Being a good political organiser involves quite a large set of skills which take years of practical experience to hone. The manual on how to be a good organiser - if one could even be written - would be a book large enough to be covered by the Offensive Weapons Act. This is a basic primer on what makes a good organiser rather than a shoddy one, focusing on the kind of traits you should be trying to develop over time. None of us lives up to these all of the time, but it's what we should aspire to and move closer towards continuously.



The 8 traits are:

1. **Reliable**
2. **Co-operative**
3. **Independent**
4. **Communicates Clearly**
5. **Realistic**
6. **Ambitious**
7. **Secure**
8. **Growing**

1 - Reliable

Responsible

1. *You do what you say you will do.*

Don't say you'll do something if you don't intend to do it, just to make others or yourself feel better in the moment. Be critical whenever you're about to volunteer something. Are you certain you'll do it, or are you really thinking there's just some possibility you might do it? People not doing what they say is one of the most destructive things to political organising. It creates resentment, a culture of not following through, and an inability to plan things.

If you need to bail out, swallow your pride and let someone know.

2. *You take responsibility for the outcome and keep the show on the road.*

No group can magically carry itself. Individuals decide to do things to make that happen. Be one of those people. If things are in danger of grinding to a halt, will you step in to keep it going? Feel a sense of personal ownership.

3. *You are accountable to others and own up to your mistakes.*

If you screw something up, recognise this to the others and apologise. This is healthy. Don't hide mistakes or refuse to take responsibility.

4. *You are unshakeably principled.*

Your principles live through your actions without you having to say a word. Other people cave, but you won't. You try your hardest to be the bulwark evil can't pass. Be a person worthy of the Justice and Freedom you seek to achieve. You are not a coward. You speak the truth, even if your voice shakes.

5. *You lead by example.*

By providing a living example of how things should be done, you educate others and inspire them to be better change-makers. You set a tone and standard for action which travels beyond your own doings.

Sustainable

1. *You don't take on too many tasks, only to drop them due to burnout.*

One of the hardest things in organising is being able to say 'No' to something. However, failure to do this can lead to you buckling under the pressure, which causes a mess where others have to pick up the pieces or perhaps being too late to rectify at all. It might mean that too much work is now spread over too few people,

whereas if you never volunteered for those tasks, a different more realistic plan would have been made.

Level-Headed

1. ***You remain calm under pressure and can make a decision based on imperfect information in too short a time.***

A critical skill is remaining calm in an emergency. As an organiser, you'll likely be thrown into situations where you're out of your comfort zone. It might be dealing with the cops or fascists, a plan failing, or any number of situations you won't predict. Staying calm is the difference between responding well and screwing it up (including screwing it up for everyone else). In an emergency, immediately tell yourself to go cold and stay calm.

We don't live in an ideal world. Generally speaking decisions are made where you don't have as much information or time as you'd like (not just in emergencies). It's uncomfortable to do this as you might be wrong. Flex your decision making skill in these conditions, learn from your mistakes, and you'll improve a lot. If you 'aren't a decisive person', become one by practicing.

2 - Co-operative

Inclusive

1. ***You make an effort to include everyone in the process.***

You try to make sure that everyone has an active role to play, something to do, that they are involved rather than at the side lines getting nothing out of it. You pass on your knowledge and skills. You empathise and remember what it's like to be on the outside and inexperienced.

2. ***You genuinely take other people's views on board.***

You listen to other people's opinion rather than dismissing them because you know it all.

3. ***You give praise where it's due.***

Praise is key to morale. If someone did something properly, acknowledge that. If someone did something great, praise is due.

Humble

1. *You make it about the group or cause and not about you.*

The group or cause is not a vanity project, it's not about making you feel better or important.

In particular, you are aware of the effects of power systems like sexism, racism, queerphobia, ableism, and class, and make a serious effort not to take it personally when someone criticises you in good faith for acting out parts of these oppressive systems.

