

Communicating your Campaign Message

At some point in time in the life of any campaign you'll find yourself talking to others face to face about the issue. It may be informally, at work, at home, or in the pub. Or it could be part of your campaign strategy, engaging the public 'on the streets', maybe alongside other campaign techniques such as direct action or using the media.

What your 'audience' believes:

Whenever you're trying to communicate a campaign message you're essentially trying to get someone to see your point of view and to believe in it. Many people would assume that the way to achieve this would be to know your facts and prepare a good argument. But look at these statistics:

Psychologists tell us that:

- ★ The words you use account for just **7%** of what people believe (what you say: the **verbal** information)
- ★ **38%** of what people believe is down to your tone of voice (the way you sound: the **vocal** information)
- ★ But the majority of what people believe - **55%** - is down to body language! (the way you look while you're talking: the **visual** information)

So getting the message across is more than just knowing your stuff and saying the right words. In fact it's how you say the words and how you look when you're saying them that count for the most. Non-verbal communication (visual and vocal) is actually more important than what you're saying! To maximise the effectiveness of your communication you need to reinforce your verbal message with matching and persuasive vocal and visual messages.

What your 'audience' remembers:

Whoever you're communicating with will forget:

- **25%** of what you say within **24 hours**
- **50%** of what you say within **48 hours**
- **80%** of what you say within **4 days**

To maximise your effect, think about picking just a few (no more than 3) simple key messages and sticking to them. Don't get sidetracked. The only way to get your point home in the long term is to keep it clear, simple and to reinforce it. Better to repeat 3 points 3 times than make 9 separate points – your audience won't remember them all anyway!

Even if the audience doesn't remember the facts of what you said – if you come across as confident, passionate and intelligent, they will remember your arguments as confident, passionate and intelligent!

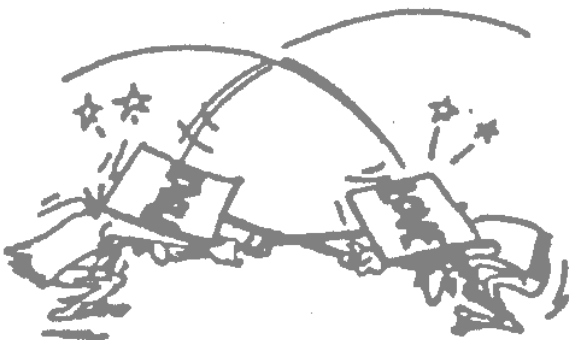
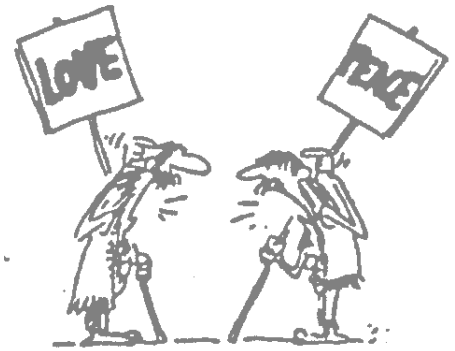
Body Language & Tone of Voice



- **Tone of voice** is vital. You know that from your own everyday experience. Simple comments or questions, if said in the wrong way can cause offence and close off all useful communication in an instant. Worse, communication is contagious – if you find yourself in a tense discussion, the tension can spread to those around you.
- **Eye contact** is an important factor in all communication. If you want people to be willing to talk to you, you need just the right amount of eye contact. As you see someone approaching, make eye contact (and smile!), but don't let it become a staring contest. Let the contact go – you've acknowledged they're there and told them you're willing to talk to them. As they get nearer you can re-establish the contact and hit them with your opening line.....

- **Smile!** It doesn't take a genius to figure out that smiling makes you more approachable. It's not always easy to smile at people who may represent everything that you work for an end to, but if it helps make them more receptive to your message....

- **Open Stance** – to appear open to communication, you need to look open. So uncross your arms, come out from behind your stall, stop hiding behind your mates, and turn to face people. Keeping your hands in full view - having your palms facing the person you're talking to helps. Keep hand gestures out of their space and out of their face. The more you relax the better, so be aware of your breathing and keep your shoulders down (tension often collects in our shoulders).



- **Speed of Movement**... Rushing towards someone in your eagerness to hand them your leaflet can startle and even frighten them. Remember they may have a stereotype of you as a dangerous hippy terrorist. You know you're lovely, but do they? If you've already made eye contact they know you want to communicate with them (indeed you've already begun to) so you can then saunter over in a friendly manner. Too slow, on the other hand, may send the message that you're reluctant to engage with them, you lack confidence and that you don't have faith in your message

- **Personal space** – Ever been trapped on the street by over-enthusiastic street collectors and resentfully handed over your small change? If you want people to be receptive to your message they need to feel an element of choice in the encounter. Be aware of herding people into a funnel of leafleting campaigners, and watch for the obvious signals that they don't want to engage with you. Force someone to talk to you and they'll already resent you (and be less receptive to your message) before you start your opening line.

