

Five Principles of Conscious Social Change

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Non-violent action, born of the awareness of suffering and nurtured by love, is the most effective way to confront adversity. - Thích Nhất Hạnh

Conscious Social Change:

A Definition

Conscious Social Change is a process led by responsible and ethical change agents, who engage in their own practice towards deeper self-knowledge and personal transformation, while striving to advance positive change for the common good. When an individual chooses to serve as a change agent, the experience of making a unique contribution to a greater whole can be deeply meaningful and can also accelerate a person's self-actualization. In turn, when an individual interested in creating social change chooses to deepen their self-awareness, they have a greater likelihood of making mindful and wise decisions, undistorted by personal agenda or abuse of power. These two components of inner and outer transformation are integral and essential for a whole, just and compassionate society.

Principle ONE: Cultivate Presence

The overarching practice of the path of conscious change is being fully present in every moment. The more we look deeply into ourselves and listen to our emotions without reacting, we come to understand with clarity the underlying reasons for our anxiety, pain and fears. As we begin to see the root of suffering and the path of change in ourselves, we can find compassion for the difficulties of suffering and the challenges of change in others.

Principle TWO: Become Whole

The second principle is to be proactive in addressing our own wounding, fears, limiting beliefs and shadows that can distort our perspective and cause us unconsciously to harm others while protecting ourselves. The unexamined self has been at the root of many activist movements that have turned violent as well as leadership attained through oppression and prejudice. As institutions become ever-more integrated with cultural practice and dominant culture, they too can come to reflect the unconscious shadows of their members and the very imbalances of power that they were established to upset.

Principle THREE: Ensure Balance

The third principle is using presence for balance and self-care. By committing to ongoing personal transformation practices, we can more easily attend to our own need for balance so that we avoid burnout, but stay whole, grounded and completely available to do our work in the world.

Principle FOUR: Stay Attuned

The fourth principle is using presence to stay attuned to the changing needs of those we aim to serve, so we do not stay stuck on our own agenda or abuse our power. This transformational paradigm is inner-driven with a focus on serving the highest common good.

Principle FIVE: Listen Deeply & Leverage Inner Purpose to Create Social Innovation

The final key principle in initiating conscious social change is to listen for an individual calling and then to learn how we can leverage it to create social innovation. Bringing presence to our social justice work allows for radical creativity. Clarity among conscious change agents allows for personal agenda to make room for the best ideas to move forward. As an inherently interconnected and systemic approach, conscious social change invites collaboration with both the target population and the perpetrators. Finally, it ensures those working together are inspired by a common cause and energizes collective efforts by honoring individual needs for renewal.

KEY TAKE-AWAY

This overarching process of cultivating presence invites a balance of engagement with both the outer world, which provides opportunities for learning, and our inner world, which allows us to integrate and utilize each lesson. The journey for consciousness is something that we must do every day, especially if we aim to advance social change for a more just society.