

Reclaiming the Warrior: Channeling Healthy Red Energy

The problem progressives refuse to name is that we have become the party of the therapist, not the warrior. We offer diagnosis and healing, but the patient is still actively bleeding on the table. We need to become the medic who can also return fire.

We've spent twenty years deconstructing "toxic masculinity," dismantling hierarchies, and centering care work. All necessary. All good.

But in the process, we've pathologized every expression of Red energy—the raw, fierce, protective power that says "*I will defend my people with everything I have.*"

We talk about dismantling oppressive systems. We talk about building caring communities. We talk about healing trauma.

We almost never talk about fighting like hell to protect what we're building.

And so the electorate—especially working-class men who are drowning in economic precarity and cultural erasure—looks at us and sees weakness. They see people who will write position papers while their families starve. They see people who will hold healing circles while their neighborhoods get looted by private equity.

Trump, by contrast, embodies Red energy relentlessly. He projects dominance, strength, the willingness to fight dirty, and the primal promise: "*I will protect you from the forces trying to destroy us.*"

His base doesn't experience this as authoritarianism. They experience it as someone finally willing to *fight back* with the same ferocity as the perceived enemy.

The electorate chooses the monster who fights for them over the saint who pities them.

This section is about how to reclaim healthy Red energy—fierce, protective, unapologetic power—and channel it toward liberation instead of domination.

Understanding Red: The Stage We Love to Hate

In Spiral Dynamics, **Red** is the stage of:

- Raw power and self-assertion
- Dominance and territory protection
- Immediate action and physical courage
- Tribal loyalty and fierce protection
- "Might makes right" and zero-sum competition

In its unhealthy form, Red is tyranny, violence, narcissistic rage, and brutal domination. It's the warlord, the abuser, the authoritarian strongman.

In its healthy form, Red is vitality, courage, boundary-setting, and the willingness to fight for what matters. It's the warrior who defends the vulnerable. It's the union leader who stares down the boss. It's the mother who physically blocks ICE from taking her neighbor. It's the community that shows up armed (legally) to protect a Black church from white supremacists.

Progressives have systematically repressed all of Red, healthy and unhealthy alike.

We frame strength as inherently oppressive. We treat confrontation as violence. We offer process, dialogue, and restorative justice—all vital Green tools—but rarely raw, fierce, unapologetic *power in defense of the vulnerable*.

This creates a vacuum. And in politics, vacuums are filled by monsters.

The Protection vs. Domination Matrix

Not all Red energy is the same. The distinction that matters is **intent and direction**.

| Healthy Red (Protection) | Unhealthy Red (Domination) |
|---|--|
| Defends the vulnerable | Exploits the vulnerable |
| Sets boundaries to preserve collective safety | Violates boundaries to assert personal power |
| Fights to stop harm | Fights to inflict harm |
| Seeks justice, not revenge | Seeks revenge, not justice |
| "I will protect us" | "I will conquer you" |
| Can de-escalate after the threat is neutralized | Escalates even after winning |
| Accountable to the community | Accountable to no one |

Examples of Healthy Red in Action:

1. Deacons for Defense and Justice (1960s)

Black men in Louisiana, many of them Korean War veterans, formed armed patrols to protect civil rights workers and Black churches from KKK attacks. They didn't initiate violence. They defended their communities. They were fiercely disciplined and strategically deployed.

2. ACT UP (1980s-90s)

Queer activists stormed the FDA, shut down Wall Street, and disrupted church services—not because they enjoyed chaos, but because *people were dying* and the government was letting it happen. They were fierce, confrontational, and relentless. They saved lives.

3. Standing Rock Water Protectors (2016)

Indigenous-led coalition physically put their bodies between bulldozers and sacred land. They built camps, organized patrols, and held the line for months against militarized police. They didn't attack. They *defended*.

4. Chicago's "Migra Watch" (2025)

Neighbors trained to spot ICE vehicles, blow whistles, form human barriers around targets, and livestream the raids in real time. They chased ICE out of their neighborhood through sheer numbers and coordination. No violence. Just fierce, collective protection.

In every case: The force was defensive, disciplined, and deployed to protect the vulnerable from a stronger aggressor.

This is what progressives need to learn to embody.

Why Progressives Fear Red (and Why That's Killing Us)

The legitimate fear: Red energy, unbound and undisciplined, becomes fascism. It becomes the mob. It becomes the authoritarian strongman who crushes dissent.

The strategic error: Believing that the *absence* of Red energy prevents fascism.

It doesn't. It just ensures that when fascism arrives, we're unprepared to fight it.

