**Introduction**

How to prepare to do self-criticism.

I know that some may feel that the process of self-criticism is a demoralizing one. Some feel that it means saying everything is your fault, or that you are a bad and unworthy person. You might feel guilty, or filled with self-doubt. You might think self-criticism means that it’s all your fault and you are very sorry.

I know others feel they have nothing to criticize themselves for and take no responsibility for what has gone on. Or, maybe you think you did one or two little things wrong, but mostly you are right, and you’ve been doing all the work anyway.

Well, all of these ideas of what self-criticism is are wrong. No organizational problem is ever one person’s fault. Guilt is not going to solve the problem. Organizational problems include all the people participating, so everybody needs to take their share of the responsibility. That goes for people who think they did nothing wrong, too. Fingerpointing and defensiveness won’t help the problem, what’s needed is analysis. People who think that they are right and have been working so hard (violins, please) need to keep in mind that it really doesn’t matter if you are right. Congratulations, right thinking people, what good is your position if you are the only one who sees it that way?

The way to do self-criticism is think of yourself as a scientist. Your tool for making your discovery is self-criticism and consciousness raising. All of your data is locked up in your own experience. Each person knows what she did wrong better than anybody else. It’s up to you to examine yourself critically and honestly.

Your approach to criticism should be scientific. Put yourself under the microscope! Imagine what would happen if a scientist cried all day because she felt so sorry for the people who had a disease. Imagine if she sat around all day feeling guilty because she hadn’t found the cure. Imagine if she refused to believe that castor oil won’t cure the disease, refused to admit she’d made an error—"it’s the patient that’s wrong for not getting better!"

It’s just as bad as if another scientist cried in despair, "But I’ve been working so hard What do you mean castor oil won’t work?" and instead of trying a new approach, she just sat around all day telling people how hard she was working on her castor oil cure. Even if you’re right that castor oil is the cure, you’ve still got to make a case for it, prove it to other people.

The thing to do is to dig for the truth, to objectively try to find the truth of the situation. This requires that you leave your ego, pride, guilt, self-doubt, and feelings of martyrdom at the door. If you do that, you, like me, will be able to hit upon a solution.

-A.C.
Follow Like A Leader

I was Campus NOW’s Vice President for a year and before that co-organized the chapter with Alex Leader. Although I moved to New York City in November ’92 to work with Redstockings of the Women’s Liberation Movement, I continue to have a big personal and political interest in NOW’s survival and well-being. I spent pretty much a year of my life building the chapter with Alex and building a strong, unified Board to take our place as leaders and organizers. Why did I do that? Because I have a deep commitment to developing leadership for a women’s liberation movement. There are not enough of us for all the hard work that needs to be done. If we are going to have a strong movement which makes a positive change for women, we’ve got to have committed women to lead it. That means you.

Being in New York City has given me the opportunity to attend Women’s Action Coalition meetings and the meetings of other mass feminist and left group. What I have seen confirms what I thought before coming here: Campus NOW is unique among mass feminist organizations, unique among other NOW chapters, and I believe unique among mass left groups in general (with a few exceptions). It is unique in its level of commitment, in the quality of its leaders, in its understanding of the importance of organizational structure and leadership, its use of consciousness-raising internally and it consciousness-raising style of public action, its understanding of history and the leadership’s willingness to study it, its willingness to face problems head on and analyze them, and its unity.

It’s because of this that when I look into your faces, I see reflected there the future of the feminist movement, the future of women, and because I am a woman, my own future. I see the potential for great victories and advances, with you at the forefront. When I think of the NOW Board and the individuals on it, I feel a powerful feeling of love and commitment. It’s a love that’s born out of struggling together and the knowledge of a unity of purpose. It’s a love of our common vision of justice, a better world for ourselves and future generations. In that sense, it is a very unique and powerful love, a love many people don’t feel their whole lives: a love of comrades.

It’s in this spirit that I’m writing. I want to tell you how I messed up, and how I analyzed and began correcting my mistakes by doing self-criticism and consciousness-raising. I hope that you can use my experience to improve your own organizing and build unity in NOW.

When I moved to New York, I made some very bad mistakes. I backslid. I didn’t do my work, and my general level of commitment wavered. I no longer felt motivated. I didn’t want to quit, I just wasn’t doing good work and I didn’t feel like doing work. I felt isolated, in a way, because I was making a transition from high-pressure, highly public mass organizing in NOW to internal maintenance of a feminist think tank. I went from becoming one of the leaders to being a volunteer. It was quite a transition and I made it pretty poorly.

I waited for the woman who was supervising me to tell me what to do. If she didn’t tell me to do something, I did nothing. If we agreed to have a meeting one day and she didn’t call to confirm, I blew the meeting off. I fought with Carol Giardina of Gainesville Women’s Liberation when I consulted her and she suggested I make an agenda for weekly work meetings. (Imagine—me not making an agenda!) If I had agreed to a deadline for a task and no-one checked up on me, I would continue to procrastinate on the task and ignore my deadline. I was behaving like a brand new recruit, like I had never done any political work before. I was doing to Redstockings what others had done to me when I was leading NOW — you know, people that need to be constantly monitored. It drove me nuts when I was leading NOW, and I started doing it in Redstockings.

Similarly, because I was a volunteer, I did not correct errors when I saw them happening. Instead of saying, “Wait, let’s do it this way.” Or saying “Did you meet your deadline for such-and-such?” or seeing that our

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meeting started on time, I let things slide. I made all the classic mistakes. I said nothing when I saw a problem, even if I knew it was wrong. I wasn't as honest as I should have been when I saw mistakes, because I didn't want to hurt people's feelings. I didn't disagree as often as I should have, because I knew it would be more work if I took responsibility for learning enough to disagree or agree. So instead of asking for explanations, I said nothing. I feel asleep during meetings. I took a liberal attitude towards myself—I didn’t try to figure out why I was slacking, why I felt isolated, why my moral was down. I just sat and waited for someone to notice. I sat and waited for someone to whip me into shape.

