

00:04 [Syeeda Rahman] So the first things, we do have a couple of rules we want to make sure this conversation

00:09 is moving along.

00:11 So the first thing is respect, you guys know what that is I don't have to explain that to you.

00:16 So the no identifiers is just keep it to I-statements.

00:19 So like don't name people like Mr. So-and-So and "this person with this shirt."

00:24 Just try to keep it to I-statements when you're sharing stories about other people.

00:28 And then Vegas Rule is what happens here, stays here.

00:30 So if anyone's sharing anything vulnerable, don't take it out and tell everyone about it.

00:36 And then one mic is one person speaks at a time and then be mindful of other people's times.

00:41 Be present, be here.

00:44 And then step up/step down is if you notice yourself participating a little too much,

00:48 give some other people a chance, and then if you're not participating, step up and join in on the conversation.

00:54 And then lastly have fun.

00:56 We're so excited to have you here and I'm going to pass it to Elizabeth.

01:00 [Elizabeth Finn] Yeah.

01:01 So as I mentioned before, this is part of a whole series where we really hope that students

01:06 can walk away with tools and tips and hear from speakers who have experienced all about

01:12 what it means to be an organizer and how you can become one.

01:15 So today we're hoping to help everyone understand why organizing is an effective method of accomplishing

01:23 any social change or just social justice or political goals they might have.

01:32 So what is organizing?

01:34 I know it's a broad term, but there's an umbrella underneath it of what it can mean.

01:40 And organizing can be political organizing.

01:44 It can be at the national level, like a presidential campaign.

01:48 It can be at the state level, the local level, the town level.

01:52 It can be social justice organizing.

01:55 It can be for policy issues, housing.

01:58 It can be for labor issues, community issues, as basic as organizing to put a stop sign on your street.

02:09 So there's a kind of a complex definition of what organizing can be, but to break it

02:18 down, it really is just to achieve long-term change through building powerful and public relationships.

02:25 It's about influencing and negotiating with government, institutions, corporations, community

02:32 stakeholders, and really the goal is just to achieve direct representation and holding

02:37 decision-makers accountable to the people through public action.

02:43 So really social movements don't just happen.

02:46 They need to be organized, people need to come together.

02:50 And it's simply just turning shared ideas, values into action.

02:56 Identifying community problems and coming up with those solutions and then engaging existing power structures.

03:03 Those people in charge, government, community leaders to make those solutions a reality.

03:09 And at the end of the day, it really is just all about identifying, and recruiting, and

03:16 developing relationships that turn into leadership.

03:19 But I will let our speakers get more into what it actually means to be an organizer later on.

03:27 [Rahman] So what do you think about organizing?

03:30 Do you have any experience?

03:32 If you do have experience in organizing, if you sort of put a thumbs up on your reaction, that'd be awesome.

03:39 Or if you want to share any stories, feel free to raise your hand.

03:42 And if you have any questions about organizing and what it is right now, you can also raise

03:46 your hand and we'll try our best to help you out.

03:51 [Finn] Also throw it in the chat. if you have an experience or if you have a thought as to what it means, go for it.

04:00 [Rahman] I'm not seeing any hands right now.

04:06 So we're just going to move on to the video.

04:10 So this video is just a video on organizing and why it's important and why it's important in activism.

04:16 So I'm just going to play it.

04:18 And if you have any thoughts, please put them in the chat.

04:25 We're always monitoring that.

04:26 [Video] I'm Dolores Huerta and I am 87 years old, and I have been an activist since I was 25,

04:31 that's 62 years, and I'm still going strong.

04:36 I do believe that the people that are being affected by the issues are the best ones that can solve them.

04:46 We started the National Farm Workers Association of Cesar Chavez, which became the United Farm

04:51 Workers of America.

04:52 Knowing that ordinary people have the power to come together, to organize and that they can change policies.

05:00 This is what really engaged me and really changed my life.

05:05 And eventually I left being a school teacher to become an organizer.

05:08 The bit of a moment in my life came when I met this great man named Fred Ross, Sr. and

05:14 I went to a meeting where he showed us pictures of people who would organize themselves.

05:20 I registered in to vote, elected the first Latino to Los Angeles City Council.

05:25 The most effective way to make changes is by organizing, especially at the grassroots level.

05:31 I keep going door to door, canvassing, organizing one on one, because this is where you can

05:34 really engage with a voter and explain the issues to them.

05:36 People get confused so they just throw up their hands and they don't vote.

05:40 But we have to say to people, vote for what you're confident in voting, even if you have

05:46 to leave some of the spaces blank.

05:48 The important thing is to get in there and vote.

05:53 We're seeing a new dawn of resistance, a new dawn of women.

06:00 And if we don't act responsibly, if we don't engage, then we have only ourselves to blame.

06:11 [Rahman] Awesome.

06:12 So now we're going to hear from professional organizers, our speakers today.

06:22 So we have Councilwoman Mehreen Butt, and Suffolk alum and organizer, Isaac Boateng.