Here's what actually happens when progressives refuse to embody healthy Red:

1. **Working-class voters seeking protection flock to right-wing authoritarians** who at least promise to fight for them, even if dishonestly.
2. **Movements get steamrolled by state violence** because they prioritize aesthetics ("we're peaceful!") over tactical effectiveness.
3. **Organizers burn out** because they're trying to do care work and trauma healing *while still under assault*, without the protective firepower to stop the bleeding first.
4. **The culture becomes effete and ineffectual**, vulnerable to any demagogue willing to project strength.

The antidote is not to suppress Red. The antidote is to train it, discipline it, and aim it at the right targets.

Training Healthy Red: Three Exercises for Movements

Exercise 1: The Boundary-Setting Practice

Purpose: Learn to assert power without apology or shame.

How:

1. Identify one concrete harm happening in your community (evictions, wage theft, deportations, pollution).
2. Name the actor causing the harm (specific landlord, specific corporation, specific agency).
3. As a group, craft a **one-sentence ultimatum**: "Stop [specific harm] by [specific date], or we will [specific escalating action]."
4. Practice delivering this sentence out loud. No hedging. No "we'd appreciate if..." No apologizing. Just clear, firm power.
5. Notice what happens in your body when you say it without softening. Does it feel scary? Good. That's the edge.

Debrief:

- Did you feel the impulse to soften it, to make it nicer, to couch it in "I statements"?
 - What would change if you could hold this level of clarity and force without guilt?
-

Exercise 2: The "Who Would You Fight For?" Reflection

Purpose: Connect to the protective instinct underneath political work.

How:

1. Sit quietly. Picture someone you love—a child, a partner, a friend, a neighbor—facing a threat. An eviction. A deportation. A medical bankruptcy.
2. Now picture yourself physically standing between them and the threat. Not debating. Not processing. Just *standing there*, immovable.
3. Feel what arises. Anger? Resolve? Ferocity? That's healthy Red.
4. Now ask: "What am I currently unwilling to do to protect them?"
 - Confront a landlord?
 - Occupy a building?
 - Block a road?
 - Get arrested?
5. Name the line. Then ask: "What would it take for me to cross it?"

Debrief:

- Where is your protective instinct strong, and where does it collapse?
 - What story are you telling yourself about "appropriate" tactics that might be limiting your effectiveness?
-

Exercise 3: The Disciplined Escalation Drill

Purpose: Practice fierce action that stays strategic, not reactive.

Important: This is a training in collective discipline and somatic regulation, not a call to violence. The goal is to practice holding formation and strategic focus under pressure, within the bounds of the law and your group's risk tolerance.

Scenario: Your group is facing a threat (eviction, raid, workplace closure). You need to escalate your response without losing discipline.

The Drill (Role-Play):

1. **Round 1 (Defensive):** Practice forming a human barrier, linking arms, holding the line. No one moves unless the whole line moves. Feel the collective solidity.
2. **Round 2 (De-escalation):** Practice responding to provocation (someone shoves, someone yells) without breaking formation or retaliating. Breathe. Hold. Redirect.
3. **Round 3 (Controlled Escalation):** Practice advancing—slowly, steadily, as a unit—to reclaim space. Not a charge. A disciplined push.

Debrief:

- Could you feel the difference between reactive chaos and disciplined force?
 - What made it possible to hold formation under pressure?
 - How does this differ from what most protests look and feel like?
-

Historical Models: When Red Energy Served Liberation

1. The Black Panthers' Breakfast Program (and Armed Patrols)

The Panthers are remembered for the guns. But the guns *enabled* the community programs. They patrolled Black neighborhoods to stop police brutality. The visible show of force—legal, disciplined, trained—detected violence and created the safety needed to run free breakfast programs, health clinics, and schools.

The lesson: Protection and care aren't opposites. Protection *creates the container* for care.

2. The Solidarity Movement (Poland, 1980s)

Shipyard workers in Gdańsk went on strike. The government sent in tanks. But Solidarity was *disciplined*. They occupied the shipyard, yes. But they also organized food, healthcare, communication networks, and clear demands. They didn't riot. They built parallel power—and they were willing to hold the line, physically, for *months*.

The lesson: Disciplined Red energy, combined with logistical sophistication, can outlast state violence.

3. The Battle of Blair Mountain (1921)

10,000 coal miners, many of them armed veterans, marched on West Virginia to fight for union recognition against company thugs and private militias. It was the largest armed uprising in U.S. history since the Civil War. They lost the battle but won the war—public opinion shifted, and labor

organizing surged in the following decade.

