

Individual (Organizing) Conversations

A framework

- The essential basic tool of organizing is the individual meeting/conversation
- The “radical” tool of relational organizing
- Also called the relational meeting, one-on-one, organizing conversation
- It is itself an “action” – the “action” is to build a relationship around self-interest
 - Story
 - Passion
 - Vision
 - Values
 - What motivates them
 - What they will act on
- Essentials of an individual meeting
 - Short – 15-25 minutes
 - Do not need to get to everything in the first meeting
 - Close with conscious curiosity – they will want to meet with you again
 - Deliberate
 - Not limited to chit-chat or small talk
 - Not about “selling” the Association
 - Not about a “task”
 - Not about the immediate
 - It is person-centered
 - It is about listening and trying to see the world from their perspective
 - It is about probing
 - Agitation (around their interests), not irritation (around your interests)
 - Taking people deeper
 - A conversation, not a script
 - It is about extending an invitation
 - Calculated vulnerability
 - It involves risk on both sides – when someone invites you to “go in”
 - Let people know you are on their side
 - Enter as a relative stranger, leave with the beginning of a public friendship
 - Be a real person with your own story and be willing to tell your story to build the relationship
 - Leads to another meeting
 - Look for energy, cut your losses if there is none
 - ***Eventually leads to action***

Self-interests and individual meetings are about building a collective (an infrastructure) that will grow the organization and foster solidarity among colleagues.

One on One Conversations & Assessments

Effective organizing means building relationships, one at a time and over time, through structured one-on-one conversations. Organizing conversations are the most effective way to gather information, identify employees' concerns and issues, share factual information, inoculate against other campaigns, move members to action and ultimately effect positive change and grow membership.

Purpose of the Organizing Conversation

- Develop a positive, trusting relationship with the other person.
- Listen
 - To identify concerns and issues
 - Identify leadership and relationships
- Assess employees on a variety of factors and issues
- Move into action

How to Have an Organizing Conversation

Introduction

Who you (organizer) are and why the conversation is important

Ask Questions/Listen

What does the individual or group of individuals do at work, what is it like to work there, what is good about the job and what is not good? A good organizer uses the 80/20 or 70/30 rule of listening to talking.

Educate

Give factual information to bargaining unit members on issues, actions and other pertinent information.

Agitate

Why are things the way they are, and who makes these decisions? How would things be better if you had a voice in making these decisions?

Inoculate

Provide clear expectations for likely outcomes and messages that will come from the opposition. Provide factual and evidence-based refutations.

Invitation to Action/Assessment Question(s):

Move the employee to action:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Recruit membership | • Sit on Association or external committees |
| • Schedule appointments for additional conversations | • Serve as Association Rep. (or other formal or informal position) |
| • Attend a meeting | • Political campaign |
| • Sign a petition | • ??? |
| • Wear a button | |

The One-on-One Relational Conversation

- **Arrange A Time to Talk:** Where possible, arrange a "protected few minutes" to talk with your colleague.
- **Location:** Choose a comfortable location. Sometimes the classroom or staff lounge isn't the best place to talk.
- **Relax:** Begin with light conversation. (*"How's your week going?"*)
- **Focus:** Frame the purpose of the meeting: *"I'd like to get your input and learn about your concerns this year, get a sense of what's important to you"*.
- **Be Flexible:** Don't dictate the program--ask them.
- **Obey the 80-20 Rule:** *Listen 80% of the time, talk 20%.* Give them opportunities to speak by asking open-ended questions (e.g. *"What are your greatest concerns about your job?"*) and encouraging them to expand on remarks.
- **Networks:** Ask about social networks. e.g. *"Do you think others in the team/department would agree?" "Should I talk to that person?" "Is there someone who you or others turn to for advice?"*
- **Future:** Where appropriate, invite the contact to participate in future meetings, events, etc.

Tips

- People will respond in their own way. Body language varies as well. Don't be frustrated by the variety.
- Do not argue with the interviewee.
- Don't lie or invent answers. If you don't know something, it's OK to admit it and say, "I'll get back to you."
- Don't talk more than you listen. (The "80-20" rule: Listen 80%, Talk 20%.)
- Do Make Encouraging Remarks (*I See, Uh Huh, Right...*)
- Do Give Non-Verbal Acknowledgment (Nod, Match Facial Expressions, Open and Relaxed Body Posture, Eye Contact)
- Do Invite More Information, If Required, For Understanding
- Do Reflect What You Observe Or Hear And How You Believe The Speaker Feels
- Don't Interrupt
- Don't Change Subject
- Don't Rehearse In Your Head
- Don't Interrogate
- Don't Teach Or Lecture

Social Policy

Organizing for Social and Economic Justice

WHAT IS ORGANIZING?

By Marshall Ganz

[2005 revision, originally published in 32 (1) SOCIAL POLICY 16 (Fall 2002)]

Marshal Ganz grew up in Bakersfield, CA, son of a Rabbi and school teacher. He was a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Council Mississippi field secretary, spent 16 years with United Farm Workers Union where he learned labor, community, issue and political organizing, became UFW Organizing Director and for eight years was elected to its national executive board. In 1991, he returned to Harvard College to complete undergraduate work in American history and government. He is Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School, has received awards for his teaching, and has published articles in his field in popular and academic journals.

