

# Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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## Love Your Local Activist/Change Agent

In today's column, I want to change up my format a bit and talk about **who activists are and the important role we play in the survival of a culture.**

I bring this up because, in talking with people over the years, I often feel that mainstream folks, while vaguely valuing activists' contributions, also **see us as social oddities who stubbornly refuse to conform to mainstream career paths and insist on annoying people by bringing up dark issues** that most folks would rather not see.

Certainly, when I was younger and imagining my life, I never expected that I'd fall into the activist category — although I should say that I don't usually use that term for myself, preferring instead something more like "change agent" or "community educator" or **"on the team of people seeking to prevent worldwide disaster and the collapse of all life on earth."** Yeah, but that last one is hard to fit on a business card....

And, absolutely, at times I've questioned my own sanity for taking on such enormous and frustrating challenges for little or no pay. Who would make such a crazy choice in this individualistic, materialistic, self-centered culture?

But then I remember how horrified and hopeless I can feel when I see the looming collective crises, knowing the pain and desecration that will occur. I compare that to how joyful and satisfied I feel when I help us steer in a saner, less painful direction. **Yes, indeed, action is the antidote for despair!**

**So that's why today I want to speak up for my team,** my fellow activists by whatever label, to help folks better understand and value what we do.

First, I want to describe the reason that most of us act. Contrary to the fiery

opinionated image that people can associate with the term activist, **I find that the core motivation of most of my peers is usually a deep sense of caring and responsibility,** a desire to stop enormous suffering, now and in the future, as soon as possible. **We are truly first responders,** willing to sacrifice our own time and material comfort so that others and the larger community will benefit.

Which leads to my second point: no matter how bad you think the state of the world is now, it would be so much worse without the change agents who've invented better ways and stepped up to make them happen.

However, I rarely see our collective contribution noted in our current identity (or pay scale!). Instead, those of us who act for the community's interests are usually marginalized, seen as just another special interest group, another voice in a cacophony of competing consumer offerings, and not the sexiest one at that.

**Which gets me to my key point: I think that a smart culture warmly welcomes its change agents,** treating them with respect and appreciation for the vital service they offer of balancing, protecting, and helping evolve the shared community organization.

Because if a culture doesn't have some people who take the time to step back and look at the big picture, question the status quo conventional wisdom, consider different ways of being and behaving, and encourage folks to learn and grow in new directions — **well, then a whole culture of people can confidently and collectively like lemmings march straight off the proverbial cliff.** Which, frankly, I think happens quite often nowadays, as my people yell from the sidelines, "Wait, stop! There's a better way!"

Of course, it's vital for activists to be responsible in how we stir up trouble, to not just complain with fatalistic cynical assumptions nor avoid conflict by propping up convenient, simplistic, but insufficient remedies. We're more effective when we instead speak for constructive change in ways that are both accurate and heartfelt, logical while also connecting with people as human beings, and respectful of other viewpoints while revealing our heart just a little bit.

But I also know that, even when we're behaving respectfully, simply bringing up these issues will tend to annoy those who follow the dominant culture's desire for only current pleasure with little concern for future pain or the suffering of others. Sometimes speaking up is inherently disruptive, and needs to be.

And so, dear readers, **I encourage you to understand this dynamic and be a loyal ally for those activists who are nurturing wise change in the world.** Because, when you make sure that we pioneering, innovating, risk-takers are supported as we take on society's collective challenges, you are joining with us in helping to create a happier tomorrow.

*Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl!" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.*

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Published in the Sonoma County Gazette, May 2011.

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