When my co-workers gave me the assignment to figure out what my problem was, I was relieved. I was relieved someone noticed, frankly. I was relieved, too, that I would be the one to evaluate my work and that I would not be chastised. Instead, I was asked to sit down and carefully study the past six months of my life and decide on a course of action. They gave me things to read too—Gracie Lyon’s *Constructive Criticism*, and Mao’s *Combat Liberalism* (I recommend them to each of you). I did consciousness-raising and others in my group did self-criticism, each analyzing their own mistakes in their own political work. One morning when I was laying in bed, when I was first waking up, it came to me: I’d forgotten I was a leader. I wasn’t following like a leader.

Here I had been leading campus NOW, studying, working, supervising, a flurry of activity. I learned how to motivate people, how to get people to do work. People look to me for help and advice. I worried about how other people were doing: was so and so doing her work? Did so and so understand this or that action? I also questioned Alex when I thought things weren’t going right. I nagged her to do work—and she nagged me. When she got sick, I took responsibility as a leader and as her follower—we agreed to switch roles until she got better.

And then, when I went to Redstockings, a group I have long respected and admired, I put all those leadership skills away. Since I was not a follower, I reasoned, I volunteer, I didn’t have to worry about those things anymore. It wasn’t my responsibility. It was everybody’s responsibility but mine to see to it that tasks got done. I wasn’t responsible for “the big picture” – I was just going to do my little job—and that not very well, I might add. Folks, my eyes slid right off the prize!

Well, I was just about as wrong as anybody could be. And I had all this experience, still I made this terrible error. I’m telling you this to show you how easy it is to make the mistake I made. It’s hard as hell to be a good follower. In some ways it’s harder than being a good leader.

How have I changed? How am I working on following like a leader? Just realizing what my problem was and what I was doing wrong was incredible cathartic. I no longer felt guilty or bad. I was happy! Embarrassed a bit because it had taken me so long to figure it out, and irritated that I had wasted so much time in my trench—but I was happy that I had made this discovery and could take steps to correct it. When I hit on this thing of following like a leader, I could literally feel my brain stretch and my consciousness expand. It’s like the 1968 cartoon in the Women’s Liberation Journal *Lilith*, “My mind is growing muscles.” I can’t bench 500 pounds, maybe, but I definitely felt a little muscle grow there.

When I did good self-criticism with my political co-workers and got my eyes back on the prize, I knew what I had to do. I was going to act just like the Campus NOW Vice President—I was going to follow like a leader. I wasn’t going to let a thing slide. I was going to fuss at people who were late, keep people on the agenda, and enforce deadlines (my own and others). My co-workers gave me a Daytimer, which is a fantastic calendar system, which I keep with me and look at a dozen times a day. I was going to make to-do lists, and follow them. I was going to remind people what their jobs were if I was afraid they might forget.

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I began seeing myself as part of a team again: If one fails, we all fail. I had to take my piece of responsibility for the Redstockings team. If anybody else on the team dropped the ball, I wasn’t going to stand around and look at it lying on the ground anymore, I was going to pick it up!

I also knew I had to keep the big picture in my mind at all times. If I wasn’t sure of something, didn’t understand why something was happening or why we were taking particular action, I would speak up so that those who know more (which in Redstockings is just about everyone) could explain it to me. While I recognize that I didn’t know as much about most things as a Redstocking, I still had a vital contribution to make and I had to make it. That’s following like a leader.

I know it’s hard to put in your two cents when you are working with people who know more than you. But what I’ve discovered is that I’ve got to participate in the debate, so that my ideas will grow and evolve. Probably 50% of the time I open my mouth what comes out is dead wrong. But what happens is, someone say, “No, that’s not right, it’s this way.” That makes my understanding grow, and the next time I say something I’ve got more information to go on. What I’ve discovered is that I can have a totally wrong position on something when we start discussing it, and through the debate and discussion, my ideas change and grow with everyone else’, and sometimes I end up being the one to hit on the solution! That’s part of what it means to follow like a leader: to dare to be wrong, to dare to change your mind, and dare to persist.

Now, whose responsibility is it to make sure I do my work, speak up during arguments, to make sure I understand what’s going on, to keep the big picture in my head, to make sure everyone else does their work? It’s mine. I’m a leader, feminist leader, and so are all of you. None of us should have to have our hands held. None of us should expect to be included on a decision if we don’t come to meetings. And, most importantly, none of us should pass the buck and say, “Well, it’s the president’s job, not mine.” That is not following like a leader. That is not playing on a team. That is not caring about your own development or the development of others.

What I have found out is that the responsibility of a follower are more or less the same as those of a leader. The difference between me as a follower and those who are leaders is that leaders have a higher consciousness than I do. How did they get such a developed consciousness? Maybe they have done more feminist work. Maybe they have done feminist work longer than I have. Maybe they have had experiences that I haven’t had, and those experiences taught them some things. They are definitely willing to take on more leadership, something I’m not willing to take. They are more committed than I am. They have studied more. They do more work. But that doesn’t change the fact that I am still a leader, still responsible to the group and responsible for its success or failure.

If you truly have the interests of advancing the cause of feminism, of struggling for unity and striving to be the very best Campus NOW officer you can be, you are bound to succeed. You are the future of feminism. If you want your freedom, you are going to have to fight for it. Who else is going to do it? And if you want to be a good freedom fighter, you will have to use self-criticism as a tool to build unity and develop yourself. Only then will you know how to be a good follower and a good leader.

Keep fighting and keep your eyes on the prize!

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