

Get the facts. You may want a new playground in your area. Are you sure that one is not already planned? How much do you think it will cost? What has been the pattern for other playgrounds?

3. Be sure that the end you seek will benefit more than just your own group. Will the change you seek, the expenditure you ask, be for the good of the community as a whole?

4. Get others to cooperate with you and bring them into the planning early.

5. Organize your campaign carefully. You can organize behind an idea just as you would behind a candidate, with this advantage: you can cross party lines.

6. If you fail at first, try, try again. There is nothing to equal the satisfaction of working with others to make a dream come true—even if it is a little dream. Not long ago I was talking with some of my League friends from around the country about activities that had given us the most satisfaction.

I remember what a woman from Tucson, Ariz., had to say. "It wasn't a League project at all," she began, "it was something we did in our PTA in the school my kids were attending. Our neighborhood was growing and the children were practically bursting out of the classrooms. The bond issue to remedy the situation had been turned down five times. A little group of us decided to do something. As a League member I was imbued with the philosophy 'get the facts and get them to the people who will make the decision,' so we really dug in and got the facts. We found out from the superintendent exactly what the needed new additions would cost; we found out how many preschool kids there were who would soon be using the school, and how this predictable influx would affect split shifts and teacher-pupil ratio.

"After we had the facts, we put them in understandable and usable form, and organized ourselves on a block-by-block basis. We knocked on doors, told the story and left our literature. When the next election rolled around, our bond issue passed. Every time I drive by that school now and see that addition, I think, 'Well, there is our monument to fame.'"

All around the country there are similar "monuments" to thousands and thousands of women in the form of new schools, clean water, consolidated libraries, improved city charters, traffic lights, parking machines, and acres set aside for parks and recreation. A registration list to which 2,000 names have been added, or an initiative petition with 100,000 signatures, can also be a monument.

Once aroused, women can combine their interest in home with a larger interest in their community to the betterment of both. Our husbands may want improvements, too, but their first drive, as we have said, is in their own jobs.

Women don't mind seeking the information they need, even if they may appear somewhat stupid in so doing. Men are more reluctant to ask questions, because they're supposed to "understand things." Women do ask questions.

Women understand that life is full of accommodations. We can't always get our own way, at least not all at once. Sometimes half a loaf is better than none.

Women have not been able to clean their

house"—as if one good housecleaning could do the job. Every woman knows that no house stays clean without daily picking up and polishing and dusting and keeping at it.

Women sometimes are not sophisticated enough to know that what they set out to achieve is "impossible." This was certainly true in my case when, as newly elected president of the Washington state League of Women Voters, I happily agreed that it would be a fine idea if our state League (with less than 2,000 members) took on the chore of writing an initiative to redistrict and reapportion the state legislature, and to get enough signatures to put it on the ballot. Well, to everybody's surprise, we succeeded, and without benefit of a public-relations firm, an advertising campaign, or any of the accouterments the pros think are necessary.

After you have done this sort of thing for a while you get ideas. You think, "If we can get new rooms for the local school, perhaps we can get more junior colleges and branches of the university all over the state," or if you have helped to get a new city charter, you think, "Well, maybe we can get fairer taxes for the state."

Thus your ideas soar, and when you are washing dishes or waxing floors your mind reaches out beyond the house where you are and the street that you live on, and you begin to think of an improved town and a better state and a more beautiful world for your children and other people's children and their children to come. And you think, "Perhaps I can help some of these things become a reality." And you can.

Because individually and collectively we have power. I use the word "power" advisedly, although nice people have tended to flee from the word and the reality ever since Lord Acton remarked that "power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." But we all have power in some degree—as the *Ladies' Home Journal* points out in its famous slogan, "Never underestimate the power of a woman."

Lord Acton to the contrary, this exercising of power need not be bad. Recently I read some words of Stephen Bailey, dean of the Maxwell Graduate School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, a distinguished political scientist who has put his theories to practice as the mayor of a middle-sized city in Connecticut.

"Power may corrupt, but it also can ennoble," he wrote. "The sense that you, and the office you hold, are widely valued often creates a heightened sense of responsibility, a desire to live close to the public expectation, a wish to become a kind of community example. Too few people appreciate the ennobling effect of public office."

I believe that it is not only public officials who can be ennobled by the exercise of power; the rest of us can be too. But first of all we must try it. We use our influence when we recommend a toothpaste or a soap powder or a cake mix to a friend. We can be effective purveyors of ideas as well.

We can start by using the power of our vote; we can continue by joining



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