

Preface

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.

—Margaret Mead

Walk through any bookstore, and look at the biography section; there are countless books about people in powerful positions. Biographies of presidents, influential activists, successful business leaders, and prominent historical figures dominate the bookshelves. Society heroizes those in positions of authority and those who develop authority by virtue of a strong influence over large groups (such as Martin Luther King Jr.). What is missing from the bookshelves is a focus on everyday people who create positive change despite their lack of national recognition, formal position of authority, and large group of followers. In a world where the future is seemingly guided and directed by those in power (at least through the eyes of the media and publishing world), the contribution of the majority of the people who create and shape our society is often unrecognized.

While the common image of leadership and change in both societies and institutions is quite narrow, there is a growing collection of work that spotlights the efforts of everyday leaders who create changes and better our world. The successful grassroots organizing of the Obama campaign is responsible for some of the growing interest. People now have a prominent example, within their own experience and generation, of the power of organizing and working from the bottom up. One example of the growing interest in understanding grassroots leadership is National Public Radio's (NPR's) forum, where the hosts interview and give voice to grassroots and community leaders. Reaching audiences across the country, NPR highlights the activities of local activists who have significantly changed their communities through

grassroots organizing. For example, Alice Coles transformed Bayview, Virginia—an African American community—into a bustling modern town. Other biographers are moving beyond famous and/or controversial figures to tell the stories of more common individuals who have created meaningful changes. For example, Bornstein's (2007) book *How to change the world: Social entrepreneurs and the power of new ideas* documents everyday social entrepreneurs that use their grassroots skills to develop innovative solutions to the most vexing social problems. This is not to say that grassroots leaders, outside institutional settings, have not been documented, such as Rosa Parks, but their accomplishments are often seen as an exception, not as the work of the average person.

Even the media are beginning to explore grassroots leaders. In 2009, the *Los Angeles Times* told the story of Rekha, a twelve-year-old child in rural India who refused to marry and wanted to stay in school. With encouragement from her teacher and older sister, she stayed in school until the age of eighteen. She has now become a national symbol and advocate for the campaign against child marriage. Her simple act of defiance, followed by a choice that emboldened her and made her happy, has led her to create a newsletter and speaker series to encourage children to stay in school. Rekha's activities have led to thousands of children delaying marriage. The Kellogg Foundation also focuses on grassroots activism by providing research-based leadership development for grassroots leaders.

This book follows in this growing tradition of giving voice to grassroots leaders who often have a different vision of the world from those in positions of power. We also provide leaders support by developing research on successful strategies and tactics for grassroots leaders and helping them overcome the inevitable obstacles and challenges. This book is also unique in its contribution by examining leadership within educational contexts. Future generations of leaders and change agents will emerge and develop within postsecondary settings. The way that leadership is conceptualized and framed within colleges and universities is extremely important to the future direction of society. We believe that students will benefit if educational institutions foster grassroots leadership on campus among faculty, staff, and students. How better to create the next generation of leaders than to demonstrate and role model that leadership and change is the work of all citizens, not just those with titles, power, and money? We hope that this book can further the emerging literature base on grassroots leaders in educational settings—particularly as we explore new issues that have gone unexamined, such as how

grassroots leaders define and understand power, how this affects their approach to leadership, and how grassroots leaders create a strategy that successfully fits their institutional setting. These and many other issues will be addressed on the following pages.