You focus on the collective interest rather than simply your own narrow interest, say when the majority disagree with you on a specific decision, which is inevitable in any democratic process.

You don't try to be the great leader who others depend on. A good organiser stands back to let others blossom and shine.

2. *You don't micromanage people.*

Respect the autonomy of others. No one likes to be micromanaged. Let people do things their way. Let people make mistakes, which are crucial to learning. Advise or remind without micromanaging.

3. *You realise that everyone is on a different path and seek to understand rather than judge.*

You don't forget that once you were ignorant. You don't forget that you still are. You remember that people are a product of their environment. You mainly seek to understand how people work rather than bringing emotion into it.

Diplomatic

1. *You build networks of people you can call upon for support or to work with.*

You're able to form relationships with a wide range of people, and actively pursue this for the sake of the cause. These networks are critical to being an effective organiser and take years to develop. Information and resources flow through them, and they are the basis for action. Make an effort to introduce yourself to others trying to change the world, so you can help each other.

2. *You can work with people you have significant political differences with.*

Working with people who completely agree with you is easy. Working with those

who don't is much more skilful. Very often this is necessary to get things done - in fact it always is. Be able to have a healthy disagreement without turning it into a row.

3 - Independent

Independent Thought

1. ***You make up your own mind rather than being pushed and pulled by others' opinions.***

You can listen to others without immediately giving in to their viewpoint due to perceived social pressure or doubting yourself.

2. ***You're sceptical when you hear information and put truth above social acceptance or convenience.***

You don't assume everything you hear is correct and you put a premium on what is true, whether it's convenient or not.

3. ***Don't assume everyone else is right and you're wrong.***

Your default assumption isn't that other people know what they're talking about and your opinion is worthless.

4. ***Don't be afraid to assert your opinion.***

You're not afraid to make your view heard, because that's what you think even if it contradicts everyone in the room. Don't assume that because something isn't being said it shouldn't be said or has already been thought of.

Independent Action (Initiative)

5. ***You don't wait for 'Someone Else' to make the decisions.***

Organising requires lots and lots of decisions, often based on quite imperfect information and in a short timeframe. You don't dump this load on someone else, but take your share of responsibility for making them yourself.

6. ***You don't wait for 'Someone Else' to assign you tasks.***

You either do what needs to be done or actively ask others what needs to be done, rather than waiting around for someone to ask you to do something. Definitely don't use 'nobody asked me to do anything' as an excuse. You consistently ask yourself 'what can I do to complete the task, to improve things?'

4 – Clear Communicator

1. ***You make your limitations clearly known to others.***

You spell out what your needs are, how much or how little you can do, what is or isn't convenient, etc, so that everyone can make the most informed decision.

2. ***You make what needs to be done clearly known to others.***

You share your view of the situation with others rather than keeping it to yourself, including reminding of tasks that are yet to be completed.

3. ***You definitely don't get passive aggressive with others.***

You don't make snide remarks, or get pissy with people, or give others the silent treatment, or any of that crap.

4. ***You make a balance between directness and not being a jerk.***

You cut to the chase and speak the truth, but are careful not to hurt others.

5 - Realistic

1. ***You aren't pie-in-the-sky with your plans.***

You make a big point of creating plans that are actually possible rather than ones which would be great in some lovely parallel universe. You constantly ask 'who will do it?', 'when will it be done?', 'how will it be done?'. You are aware that resources (time, people, money) are finite and some worthy activity must unfortunately be cut out.

2. ***You soberly assess the facts and your plans include a significant margin for error.***

You base your plans on facts rather than random stabs in the dark. You assume that things will go wrong, because they always do, so you plan to fail elegantly by always including a significant margin for error so that when something doesn't go according to plan the damage is minimised.

3. ***You don't assume things will come easily.***

You don't assume it will be plain sailing, you manage your expectations. You know there will be unexpected roadblocks, fuck ups, personal emergencies, and lots of slog. This way you won't be shocked and appalled when carrying the load.

