

Radical, A Portrait of Saul Alinsky

Radical, A Portrait of Saul Alinsky by Nicholas Von Hoffman

There has been mention of Saul Alinsky's book *Rules for Radicals* (1971) recently in the Press these days, partly due to Nicholas Von Hoffman's release of his new book, *Radical, A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (2010). Mostly Von Hoffman's book pays homage to the man he admired, yet there has been much ado about Alinsky and urban community service projects linked to current political figures.

The view point of Saul Alinsky could be viewed as a mind-set described in the management article by Gosling and Mintzberg, *The Five Minds of a Manager* (2003). Saul Alinsky was a tough guy on the outside yet reflective in his leadership style for the common good.

Based on Mintzberg's research and reflecting on Goslings and Mintzberg's, *The Five Minds of a Manager* article (2003) one might see that the flaw of reflection is tossed to the wayside in order for action to prevail in "business as usual" and let's get on with it approach.

The point that is made in their article is that it is significant yes, things are changing rapidly, yet there are some constants that don't change and haven't changed for years.

In another Mintzberg's article *The Last Word Rebuilding Companies as Communities*. (2009) Mintzberg states, "Companies must remake themselves into places of engagement, where people are committed to one another and their enterprise. Beneath the current economic crisis lies another crisis of far greater proportions: the depreciations in companies of communities –

people's sense of belonging to and caring for something larger than themselves. Decades of short-term management, in the United States especially, have inflated the importance of CEOs and reduced others in the corporation to fungible commodities – human resources to be “downsized” at the drop of a share price. The result: mindless, reckless behavior that has brought the global economy to its knees.” (p. 140)

Alinsky (1971) from his chapter on *Tactics in Rules for Radicals*, he starts off with a quote from Hannibal and then continues with a definition of tactics.

“We will either find a way or make one”. – Hannibal

Tactics means doing what you can with what you have. Tactics are those consciously deliberate acts by which human beings live with each other and deal with the world around them. In the world of give and take, tactics is the art of taking; how the Have-Nots can take power away from the Haves. (p. 126)

Alinsky (1971) from his chapter on ‘*Of Means and Ends*’ begins with a quote from Whitehead. He then goes on to discuss Of Means and Ends...

“We cannot think first and act afterwards. From the moment of birth we are immersed in action and can only fitfully guide it by taking thought.” – Alfred North Whitehead

Alinsky asks ...That perennial question, “Does the end justify the means? Is meaningless as it stands; the real and only question regarding the ethics of means and ends is, and always has been, “Does this particular end justify this particular means?” (p. 24)

In thinking about Mintzberg and the worldly-mindset and the context of where the two thoughts actually intersect in the minds of an individual within an organization, community or

society at large. Isn't this about the polarity of the means and ends? Who and how will people be impacted by the changes and choices we as the people have been presented or lack thereof?

Alinsky (1971) Rule number one: first, that one's concern with the ethics of means and ends: first, that one's concern with the ethics of means and ends varies inversely with one's personal interest in the issue. Accompanying this rule is the parallel one that one's concern with the ethics of means and ends varies inversely with one's distance from the scene of conflict. (p. 24)

In summary the action mindset integrates with the topics described above yes and without careful review of each step in the process, managing self and using the reflective mind-set, managing via the analytic mind-set, looking at the world through the context and the worldly mind-set, managing relationships via the collaborative mind-set in the new borderless world and lastly remembering before action is taken to stop and weigh the other mind-sets of the other views before taking an action. Perhaps this is what Saul was writing about in his book, *Rules for Radicals?*

Alinsky, S.D. (1971). *Rules for radicals. a pragmatic primer for realistic radicals.* NY, New York: Vintage Books.

Gosling, J. & Mintzberg, H. (2003). The five minds of a manager. *Harvard Business Review*, 81 (11), 54-64.

Mintzberg, H. (2009). The Last Word: Rebuilding Companies as Communities. *Harvard Business Review*. 87 (78), 140-143.

Von Hoffman, N. (2010) *Radical. a portrait of saul alinsky*. Philadelphia, PA: Nation Books, A

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