06:29 First we're going to hear from Councilwoman Mehreen Butt, she's a councilwoman for Wakefield.

06:35 And she's also the policy director for Planned Parenthood in Massachusetts.

06:38 These are some of the questions that she's going to get to, and if you have any questions,

06:44 while these speakers speak, please just drop them in the chat.

06:48 And at the end, we'll also give time for people to ask questions.

06:52 So I'm going to stop sharing so you can see her and have her speak.

07:01 [Councilwoman Mehreen Butt] I will get used to Zoom.

07:03 Hi everyone.

07:05 Thank you for that introduction.

07:07 So my name's Mehreen and I always start by saying, I just want to know if there's any people from Wakefield.

07:15 I know Lizzie's from Wakefield, but anyone else?

07:18 It's always good to know who's in the audience.

07:21 And then I just want to say everything that I say today are my thoughts and my thoughts only.

07:26 I'm not representing anyone but me.

07:27 So you're going to get a full on Mehreen tonight and not anyone else.

07:31 So when Lizzie asked me to speak today, I had to take a moment because I don't consider myself an organizer.

07:37 I went to law school, I'm a lobbyist in the state of Massachusetts.

07:41 I work on policy issues and then I thought about it and I'm like, "But I convince people to do social change."

07:47 And I was like, "Oh, I am an organizer."

07:50 Like that is, I need to add that to my resume.

07:52 So I will add that after this.

07:56 As mentioned, my day job is I'm the Associate Director of Government Affairs and Policy

08:01 at Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts.

08:03 I've been there for about a year and a half.

08:06 And before that I worked at health-related organization.

08:08 So I worked at Rosie's Place, which is the oldest women's shelter in the country.

08:13 I worked at the Statehouse for the legislature and then I worked on political campaigns.

08:19 So I was a campaign staffer in 2018 for a statewide campaign.

08:23 So I got to work on social justice issues, in my professional life I work on healthcare

08:29 and trans rights and economic justice, antipoverty, abortion access, voting expansion.

08:34 All of those issues I got to do in my day job.

08:38 And all those wins that we've had in the state of Massachusetts on healthcare and trans rights

08:42 and increasing the minimum wage to \$15 and making public benefits better.

08:47 That's all come through organizing.

08:49 It's people across the state, making phone calls, knocking on doors, sending postcards,

08:54 talking to their neighbors, calling their elected officials, calling the governor.

08:58 So if you care, whether you're starting your career or just an 11-year-old.

09:05 If you care about social justice, economic justice, health justice, then you need to organize.

09:11 So that's my day job.

09:14 And I get to do that on my day job.

09:15 And then at night, my nighttime unpaid volunteer position, as my father likes to remind me,

09:22 I don't get paid for doing it, is I'm a Wakefield town councilor.

09:26 And through that work, I get to work on campaigns for elected throughout the state and we get

09:31 to organize in my town.

09:34 So a few examples, we changed our board name to a gender-neutral name.

09:38 We used to be a selectman and nobody knew what a selectman was.

09:42 And so we ran a 17th month campaign because we had to change our town charter, our town

09:48 constitution called us selectman.

09:51 And so it was a 17th month with two town-wide votes and a valid question to change it to the gender-neutral town councilor.

10:02 We organized to get a pride flag in the town for the month of June.

10:06 And then we organized to get funding for renovations of a public safety building or to have our

10:12 library be open seven days a week.

10:15 That's all examples of organizing.

10:18 I like to say that I do organizing because my one goal of being an elected and working

10:25 on these issues is to be that voice for people that don't have a voice.

10:28 So I'm really lucky to have a seat at the table, but I just get one vote to accomplish anything.

10:35 I need people to help amplify that vote and help amplify that message.

10:40 So a little bit, I'm supposed to kind of give advice and I kind of give this all the time,

10:44 is find causes or candidates that you care about.

10:48 So climate change, reproductive health, ranked-choice voting, Medicare for all.

10:54 There's a new campaign to name a new Massachusetts State dinosaur, if you really care about dinosaurs.

11:00 Find a cause that you care about or find a candidate.

11:04 So we just had our national elections, it's great to find a national candidate, but find someone local.

11:11 Find a mayor from Framingham who's the first woman mayor in Framingham.

11:17 Support a local person in Wakefield.

11:21 Just find someone who inspires you, who thinks like you and volunteer for that campaign.

11:26 And sometimes when you volunteer, they turn into full-time positions, the full-time jobs, which is great.

11:33 But the best thing about organizing and I say this all the time, and I'm saying it as

11:38 I look to all of you on the Zoom screen.

11:41 There's not a lot of us that spend our Thursday nights having these conversations.

11:46 This is not everyone's idea of fun, but this is our idea of fun to talk about organizing

11:51 and social causes and how we are going to make the world better.

11:54 And so what I've loved about organizing and doing this work is that I found other people who think and act like me.

11:59 I have found my best friends.

