



## Handout - Dolores Huerta Interview Transcript

GUY RAZ, HOST:

It's the TED Radio Hour from NPR. I'm Guy Raz. And on the show today, ideas about Changing The World.

Do you remember a time where you were so scared you almost wanted to stop?

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, I remember being very scared. But I never wanted to stop. I was terrorized at my home, you know, threatened with guns and then, of course, beaten by the police in San Francisco very severely, to the point that I almost died. But the thought of stopping has never entered my mind.

RAZ: This is Dolores Huerta. She's a labor leader and a civil rights activist and the co-founder of United Farm Workers. Around the same time Ruby Sales was involved in the struggle for civil rights in the South, Dolores Huerta was organizing migrant farm laborers in California, fighting for better pay and working conditions. Dolores has been an activist for over 60 years. She actually just turned 89. But even today, she's still pushing for people to get involved.

HUERTA: I have so much faith in the organizing model that if you can just reach people and talk to them and meet with them and show them that they have power, convince them that they have power - this is such an important element because if we're going to keep our democracy alive, people have got to get involved. And they've got to understand that they have responsibility to participate and that they can make a difference.

RAZ: And for Dolores, she discovered her own power to get involved back in the 1950s, when she started working in California with a man named Fred Ross. Here's more from Dolores Huerta on the TED stage.

(SOUNDBITE OF TED TALK)

HUERTA: I want to give you an example of how I found my voice. And I was very fortunate in that, when I was 25 years old, I met a gentleman named Fred Ross Sr., who organized a chapter of a group called the Community Service Organization in my hometown of Stockton, Ca. This was a grassroots organization, and I was recruited to be a volunteer.

So one day, while we're in the - sitting in the office, a farm worker comes in. And he's paralyzed. He could hardly walk. He has a crutch. And he needs help. He needs someone to help him go down to the welfare office and make an application, so I volunteered to do that. But when I got to the welfare office, they would not let me make an application. I didn't know what to do. I was at a loss. So I went back to the office, and I told Mr. Ross. And he said to me, very sternly, you go right back down to that welfare office. And you demand to see a supervisor. And you demand that they let him make an application. And I thought, wow, I can do that?



(LAUGHTER)

HUERTA: So I thought about it. And I kind of overcame my anxieties and my fears. I went down to the welfare office, and I demanded to see the supervisor. Sure enough, he came out. And they had to let Mr. Ruiz make an application for welfare. And he got his disability for himself and his family. But that taught me a lesson. That taught me that I had a voice.

RAZ: I mean, you did that, right? And I wonder, when you think about activists today or people who are considering it, what is it that prevents people from becoming active and involved?

HUERTA: A lot of it is fear, apathy, that they don't really know that they have power. A lot of people just feel, well, that work belongs to somebody else. You know, it doesn't really involve me. I think a lot of people, especially people that are working-class, they're so busy just trying to survive. You know, you have parents that have to work two jobs. And they've got to raise their children. And even when they hear what's happening in the world, again, they don't realize that they can have a role to make sure that that just - that they don't have a role to know that they can make things better. And I think that's why, a lot of times, it's hard to get people to vote because many people get cynical. They don't feel that if they vote, that it's going to make any difference. And so it's just - we have to do a lot, a lot, of education - civic education - to make people understand that they can make a difference.

(SOUNDBITE OF TED TALK)

HUERTA: I want to give you an example of a woman in our foundation just to show you that, sometimes, people - they have power, but they don't know it. So Leticia Prado is an immigrant from Mexico, only has a sixth-grade education and speaks very limited English. But she was very concerned because the children at the middle school in their town called Weedpatch - this is in California, the Central Valley. They couldn't go out and play in the schoolyard because the air quality is so bad.

So she and her husband went out there, and they passed a bond issue to build a brand-new, state-of-the-art gymnasium for the kids at their middle school. That was a big success. Then she heard a rumor that the principal was going to end the breakfast program for the farm worker children because the principal thought there was just too much paperwork. So Leticia got herself elected to the school board. Eh? They kept the breakfast program, and she got rid of the principal.

(LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE)

HUERTA: And this is just an example of a woman who'd never went to high school, never went to college, but she found her power. We recently had midterm elections here in the United States of America. And what did we see? We saw that so many more women, young people, people of color, LGBT folks were all elected to public office. And so we now see that we have this potential. We have this potential to get rid of the apathy. And it will get everyone involved, get everyone committed. I want to just remind everybody, we have power. But in order to achieve the peace that we all yearn for, we've all got to get involved.



(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

RAZ: Dolores, a lot of young people are looking at our political climate. And they're impatient, right? There's a sense of urgency that things have to change quickly. Do you think, based on your experience, that activism and social justice require patience?

HUERTA: I agree with the young people. I think - I do think that we have to move a lot faster than what we have been moving in terms of social justice issues. But at the same time, the young people have to understand that we have to institutionalize some of these demands that we want and some of the changes that we want. So it's not just about protest, it's about making sure the things that we want to change are embodied in some kind of legislation, some kind of a law.

There is a difference between organizing and mobilizing. You can mobilize people very quickly - like we have seen in these massive marches that we've seen, like the Women's March - when people are of the same mind or they understand the issues. But in order for people to get mobilized, they've got to be organized to begin with. They've got to be educated on the issues. So I think if we can somehow expand our organizing model, you know - sit in people's living rooms, talk about the issues so that they can understand what's going on - then we get more participation in terms of activism.

RAZ: As you look toward the future, are you as optimistic today as you were when you began as a 25-year-old community activist? Like, do you think you were more optimistic then?

HUERTA: I am still very optimistic. And the reason I'm optimistic is because, when it comes to knowledge - and it is accessible - people can't hide. So many of these inequities that we face in our society - they're not only visible, but they're accessible. So you can know who the players are. So I do - I feel very, very optimistic, actually. I think we're going through a hard moment right now, just like we did in the '60s. But because we are in this difficult moment, a lot more people are coming out of their apathy. A lot more people are getting involved. And, especially, you see a lot of women getting involved. And, you know, to quote Coretta Scott King, who said, we will never have peace in the world until women take power - I see that happening.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

RAZ: That's Dolores Huerta, labor leader and civil rights activist. You may have also heard of the other co-founder of United Farm Workers, a man named Cesar Chavez. You can see Dolores' full talk at [ted.com](http://ted.com)

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