4. ***You don't confuse 'realism' with burnout, bitterness, and hopelessness.***

It's too easy to mistake your chronic assumption that nothing will go well and that no one can be trusted for realism rather than burnout. Proper realism doesn't require feeling shit and annoyed all the time.

6 - Ambitious

1. *You aren't afraid to take a risk sometimes.*

You know that there is no growth without risk. Trying to achieve something greater than what seems readily achievable in the present involves uncertainty. Inevitably there will be failures. Don't freak out when something goes awry, learn from it and move on.

2. *You're creative. You don't necessarily stick to the same practices and ideas which are always used.*

The left can be very conservative and stick to doing the same things over and over again. You take a step back, brainstorm, and consider different, unusual, or even unheard of ways of doing things. What is done is not necessarily what is best. Everything has not been invented.

3. *You keep the long view in mind.*

You don't get bogged down in the day-to-day but always bear the big picture in mind, the long term aims that the present is a stepping stone on the way to. For instance, we are aiming for a global transformation of society to one which is unrecognisably free and fair.

7 - Secure

1. *You keep a secret when it's supposed to be kept.*

You pride yourself on your trustworthiness and practice a military-like respect for confidentiality and secrets.

You don't run your mouth trying to impress people. One of the biggest problems with people spilling the beans is wanting to feel important, or come up with something to make conversation. Don't do this. Be secure enough in yourself to be able to shut up.

2. *You keep tabs on who knows what and who is linked to whom.*

A big part of security is being aware of the information flows. These are sometimes formally defined through, say, technology, or democratic structures, but are often

largely informal networks of people. Be aware of who is supposed to know what, who knows what, and who is likely to pass information on to whom.

3. ***You keep an eye out for dodgy and disruptive people, and don't sit idly by.***

A good organiser is not a naive people-pleaser who thinks everyone is wonderful. You know that you will cross paths with people, if only a small minority, who can damage the cause and the people around you. You don't get taken in by appearances. You can spot who might be the personally ambitious ones who are seeking power, the hot-headed ones who can't co-operate, the glad-handling liars and manipulators, the sexual predators, the state agents, or at least your alarm bells are ringing. You don't sit on your hands but will take the appropriate action to protect yourself and those around you.

4. ***You're not paranoid.***

Security does not mean paranoia. In fact, paranoia jeopardises security as you can't tell between false positives and actual causes for concern. Paranoia is easy, anyone can do that. Remain calm, measured, and rational, with a sceptical and watchful eye.

8 - Growing

1. ***You always look at your mistakes as opportunities to learn.***

There is no organising without mistakes. Be philosophical and practical about this. Mistakes give you data on what can be improved upon. Always spend a bit of time properly looking over your mistakes and figuring out how to prevent those mistakes from happening again.

2. ***You never think you know it all.***

Don't get cocky because you know some things and even you've been around for a while, and start thinking that you've figured it all out. Never let your thinking become rigid. Keep a fresh mind. And leave the arrogance at the door.

3. ***You arm yourself with new knowledge, skills, and character.***

You consistently give yourself new input to make sure that your worldview connects to reality, rather than a cartoon version of it. Especially exposing yourself to perspectives on things you don't experience yourself.

You learn and refine skills which allow you to do more things and be helpful to others. Same for knowledge.

You aim to, at least eventually, be as capable and honourable as the organisers you look up to. Who else will carry the torch?

Lastly, being a good organiser is about finding the best balance. Note the tension between being Reliable and Ambitious, Creative and Realistic, Secure and Communicating Clearly, Independent and Co-operative, and any other tensions you spot, and try not to let one pole eat the other.

Good luck and remember that one person can make a difference, that practice is everything, and that our revenge will be the laughter of our children.

*This guide was produced by a member of the **Workers Solidarity Movement, an anarchist organisation active on the island of Ireland.** If you live in Ireland and are interested in working with us to create a better world, or want to stay updated, then register as an email contact: <https://www.wsm.ie/join>.*