

Some Zapatista Principles & Practices...

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The Zapatista indigenous movement in Chiapas, México has summarized many of their principles into short, accessible sayings that convey big ideas about a different way of leading and building power, which contrast greatly with repressive/oppressive methods of holding power and authority.

Mandar Obedeciendo (Lead by Obeying)

PRINCIPLE: True leaders follow the will of the people, the desires of the larger community.

PRACTICE: This principle challenges authoritarianism in the communities, and representatives who are not accountable to the widespread desires of the community will be ousted from their positions. In many of the communities, an oversight committee is created just to make sure that power is not being abused.

Proponer y No Imponer (Propose, Don't Impose)

PRINCIPLE: Make proposals for community feedback, rather than imposing rules without community input.

PRACTICE: Zapatista communities hold consultas in town hall spaces with the whole community on important issues and decisions, where people will meet for hours and hours on end, speaking from their particular vantage point and experience, until the issue is resolved or until people feel they have been heard and are ready to end. Information is made transparent and is equally accessible, so that members can participate in decision-making.

Representar y No Suplantar (Represent, Don't Replace)

PRINCIPLE: Always represent the needs and views of the community at the table, rather than standing as an individual in place of the community.

PRACTICE: Zapatista communities are run by Juntas del Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils) that are usually made up of rotating members of the community who represent for a period of time and help make decisions based on community needs and interests. The rotation is important to maintain constant accountability, democratize information, and develop everyone's leadership.

Antipoder Contra Poder (Anti-power Against Power)

PRINCIPLE: Demonstrate alternative power that challenges traditional forms of power.

PRACTICE: This is about building creative power-with from below, the kind of power that is constantly critical of the uses of power, in particular top-down power-over. In 2006, the Zapatistas embarked on 'the Other' campaign, traveling around the country and world to put forth a new way of doing politics outside of the party system. Delegations met with oppressed groups and communities throughout Mexico to listen, build proposals, and create more solidarity across different sectors of the population.

Convencer y No Vencer (Convince, Don't Defeat)

PRINCIPLE: Build power by convincing people toward just decisions, rather than repressing people who disagree.

PRACTICE: Rather than fighting nearby PRI or PAN Mexican political party stronghold communities, the Zapatistas have won over the trust of these communities by showing a better way. For example, rather than going to the Mexican police, people in these communities will go to Zapatista authorities for restorative justice processes that actually heal the root causes of harm and resolve conflicts.

Todo Para Todos, Nada Para Nosotros (Everything for Everyone, Nothing for Ourselves)

PRINCIPLE: Leaders are not in power to benefit themselves personally, but to fight for benefits for everyone in the community.

PRACTICE: This principle challenges corruption and self-serving norms within the political system, in which politicians profit financially and politically from their positions. Zapatista leaders do not receive extra benefits or live more extravagant lives for their role and work in the community. One example that creates transparency is the publication of accounts that detail every peso that the Juntas receive and how they are spent for the community.

Construir y No Destruir (Construct, Don't Destroy)

PRINCIPLE: Exercise power to build a new world, rather than focusing all energy on destruction or opposition.

PRACTICE: Zapatista campaigns have focused on making new proposals for a global society without neoliberalism, one that emphasizes mutual aid and exchange, learning from different struggles around the world, and generating new ideas and reclaiming indigenous ones to construct a viable alternative, rather than creating a reactionary platform that focuses solely on hate, critique, or creating conflict.

Queremos Un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos (We Want a World Where Many Worlds Fit)

PRINCIPLE: Strong communities embrace diversity, rather than needing to suppress those who don't fit into a norm.

PRACTICE: Especially through oppressed peoples within Zapatista communities empowering themselves and speaking up, the movement has increasingly recognized the centrality of the rights and needs of women, queer folks, prisoners, and other marginalized sectors in the struggle for justice. This is also practiced through the idea of "Caminar Preguntando" (Asking Questions While Walking), maintaining humility in listening and always being open to other people's perspectives and experiences in the world, rather than claiming superiority.

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