

How Can the Mental Health System Have an Egyptian Moment? by David W. Oaks

"Imagine the mental health system -- in the USA and internationally -- experiences a moment, some day soon, similar to what happened recently in Egypt. What is your role?"

Below are my top ten suggestions:

1. **Everyone is a leader, and the first job of a leader is supporting more leaders.** In a community organizing model, you may have the role of a coach more than a traditional leader. What is your role in helping the mental health system have an "Egyptian" moment? (A shameless plug: For two decades, I've given workshops on [Community Organizing for Independent Systems Change](#).)
2. **Inside/outside strategy:** Government and corporate funding is necessary for some important activities. But government and corporate funding tends NOT to fund certain things: Direct action, protest, civil disobedience, activism, and addressing controversial subjects like the power of the pharmaceutical industry. These are the things we need! See our independent statement created at a [SAMHSA summit](#) last year. See how MindFreedom helped at last minute to prevent forced drugging from being top [SAMHSA initiative](#), and instead helped voice and choice win out.
3. **Role of youth and other emerging leaders:** Newly emerging leaders can be of any age, and ought to be encouraged and supported. I've been a leader for 35 years, and this is a multi-generational effort.
4. **"Complex cultural competency":** Our movement has a very special diversity. I wrote my college senior paper on it. Today I work with disability groups in a workshop called "Amplify" about this. We need to include diversity, starting with language. [Let's stop using the term "mental illness."](#) We need to seek the 'edge' between individual and group organizing, with 'just enough' organizing.'
5. **Reform is not enough: Leaders are bold:** Since Arizona, we have heard about more funding for mental health. Disaster has always built the mental health system. We need to stop promoting simply "more money." Example: Having Robert Whitaker speak at last year's Alternatives 2010 conference.
6. **Leaders include allies:** We need to break out of the 'mad ghetto.' Remember the disability movement. Plug: We now have an "Amplify" workshop that connects up with 'physical' disability movement ([click to download flyer from a past Amplify workshop](#)). Plus, we are now working with mothers and family members who speak out for supporting psychiatric survivors.
7. **Unite in a spirit of mutual cooperation:** We psychiatric survivors especially hurt over power issues. So we need to be especially sensitive to that, and maintain our principles in the way we work with one another.
8. **We are our own media!** In the era of Web 2.0 each and every one of us is not only a leader, but also the media. In fact, to get mainstream media, we often need to first cover an event itself. Two examples: Alerts -- putting out a summary of a problem and a solution you are encouraging through activism. And news: Cover an event yourself like a journalist, with at least one good photo or video. One example of MFI's use of web 2.0 is our international alert system, which people can join for free [here](#).
9. **This is a global effort!** We are now working on a handbook for international leadership, and doing a training in Accra, Ghana. International efforts are the main arena in mental health, and we need to be part of that.
10. **We need both dialogue and peaceful direct action!** We at MindFreedom have sought dialogue with representatives of organizations of mental health professionals about human rights violations. This offer has not been reciprocated. We need to look into significant activism. For instance, we are suggesting 5 [May 2012 for a "Million Mad March."](#)