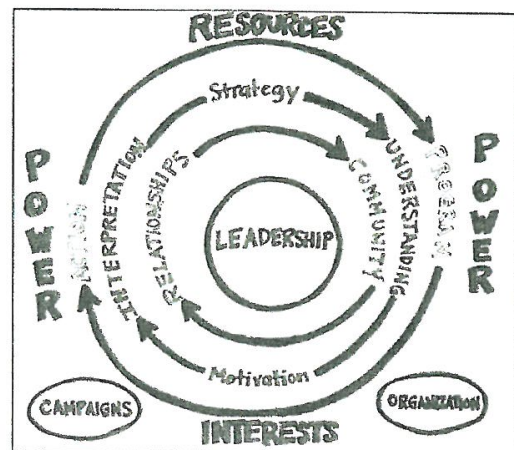
Organizers identify, recruit and develop leadership; build community around leadership; and build power out of community. Organizers challenge people to act on behalf of shared values and interests. They develop the relationships, understanding, and action that enable people to gain new understanding of their interests, new resources, and new capacity to use these resources on behalf of their interests. Organizers work through "dialogues" in relationships, interpretation and action carried out as campaigns.

Organizers interweave relationships, understanding and action so that each contributes to the other. One result is new networks of relationship wide and deep enough to provide a foundation for a new community in action. Another result is a new story about who this community is, where it has been,

where it is going -- and how it will get there. A third result is a strategy envisioning how a community can turn the resources it has into the power it needs to get what it wants. An a final result is action as the community mobilizes and deploys its resources on behalf of its interests -- as collaboration, claims making, or both.

Organizers develop new relationships out of old ones - sometimes by linking one person to another and sometimes by linking whole networks of people together.

Organizers engage people in interpreting why they should act to change their world -- their motivation -- and how they can act to change it -- their strategy.



Organizers motivate action by deepening people's understanding of who they are, what they want, and

Ganz, What Is Organizing - rev.wpd

why. Mobilizing feelings of hope, anger, self-worth, solidarity, and urgency, they challenge feelings of fear, apathy, self-doubt, isolation, and inertia that inhibit action.

Organizers engage people in articulating why they should act as a shared story of the challenges they face, why they – and others – must face up to them, and where the hope is – rooted in understanding who they are, where they want to go, and why they want to get there.

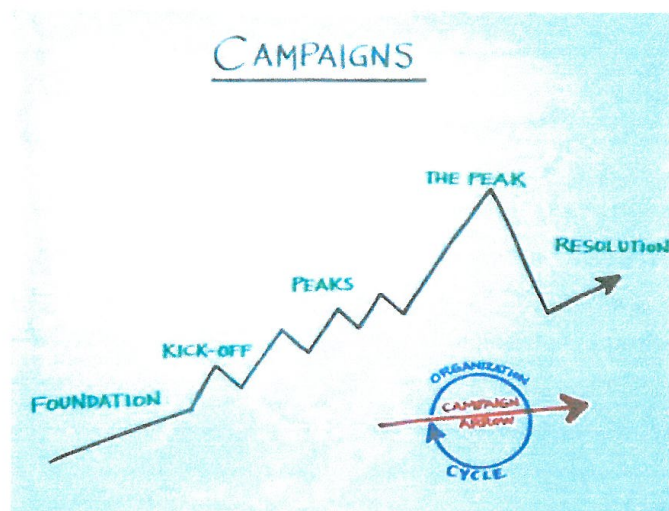
Organizers engage people in understanding how they can act by deliberating about their circumstances, reinterpreting them to identify new opportunities, and strategizing to make creative use of their resources.

Organizers challenge people to take the responsibility to act. Empowerment for a person begins with taking responsibility. Empowerment for an organization begins with commitment: the responsibility its members take for it. Responsibility begins with choosing to act. Organizers challenge people to understand, but also to commit, to act and to learn how to act effectively.

Organizers work through campaigns. Campaigns are highly energized, intensely focused, concentrated streams of activity with specific goals and deadlines. People are recruited, programs launched, battles fought and organizations built through campaigns. Campaigns polarize by bringing out those ordinarily submerged conflicts contrary to the interests of the constituency. One dilemma is how to depolarize in order to negotiate resolution of these conflicts. Another dilemma is how to balance campaigns with the ongoing work of organizational growth and development.

Organizers build community by developing leadership. They develop leaders by enhancing their skills, values and commitments. They build strong communities through which people gain new understanding of their interests as well as the power to act on them -- communities which are bounded yet inclusive, communal yet diverse, solidaristic yet tolerant. They work to develop a relationship between a constituency and its leaders based on mutual responsibility and accountability.

©Marshall Ganz, Kennedy School, 2005



Ganz, What Is Organizing - rev.wpd