# Four Roles in Social Change

## Helper

**EFFECTIVE**
- Assists people in ways that affirm their dignity and respect
- Shares skills and brings clients into decision-making roles
- Educates about the larger social system
- Encourages experiments in service delivery which support liberation

**INEFFECTIVE**
- Believes charity can handle social problems, or that helping individuals can change social structures
- Focuses on casualties and refuses to see who benefits from victimization
- Provides services like job training which simply give some people a competitive edge over other people, without challenging the scarcity which gives rise to competition

## Rebel

**EFFECTIVE**
- Protests: says “no!” to violations of positive American values
- Employs nonviolent direct action and attitude, including civil disobedience
- Targets powerholders and institutions
- Puts problems & policies in public spotlight
- Uses strategy as well as tactics
- Does work that is courageous, exciting, risky
- Shows in behavior the moral superiority of movement values

**INEFFECTIVE**
- Promotes anti-leadership, anti-organization rules and structure
- Attached to an identity as lonely voice on society’s fringe
- Uses tactics without realistic strategy
- Has victim attitude, behavior: angry, judgmental, domatic
- Uses rhetoric of self-righteousness, absolute truth, moral superiority
- Can be strident: personal upset more important than movement’s needs

## Advocate

**EFFECTIVE**
- Uses mainstream institutions like courts, city hall, legislatures to get new goals and values adopted
- Uses lobbying, lawsuits, elite networking/coalition-building for clearly-stated demands, often backed by research
- Monitors successes to make sure they are implemented

**INEFFECTIVE**
- “Realistic politics”: promotes minor reforms acceptable to power-holders
- Promotes domination by top-down professional advocacy groups
- More concerned with organization’s status than the goal of their social movement
- Identifies more with powerholders than with grassroots
- Does not like paradigm shifts

## Organizer

**EFFECTIVE**
- Believes in people power: builds mass-based grassroots groups, networks
- Nurtures growth of natural leaders
- Chooses strategies for long-term movement development rather than focusing only on immediate demands
- Uses training to build skills, democratize decisions, diversify and broaden organization and coalitions
- Promotes alternatives and paradigm shifts

**INEFFECTIVE**
- Has tunnel vision: advocates single approach while opposing those doing all others
- Promotes patriarchal leadership styles
- Promotes only minor reform
- Stifles emergence of diversity and ignores needs of activists
- Promotes visions of perfection cut off from practical political and social struggle

*From Bill Moyer’s Doing Democracy*