

with his community to know his work is on the right track: ‘Being directly connected with ordinary people gives me much more confidence in what I am trying to do.’\* So when it comes down to it, being a normal person and having the ability to recognise and understand what needs to change on a fundamental level is critical. Because it’s how activism starts, and, as we all know, starting is the hardest part.

So many of us are born with privilege, in myriad forms, and although the ability and belief necessary to make change is heavily (I repeat: heavily) informed by privilege, there is not one ‘type’ of person who can make change, and one who can’t. There is no recipe for an activist. It’s the one thing we all have in common: we are all capable of making our societies, and therefore our world, a better place. All of us. For too long, we’ve allowed that power to fall into the hands of a select few – I don’t buy that as a necessarily effective or fair way to run things and neither should you.

Generally activism is about advocacy work, campaigning and social disobedience undertaken to shake up the current system with the aim of creating real, tangible and systemic social, economic or political change. It sounds like serious stuff, and it is. So, surely it’s only work undertaken by serious, effective, productive people, right?

That’s what I thought. Before I started my work as an

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\* Kailash Satyarthi in interview with Mary de Sousa, ‘Kailash Satyarthi: Fighting for children’s rights, one step at a time’, UNESCO website, <https://en.unesco.org/courier/january-march-2018/kailash-satyarthi-fighting-children-s-rights-one-step-time> (accessed March 2019).

## WHAT MAKES AN ACTIVIST?

activist, the word would immediately conjure up for me someone that made me feel very *very* bad about myself: a strong and remarkable character who was born to change things. Someone just born to be *someone*. When they started walking and talking it was immediately obvious that they were exceptional; an individual who knew exactly who they were. They were born with fire in their belly, a plan and an unwavering sense of purpose. As an adult, they are highly effective, charismatic, organised and get out of bed at 5am without an issue. And they don't eat hummus with their fingers. Y'know, *that* kind of person.

The truth? An activist isn't actually any one 'kind' of person. They're not a breed. They're not homogeneous. We are all activists in training. We're learning about the world all the time, and all at different levels. Sure, certain personality traits may make becoming an activist an easier mission, but the kind of people who have forced change through history have a skillset as varied as any other kind, and not every activist is a 'remarkable' person. Let's take the activist I know best as an example: good ol' me. Some personality traits that helped me start and become successful in my activism are: my empathy for others, my stubbornness (finally it was good for something), being a good communicator and my determination (see: stubbornness). But, like all of us, I am chock-full of traits that did *not* help. Traits that I had to desperately control for fear of them derailing my efforts altogether. One of these is my incredibly poor practical skills; I struggle more than most on a daily basis to organise and function as an effective