12:01 I have found jobs through this, but I found people.

12:03 I found my best friends.

12:04 I have found jobs through this.

12:05 But I've found people who I want to spend my free time with.

12:06 I think that's really the best thing about organizing.

12:09 Yes, I've made the world better for a lot of people working on important issues, but

12:13 I've also found people who I like hanging around with.

12:16 Once we're past pandemic, that's kind of the most important thing, I think, is just finding

12:22 like-minded people that you want to spend time with.

12:26 So that's just a little bit about me and what I work on, and happy to answer any questions.

12:32 [Rahman] Please put your questions in the chat.

12:37 I'm going to go back to sharing.

12:38 We're going to hear from our next speaker, and then we'll do all of the questions.

12:42 Thank you so much, Mehreen, for speaking.

12:47 So next we have Isaac, who is actually a Suffolk alum.

12:51 He graduated in 2017, and he has experience in community organizing.

12:57 Also, he's a big advocate for social justice.

13:01 So I will let him introduce himself and take it away.

13:05 [Isaac Boateng] Thank you, Syeeda.

13:08 Good evening, everybody.

13:10 My name is Isaac Boateng, born in Ghana, raised in Western Massachusetts.

13:16 So any Worcester folks out there, hey.

13:20 Parents immigrated to the US from Ghana.

13:24 I'm currently living in the DC Metro area, working in DC government as a special assistant

13:31 to the director of DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs.

13:36 When I think about organizing and I think about the number of people that show up, I

13:42 think about what's going on in your community and how effective you can make that happen.

13:50 When I was a sophomore in high school, I started my own basketball program in the city of Worcester,

13:56 working with all youth from all around the city, engaging them on how to advocate for

14:03 themselves, but also how they can morally just step up to ask their elected officials

14:09 what are they doing to make a difference in their community.

14:11 But primarily, I'm a Ghanaian. I'm from Ghana.

14:15 So in Worcester, there's a large population of Ghanaians in Worcester.

14:19 Most of my players that played for me were all from Ghana and Nigeria.

14:24 So when I think about organizing, I think about the fact that as an African, what are we doing to engage?

14:31 What are we doing to actually speak to our leaders and to bring solutions to them?

14:39 So I wanted to get all the African community to be civically engaged in our system by first,

14:45 because for most parents, their kids were placed in ESL classes, despite that Ghanaians

14:53 Nigerians were colonized by the British.

14:57 But they could not get a system, right?

14:59 I'm an immigrant. I'm a proud immigrant.

15:01 So when I first came here, I did not understand how to navigate a system.

15:06 So what I did was I formed the African Council with many leaders from Worcester.

15:12 The topic of the conversation was to teach our African community of who the leaders are, right?

15:19 Because at some point, right, you have leaders coming in the community, asking questions,

15:23 asking for your vote, asking, "Hey, I need your support."

15:27 But as Africans, we were like, "Okay, we're going to vote for them. We'll vote. We'll support."

15:32 But we have to educate them on why they vote for that person and also ask questions to

15:37 the leaders and also teaching them about their rights, right?

15:42 Because as an immigrant, you get scared.

15:44 You get scared no matter who comes to your door.

15:47 I know definitely of folks who are doing the census and door-knocking during this election.

15:53 Folks were scared.

15:54 So it was governed by the fact that we had to teach them what their rights are.

16:00 But also, I also did a Get Out and Vote for a lot of Africans.

16:06 Because Worcester has so many Ghanaians in Worcester, all our leaders came together.

16:13 It was unified together, where we asked questions.

16:19 I worked on campaigns, right?

16:21 Organizing campaigns, ensuring the fact that not just my folks were heard, but making sure

16:28 that youth, black and brown youth are heard, showing the fact that gathering, just organizing,

16:35 it's not just because you want to strive for something.

16:39 It's a passion. It's what you want to do. It's what drives you to success.

16:44 So it was the fact that when I worked on campaigns, I'd say, "Young people, we've got to come together.

16:51 We have to come together, and we have to ensure the fact that whoever we elect, we hold them accountable."

16:56 So when you organize, you have to build on a purpose, a foundation of what you're going for, right?

16:58 So for me, when I organize, I look at the fact of, okay, healthcare is one of my big topics, right?

17:00 Healthcare, immigration, and education, right?

17:01 If we look at these three things, these three topics, all those topics are all seen that

17:02 as black and brown and even immigrants, they're debated.

17:03 So when I think about organizing, how I got involved was I made sure to go and talk to

17:04 my elected officials, because I know for a fact that they came to my community and they came and preached to me.

17:06 So it was the fact that when I worked on campaigns, I'd say, "Young people, we've got to come together.

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17:23 So when I think about organizing, how I got involved was I made sure to go and talk to

17:29 my elected officials, because I know for a fact that they came to my community and they came and preached to me.

17:34 So I want to hold them accountable and ask them, "Hey, what are you doing about the grocery

17:41 stores that are not in my neighborhood?