The lesson: Sometimes the willingness to *risk everything* publicly, fiercely, and collectively changes the landscape even when you lose the immediate fight.

4. The 2023 UAW Stand-Up Strike

The United Auto Workers' strategy wasn't a single mass walkout, but targeted, escalating strikes that kept the Big Three automakers off-balance. It was disciplined, strategic, and fiercely effective. They didn't just protest; they wielded their economic power with surgical precision, winning historic contracts including 25% wage increases and the right to strike over plant closures.

The lesson: Healthy Red in a modern, organized labor context. Disciplined escalation, strategic targeting, and the willingness to sustain the fight until victory.

What This Means for Your Organizing

1. Stop Apologizing for Power

If your group wins a fight—stops an eviction, wins a contract, defeats a harmful policy—don't hedge it with "we were just doing what we had to do" or "we're grateful to everyone who made this possible."

Claim it. Celebrate it. Say: "**We fought. We won. They tried to stop us. We were stronger.**"

Let people feel powerful. Let people feel *victorious*. That feeling is the medicine that cures learned helplessness.

2. Be Willing to Make Enemies

You cannot build transformative power while staying friends with everyone. If your campaign hasn't pissed off anyone with actual power, you're not a threat.

The test: Are extractive forces spending money and resources to defeat you? If yes, you're doing it right. If no, you're still in the "safe activism" zone.

3. Train for Physical Courage

Most organizers are terrified of confrontation. That's normal. But it's also trainable.

- Run confrontation drills. Practice getting yelled at. Practice holding the line under pressure.
- Do physical training together—martial arts, boxing, obstacle courses. Not because you'll fight cops, but because your body needs to learn: "*I can face a threat and not collapse.*"
- Build the collective muscle memory of standing together under pressure.

4. Channel Rage, Don't Suppress It

People are furious. They *should* be furious. The old progressive instinct is to process that rage through endless talking circles until it becomes "productive dialogue."

Don't.

Channel the rage directly into *action*. Point it at the right target (the landlord, the boss, the policy-maker) and unleash it strategically. Rage is fuel. Use it.

But also: Train people to come *down* from rage after the action. Celebrate the win. Debrief what worked. Don't let people stay in sympathetic overdrive. That's how movements burn out.

The Inoculation: Responding to the Populist Voice

Go back and reread Voice 2 (The Populist). He says:

"I don't want your pity. I don't want your policy white papers. I want my status back. With interest."

Here's the Red response he actually needs to hear:

"You're right. You've been disrespected, ignored, and betrayed by people who should have fought for you. So here's what we're going to do:

We're going to build a union that can't be broken. We're going to stop the evictions and the deportations and the medical bankruptcies—not by asking nicely, but by making it too costly for them to continue.

We're going to make them fear us the way you've feared them. We're going to win, and we're going to make sure everyone knows we won because we were stronger, smarter, and more committed than they were.

You don't need to apologize for anything. You don't need to 'evolve.' You need to fight. And we're asking you to fight with us, not against us.

The oligarchs who gutted your factory and bought your politicians? They're our enemy too. Let's beat them together."

That's the energy. Not pity. Not shame. **Fierce solidarity and a common enemy.**

Facilitator's Guide

Time: 90 minutes

Materials: Open space for movement, whiteboards

Structure:

1. **(20 min)** Lecture/discussion on Protection vs. Domination matrix
2. **(20 min)** Exercise 1: Boundary-Setting Practice
3. **(20 min)** Exercise 2: "Who Would You Fight For?" Reflection
4. **(20 min)** Exercise 3: Disciplined Escalation Drill
5. **(10 min)** Debrief: What changed in your body? What became possible?

Discussion Questions:

- Where do you feel Red energy in your own organizing work?
- Where do you suppress it? Why?
- What would change if you let yourself be fiercer?
- How do we ensure Red stays protective and doesn't become domineering?

Warning: This work will bring up discomfort, especially for people who've been harmed by unhealthy Red (authoritarianism, abuse, violence). Create space for people to name that and opt out of the physical exercises if needed.

The Bottom Line

The electorate doesn't choose weakness. Ever.

If progressives refuse to embody strength—fierce, protective, unapologetic strength—voters will choose whoever does, even if that person is a fascist.

We don't need to become the monster. But we do need to become the warriors.

The ones who fight like hell. The ones who protect fiercely. The ones who win.

This energy is the prerequisite. Now, let's move to Section 6 and learn the sequence for turning it into victory.