17:43 What are you doing about the officer who brutalize this innocent black or brown kid?

17:50 What are you doing for the purpose of education, of getting books, bringing technology, educating

17:58 us about what's going on?"

18:01 So when I think about that, I think about me.

18:05 I came when I was six years old, and not everybody I know knew exactly how to organize.

18:16 I started just as a young kid working on the governor's campaign, Deval Patrick's campaign,

18:22 and gathering all the Africans together.

18:26 At the end of the day, we had a voice. We had a voice.

18:31 The governor, Deval Patrick, made African Day on June 15th, recognized all Africans' diaspora in the state.

18:40 That's the power of voice. That's the power of bringing people together.

18:45 And so my advice I'll say is that the world is run by those who show up right.

18:52 And so- so I, so me and Mehreen can sit here and preach

18:56 to you and talk to you but I say to you is that I say to you is that you got to be a

19:02 go-getter right, because if you preach the- if you preach you got to talk too, right you're got to do the walk too.

19:06 So my advice I would say is that the road is run by those who show up, right?

19:07 So me and Mehreen can sit here and preach to you and talk to you.

19:09 But I say to you is that you've got to be a go-getter, right?

19:10 Because if you preach, you've got to do the talk, too, right?

19:11 You have to walk, too.

19:12 So when I think about organizing, I think about what's passionate about me and also

19:15 results-driven and holding your elected officials accountable.

19:20 Please do not shy away from just because they have a D next to the name or an R next to

19:25 their name, you've got to just say, "We're going to support them."

19:26 Hold them accountable, because you know what?

19:27 At the end of the day, they are the ones who show up to your door and ask for your vote.

19:32 So that's what I'll leave it at.

19:36 [Finn] Thank you for that, and thank you both so much for coming to speak.

19:42 We have some questions, and I'm sure a lot of the audience has questions as well.

19:47 So if you don't feel comfortable just asking it, put it in the chat.

19:53 One question that I have is when you're organizing and you're reaching out to people, whether

19:59 it's community members or elected officials, there are going to be setbacks.

20:03 People are going to shut doors in your faces.

20:05 They're going to tell you no.

20:07 People won't show up to your events.

20:09 How do you deal with these setbacks, and how do you then after you deal with them, how

20:14 do you overcome them, and how do you keep on going?

20:18 [Boateng] You want to go, Mehreen?

20:22 [Councilwoman Butt] Yeah. I can go.

20:24 It's not easy.

20:25 If this work was easy, we'd like, "Problem solved," and we'd move on to the next thing, right?

20:32 It is a struggle, and the struggle is real.

20:34 I am a big fan of celebrating the moments and thinking about the moments in the movement.

20:41 I'm a big proponent of every step, we have to celebrate.

20:47 You take those hard hits and know that sometimes you don't have victory, and it's a slap the

20:55 face, but you just keep on going.

20:58 I mean, I think also, Isaac kind of talked about this, but it's those one-on-one conversations, right?

21:06 So you have an event.

21:07 You have these one-on-one conversations.

21:09 People are going to show up because they like you.

21:12 I always joke that I know when I meet people and I knock on their doors they do like me, right?

21:18 They might not agree with me politically, but they like me as a person, and I get them on my side.

21:24 Some of my biggest campaign donors have been from people on the other side of the political

21:30 spectrum, but they know that I want what's good for Wakefield and I'm going to work hard on that.

21:35 They might not agree with me on national issues, and they will tell me that they did not vote

21:40 for the same people that I voted for, but they know in my town, I want the same thing, right?

21:45 I want us to have healthy lives for our families and our kids.

21:48 I want our lake to be clean.

21:49 I want our library to be open.

21:51 I want our police not to have biases as they're pulling people over.

21:57 They know that we want the same sort of stuff.

22:00 So I think I really focus on celebrating the little victories, and anyone that's worked with me will laugh.

22:07 I'm like, "Look, you got 10 new Facebook followers. Let's celebrate that."

22:12 But I think that's really important, right?

22:14 You've got to celebrate all little victories.

22:17 There's not always a lot of them, and so find those moments.

22:22 You planned an event. That's successful.

22:24 So you didn't pack it. That's fine.

22:26 You had a really good playlist lined up. Celebrate that.

22:32 You take the good and the bad, but I think you always remember that movements take a while.

22:37 I'm going to answer Rose's question, too, because it's a little related about building up the momentum.

22:44 Like I said, I think this work that we're doing is really movement work and is not moment work.

22:52 So you do the little steps.

22:57 So the example of Massachusetts is we increased the minimum wage to \$15.

23:02 The Raise Up Coalition that.

23:05 We didn't solve economic injustice, right?

23:09 No. The next session, we came back, and we said, "Hey, now we need paid family leave."

23:15 Now we're fighting for sick leave, emergency sick leave during COVID, right?

23:21 We have other struggles.

23:22 So I think if you believe in the end goal of economic justice, there are steps.

23:29 If you believe in true immigration reform, just because we stop building the wall doesn't

23:34 mean that we all get to go home and celebrate, right?

23:37 We've got to work on Dreamers, and we've got to work on asylum reform and refugee reform.

23:45 The other side will say that you keep on moving the goalposts, like, "We gave you \$15 an hour.

23:52 Go home now."

23:53 I think as organizers, you just have to keep on thinking that to maintain that momentum is think at the-

24:01 You know, to maintain that momentum is think at the long term.

24:04 You know. It is not easy, but there's a goal.

24:07 There's an end goal of justice and equality and equity in sight, and so you just have those little steps to get there.

24:15 And hopefully you've built your coalition, and you get to hang out with friends.

24:18 And so, people want to keep on hanging out with you, and so that's how you also maintain the momentum.

24:24 [Boateng] Elizabeth, can you ask that first question again? Sorry.

24:29 [Finn] Yeah.

24:30 So, when dealing with organizing, obviously you're going to deal with setbacks like people,

24:36 elected officials telling you no, people not coming to your events, not gaining the coalition that you want.

24:44 So how do you deal with setbacks in organizing, and how do you overcome them and keep going?

24:51 [Boateng] You know, when I first started organizing, not every time was I receiving the same number of turnouts.

25:00 I think what really overcame that was showing up to people's community events.

25:08 I think that speaking to the ward chair, the folks who actually run those meetings, and showing up there and bringing a flyer.

25:19 Also, what I would also say overcame that was also the fact that I got the number of the leaders.

25:30 Right? Leaders who ran those meetings.

25:33 And so, I would always text them or call them and say, "I'm going to be at your next meeting,

25:40 and can I get some time to talk to your group?"

25:42 And I think that helped out a lot when I began my basketball team, when I began the African Council.

25:50 It was talking to different communities. Going to churches and talking to pastors.

25:54 You know, going to big parties and advocating for what I believe in.

26:00 And so, that's one thing. That's the one thing.

26:04 When I knew I fell down, I knew that I can also pick myself up again by just going somewhere.

26:09 Being, "Hey, I'm here. I'm the annoying guy here. I need your help."

26:13 You know? And that aspect of that.

26:15 And I know the other, Rose's question was how is the best way to maintain the momentum

26:20 of your organization after you have started.

26:24 Keep it going. Find new things that are happening. Right?

26:32 That you feel that your organization can get involved in.

26:35 Or find things that are not clicking.

26:38 So if you see like a law being passed by your elected official, and they voted for that,

26:46 and you're like, "Oh my gosh.

26:47 No, no, no," you can walk up to their office, or send them a letter, or get your group to

26:51 write them a letter and say, "Hey.

26:53 We asked you to advocate for this bill, but yet you voted for it."

26:57 Keep the momentum going.

26:58 Because at the end of the day, your organization is not going to fall down.

27:03 It will fall down when you lose faith, or fall down if you give up.

27:08 And so, always find different type of things that are happening within your community to

27:14 keep your organization going.

27:19 [Finn] Thank you for that.

27:23 [Boateng] And I think Katherine has a question.

27:26 [Finn] Yes.

27:27 So, Katherine asks in the chat, "How can I get involved if I have no experience with organizing?"

27:32 What should my first steps be?"

27:34 [Councilwoman Butt] Katherine, I'm going to push back on you.

27:40 I can't even see you and I don't know you, but there's no way that you don't have experience with organizing.

27:47 All of us are organizers.

27:48 We have done it somehow.

27:50 And I have this conversation in my town all the time, where I try to get more underrepresented,

27:56 primarily women to serve on our boards.

27:59 Volunteer. They don't have to run, but I want them to serve, because they're primarily older white men.

28:06 And I'll have friends tell me, like, "I'm not qualified to do that."

28:09 My favorite story was that a friend, who she's like, "I'm just not qualified to serve on

28:13 the finance committee," and I was like, "You were a senior VP at a bank.

28:19 You have three graduate degrees. You run your household with your two kids.

28:23 You're paying off your student loans. You have a summer home in the Cape.

28:27 Why do you think you don't understand finances, when that's all that you do?

28:33 Oh, you also manage your daughter's Girl Scout troop and selling cookies, and you manage your son's soccer team."

28:40 All of those are skill sets that go into serving to go into finance, but those are all also organizational skills.

28:48 Right? As Isaac said, he put together a basketball team. That is organizing, right?

28:54 And people who are like, "I love the people of faith. You do so much with your church group."

28:59 And you don't think about that as volunteering, but that's organizing, when you get people

29:04 together on whatever issue. Right?

29:06 And so, you already have the skill sets.

29:09 You're already doing it.

29:10 You're not doing it maybe in a political government way.

29:13 And that to me is like find the issue that you care about and Google it, and you will find a group.

29:21 And I promise you, most people are really friendly, right?

29:24 So if you really care about climate change, you have the Sunrise Movement, who are organizing all over the place.

29:32 I really have always really cared about voter registration and voter education and voter

29:38 involvement, and so for 10 years I've gone outside of...

29:43 When we used to meet in public, but you have naturalization ceremonies throughout the state.

29:50 They have them in Faneuil Hall, and I would go outside with Mira, like an immigration

29:55 advocacy organization, with clipboard and voter registration forms, and as people literally

29:59 came outside of Faneuil Hall with their flag and their pin making them an American citizen,

30:05 I'd register them to vote. You know?

30:08 And that was just through an organization that I really cared about.

30:12 And so, I think find those organizations.

30:14 I think find those issues.

30:18 Again, find a candidate. Call the candidate.

30:22 Call and say, "I want to help you. What can I do?"

30:25 And sometimes you're stuffing envelopes, and sometimes you're making calls, and then when

30:29 they see that you're really qualified, that you have all those skill sets, like maybe

30:32 you become someone's treasurer.

30:35 Because we all need treasurers, and maybe you're really good at doing the books.

30:39 You know? My sister works for a big company.

30:43 She trains people, but she is amazing at making phone calls.

30:47 She will never knock a door for me, but she will write me a check, and she will do my calls like no tomorrow.

30:53 She will convince people to vote for me, and that's her skill set.

30:58 And so, we've all kind of got those organizing skill sets.

31:01 It's just finding the issue that you care about.

31:03 So I'm just pushing back, because I think we all are organizers at heart.

31:09 You know?

31:10 And I think back to when I was in high school and did student government, or I organized field trips.

31:16 I did all of that stuff, but I didn't necessarily consider it organizing.

31:21 I think sometimes organizing is a word we've kind of...

31:27 You need to kind of be like AOC or Ayanna.

31:30 And yes, they are great organizers, but we all have that in us.

31:34 So, that's my answer to that question.

31:37 [Boateng] I couldn't agree more with the councilwoman.

31:44 You know, I think Katherine, to add to what the councilwoman said, is what is your passion? Right?

31:51 What is your passion?

31:53 What really drives you, that you feel that can bring positive change either in your community

32:00 or in people's lives?

32:04 The first step is this, is looking at what's happening in your backyard.

32:10 You know?

32:11 And so, me, when I started it was more about the African community.

32:14 But also, normally, I'd look at the nation, right?

32:17 With BLM, Black Lives Matter. Right?

32:20 Got involved in that.

32:21 In terms of looking at policies, and what we can do as a community to change it.

32:28 And so, you are an organizer.

32:30 You just have to push yourself to really embrace and see the passion behind it and go for it.

32:41 [Finn] Awesome. Thank you. Does anyone else have a question?

32:46 I know Syeeda, you mentioned you had one.

32:48 Oh. There's one in the chat, actually.

32:51 Unless ask yours, Syeeda, and then we'll get to this one.

32:55 [Rahman] Okay. So, I just think this might be helpful for young people who are POC, women, and from

33:00 a disenfranchised background.

33:01 I love hearing your story, Isaac. I'm also an immigrant.

33:04 [Boateng] Yes!

33:05 [Rahman] And so, I think what advice do you guys have for people?

33:10 I know when I was young, I did have a hard time kind of finding communities that would

33:15 still allow me in even though I was advocating for my own issues, if that makes sense.

33:20 So, if you guys have some advice for people like me.

33:24 [Boateng] Councilwoman?

33:26 [Councilwoman Butt] Oh, I was going to go to you first.

33:29 [Boateng] I wanted you to go first.

33:31 [Councilwoman Butt] I'm only a kid of immigrants. So, yeah.

33:38 I think getting your foot in the door is never easy, right?

33:41 And as POC and kind of non-establishment, organizing is to make change, and change is really hard.

33:54 That's my biggest lesson that I learned of being a local elected, is people are like,

33:58 "What's the hardest thing you've dealt with?"

34:00 And I can deal with the names being called, and that's part of organizing.

34:06 And I think I can deal with getting yelled at.

34:08 I can deal with the emails.

34:12 But the hardest was realizing that there's such a resistance to change, because you are

34:18 threatening people of...

34:22 Status quo is just easy.

34:23 It is easy not to change how you're doing, right?

34:25 And if the system works for you, then why do you want to change it?

34:30 And it took me a little bit, and I felt like I did this for a living.

34:36 But to realize that me as a brown Muslim woman, I was going to be a threat to that, and so I was not...

34:42 If you Google selectman, it is not a picture of me.

34:46 It is a picture of three older white guys.

34:48 And so just by who I was, before I even opened my mouth, people would see me and see me as

34:53 a threat, and then they were resistant.

34:57 Like right away, there was a wall of, "You're taking away something from us."

35:01 Right? And there's that meme that always goes around, that it's not a pie.

35:05 Like we have equality and justice for everyone.

35:09 There's not limited, just for certain people.

35:11 So I think we have not solved it, but I do think on some of our intersectional issues,

35:19 we are better about allowing people who are not traditional getting involved.

35:26 And I think we know that it's tougher, but we just have to keep on pushing.

35:30 I think what I say to white people, and people that are kind of from establishment, and you

35:38 have that privilege, and to acknowledge that you have that privilege.

35:42 But also...And Ayanna Pressley says this all the time.

35:45 She started recently saying this, and I love it, is that she's like, "I don't need any

35:50 more allies. I need co-conspirators."

35:53 And that to me is what...

35:55 Being an ally and saying that you support it, like, "Hey, Mehreen, I support you."

36:00 That's great. That's great. Now be a co-conspirator, and write me a check.

36:07 Go call all your friends and take them to the voting place for me, right?

36:11 And same thing with my issues.

36:14 It is fine to be an ally, and I can be an ally in a lot of issues, but what does it mean to be a co-conspirator?

36:20 It means that I'm going to listen to the leaders in movement and support them in what they need, but actually act.

36:29 Not join a book club, not listen to a podcast, but actually have action involved, which is what I think organizing is.

36:44 I share this story often, and I reference it early, but when I decided to run for office,

36:50 I went to tell my parents, and my parents are immigrants from Pakistan.

36:55 My dad's a physician and worked really hard to give their kids the American dream.

37:02 I was like, "Dad, I think I'm going to run for Wakefield selectman," and he was like,

37:06 "So what does it pay?"

37:07 I was like, "It's a volunteer job. It doesn't pay anything."

37:11 And he literally walked away.

37:13 He's like, "I don't know why you keep on doing these things."

37:15 And as he's walking away, I want to be like, "It's because it's the right thing to do and

37:20 I want to save the world.

37:22 I need to be the voice for the people that don't have a voice," but he's walking away.

37:26 And I drive home and I was just really upset because I was going to do this thing and worried

37:31 I didn't have their support.

37:34 And the next day, my dad calls me, and he's like, "I looked it up and a lot of elected officials have law degrees."

37:40 I was like, "Yeah, they do."

37:42 And he's like, "So it's not that weird, what you're doing," and I was like, "No, it's not that weird."

37:47 And I joke, my dad put together all my signs, they were my super champions, but as immigrants,

37:56 why would you get into politics?

37:57 People are mean, people are going to look into everything that you do.

38:01 What's the point?

38:06 I had to connect the dots for them, just like I had to do to a lot of people of why local

38:11 government is important and why voting in local elections is important.

38:16 I do think we have a different hurdle for non-establishment people, so young voters who don't vote...

38:27 Your age group barely gets 10% out to vote, right... to people of color, to immigrant populations.

38:35 We don't vote at the numbers, and I think it's because we don't see...

38:40 We still have to work on the value add.

38:44 Yeah. So I share that story and I feel like one day it'll get back to my dad, and he'll be

38:49 like, "That's not how I remember it," but it was what happened.

38:55 [Boateng] I'm sorry, Syeeda.

38:56 Can you repeat your question again, please? I'm so sorry.

39:00 It was so beautiful, I just like you know...

39:04 [Rahman] It's completely fine.

39:05 Yeah, I was just saying for people like me, as an immigrant and someone who is from a

39:10 disenfranchised background, I know it was hard for me to get my foot in the door for

39:14 a lot of different organizing.

39:16 So what advice do you have for people who are struggling right now who are from a disenfranchised background?

39:22 [Boateng] Don't be scared.

39:24 Don't be scared, because you belong.

39:28 You belong here. You belong here.

39:32 When I first started organizing as an immigrant myself, right, as a young kid, I was nervous.

39:39 I'm from Ghana. I had an accent.

39:41 I wasn't adapting to the Worcester/Boston, "cah," all that kind of stuff.

39:46 I had an accent. But what really drove me was I thought about my parents.

39:56 I thought about their future.

39:58 I thought about the fact that they worked hard and came to the US, but weren't thriving.

40:05 So I figured to just go out and just get involved.

40:10 I figured to just look at the man who signs the check, the man who approves the laws and

40:17 makes laws happen, I figured to go and join the campaigns and step up.

40:23 It wasn't exactly that I think about as an immigrant.

40:28 I didn't think about that, right?

40:33 I was like, "I'm American," but American who's driven to bring change and solution in my community.

40:39 Uh and so um don't ever think that you don't belong because you do and don't ever shy away

40:46 because you know ,uh you know, um your- your leaders are not there to- to hear your voice

40:53 they are um, you know.

40:54 So don't ever think that you don't belong, because you do.

40:57 And don't ever shy away because your leaders are not there to hear your voice.

40:58 They are. Like the councilwoman said, it's about the fact that who brings change.

41:01 I know that sometimes, as immigrants, we get scared.

41:04 We get very scared because we don't know how to speak up.

41:08 Some people will be like, "No, no, no, I don't want to get involved.

41:13 I don't want to get involved. I don't want to get involved."

41:16 I'll give you one example.

41:17 I was working on a campaign in Oklahoma for this Ghanaian guy, Kojo Caesar-Asamoah.

41:22 He ran for congressional district of Oklahoma one.

41:28 And I was talking to his team about what we can do to bring change and what we can do

41:32 to get him elected, and there was one particular person who was backing him up.

41:38 This person was an immigrant, was scared, didn't want to speak up, told them that, "Hey,

41:46 listen, you don't have to be scared, because if he's elected, you can ask him questions

41:51 and get him to advocate for your behalf."

41:55 And so my advice would say don't be scared.

41:58 Go for it.

41:59 You belong here.

42:06 [Councilwoman Butt] So Elizabeth has a question about some tips to organize during COVID when you can't use traditional methods.

42:13 And that's a really great question because it's been almost a year in this environment.

42:18 I actually think COVID has been really useful for organizing, surprisingly.

42:28 My election was supposed to be in April, and it got postponed to June, but I did calls

42:34 to get out the vote and because everyone was...

42:37 Everyone was home, and that never happens.

42:39 We were having 60% contact rates calling.

42:44 And so it was really, we were like, "Let's use this. People are home."

42:49 So I wasn't knocking on doors, but I was able to use the phone more.

42:53 And mail, people loved getting mail because they were so bored and wanted human interaction,

43:01 and were reading our local paper, front to back, so if you put a story in there, I would

43:06 get calls and be like, "Great article," and I was really deliberate about what we put in the news.

43:13 So I think traditionally you can't go door to door, but I think we have such great communication

43:19 tech, Zoom and texting.

43:25 Those are all what campaigns use.

43:27 I think we've gotten really good at using videos and conveying stories in different

43:32 way, which I actually think has let us be more creative about stuff.

43:37 I worked on the ROE Act through Planned Parenthood, which was to expand abortion access throughout

43:44 the state of Massachusetts.

43:46 The whole second year of the campaign was virtual, but we had events with 500 people just like this.

43:55 But we were able to really organize.

43:57 And what's great is because everyone's in this world, we got amazing speakers.

44:01 We got Senator Warren and Senator Markey to join us because they're sitting in their living room just like the rest of us.

44:07 So I think it's shifted a little bit and you just have to think about it.

44:16 Campaigns are definitely less expensive right now because you're not paying people to go door to door.

44:24 It's not so safe.

44:25 Some campaigns have started doing that, but I think we've done a good job finding other ways.

44:33 I door-knocked in New Hampshire, and we just let literature at the door and then left.

44:41 You didn't have conversations.

44:42 But it seemed to work the way that I wanted it to work, so let's say...

44:48 But postcards, when you traditionally run campaigns, postcards are the least amount

44:54 of success, but I really think people in Georgia and Pennsylvania enjoyed getting those postcards

45:01 from all of us, right?

45:02 And it reminded them to go out and vote.

45:06 The political analyst in me is like, "Was it really successful, or did it just make

45:13 me feel good to write a hundred postcards and feel like I was doing something to save democracy?"

45:19 But I was like, "But it worked, and so I'm just going to use that as a victory."

45:24 [Boateng] Couldn't agree more, Councilwoman. I couldn't agree more.

45:29 Yeah, postcards, Zoom meetings, doing the whole texting chain is one way to organize,

45:38 so I couldn't agree more.

45:43 [Finn] Awesome. Well, I think that's all we have for questions.

45:49 If you guys have any final thoughts that you'd like to share before, or...

45:54 I just want to say thank you for both of you for coming.

45:57 I know as a young person and you want to make all these changes, you see all this stuff

46:02 going on and you're like, "Oh, I want to change that. I want to fix this.

46:07 I want to make it better," and you're like, "But everything is so big and seems so complex."

46:12 So hearing from people who have been doing this and have done it, you realize it's just one step at a time.

46:19 It's one phone call. It's one meeting.

46:23 Building that up isn't as scary as it seems.

46:26 So thank you both so much for coming, sharing your stories, and instilling your wisdom.

46:31 Thank you again.

46:32 [Rahman] Thank you guys so much.

46:35 We're going to just go back and promo our next session.

46:40 But thank you guys so much.

46:41 It was amazing to hear.

46:45 Come back next week for Activating the Actors.

46:47 Elizabeth can give you a little bit of a description on that.

46:50 [Finn] Yeah, so we'll be hearing from a political science professor, and then also a legislative

46:56 aid as to who are the actors, who are the people that we need to reach out to to contact,

47:03 how to get their attention, what methods work best.

47:06 We will be doing that next Tuesday at seven, so please join.

47:12 It's the second of the eight-part series.

47:13 Throughout all of this, we really just hope that, as students, we can walk away more confident,

47:19 more skilled on how to get moving and how to get advocating and make some change.

47:25 So have a great night, everyone.

47:28 Thank you so much for coming.

47:30 As always, follow us at @suffolkvotes.

47:34 We'll be posting all the events and keeping up with that.

47:40 You can find the Zooms there as well.

47:43 So, yeah, have a great night.