Some General Advice

Opening Lines

Work on a line that works for you! Some tactics that have been used successfully include:

- Introducing yourself “Hi, I’m Matthew...”...it invites a response (“Oh, hello, I’m....”) and instantly you’re in conversation; it’s polite, non-threatening and doesn’t immediately bombard someone with campaign info!
- Ask an open question. Open question can’t be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer – for example “What do you think of the arms industry” and so are more likely to stimulate conversation (in general questions that start with What, Who, Where, When, Why or How are open). That’s not to say that all closed questions are ‘bad’, but try to avoid giving people an opportunity to avoid you by simply saying “No” to your “ Would you like to sign this petition”
- Ask a question unrelated to the campaign to start with. Engage people in conversation and then shift the conversation round to the campaign
- Some people are naturals at this kind of thing. If you’re not one of them but are working alongside one, take the time to observe how they approach people – what do they say? How do they look? Ask them if there’s any advice they can pass on.

How not to win hearts & minds..

Adults don’t learn effectively if we challenge their self perception. All that usually happens is that they get defensive. So when you’re in a potentially confrontational communication situation don’t challenge the person, challenge their ideas. It’s a fine distinction, but one worth thinking about. But what does that mean in practice?

- ◆ In terms of the language you use, it can be as simple as saying “I disagree with what you’re saying” rather than “I disagree with you”.
- ◆ Meet people where they are at. You won’t change the mind of an arms company executive by assuming (s)he’s a heartless bastard. Find some common ground and go from there (do they have a family – so for example start by talking about their kids and taking it through to other families who lose kids because of the arms trade).
- ◆ Remember that the way you look can have a powerful effect on the interaction. Is that “Arms Dealers are Scum” T-shirt really going to encourage an arms trader to stop and engage with you in open communication? Whether to change your appearance to suit your audience is always a controversial debate. We don’t have the answer, but we are flagging it up as a relevant factor that you need to be aware of.

Win-Win Communication



When we’re out there trying to ‘defeat the forces of darkness’, armed only with our stout hearts, a pile of leaflets and a banner, it can feel like we’re at war. The thing about war is that someone wins and someone else loses. The losers may be forced to change, but may not do so willingly. It’s not always possible, but ideally in any encounter you have try to ensure that the communication is a two way process. If you can create a situation in which you’re happy you’ve communicated your message effectively, and the person you were talking to goes away happy that they were listened to,

respected and given a ‘safe’ environment to consider making change, you both win. If they walk away feeling harassed and under siege, they’re less likely to really absorb any of your ideas. If you need any proof of this, think about the times you’ve been bullied to accept new ideas. You might have accepted them in the end, but wouldn’t it have been easier if you hadn’t felt under pressure? Now, of course, the whole point of a campaign is to apply pressure for change, but even within ‘in your face’ actions there’s plenty of room for one on one human (and humane) communication.

Dealing with Difficult Situations

If you're 'on the street' (or in meetings, debates, or media interviews) long enough, sooner or later you'll need to deal with some of the following situations....

Answering Questions

Do:

- Decide whether the question is relevant and worthwhile. If not you might need to sidestep it (see Dealing with Time wasters). But by sidestepping we don't mean avoiding a perfectly reasonable question just because the answer's tricky!
- Throw questions back to the questioner, or others around you. Don't assume that you personally have to have an answer for everything
- Be honest if you can't answer the question that's asked
 - ◆ Offer to find out the answer at another time and get back to them
 - ◆ Signpost other sources of information, such as web pages and briefings that could answer the question for them
- Use examples in your response to ground it in reality and make it more credible
- Acknowledge the question – it shows the questioner that you respect them and are open to dialogue – “that's a good question...”, “thanks for bringing that up...”

Don't:

- Waffle or pretend you know the answer when you don't – you could discredit the entire campaign in the eyes of the questioner. Simply acknowledge the question and admit you don't have the answer (see Do's)
- Feel you have to answer every question as it's asked – you're allowed to have time to think. You're allowed to politely decline to answer irrelevant questions
- Refuse to answer, ignore or block relevant questions
- Present yourself as an expert (unless of course you are)

Dealing with Time wasters

The obvious lesson is don't waste time with time wasters – target your efforts to where you can actually make change. As campaigners we want to bring others over to our point of view. But we can't achieve that in one go, and many of our actions and encounters are strategically targeted at specific groups – whether the public, the media, employees of a particular industry or company, decision makers or any other possible group. So stay focused and ask yourself “Is this conversation the most strategic use of my time?”

Getting caught up in a heated and protracted discussion not only stops you from communicating to anyone but your current 'adversary', but it also can look bad, and raise the level of tension in the surrounding area. Someone else who was waiting to talk to you may decide to forget it rather than risk getting embroiled in the conflict. So agree to disagree. Thank the person for expressing their opinion and assure them that you respect their right to hold it. Be polite and firm and move on.

But don't assume that only those hostile to our cause can waste our time. If you've ever been cornered by a fellow campaigner that just happens to be passing, and decides to tell you all about their campaigning work, you'll know what we mean (or any of the other well meaning but long-winded folk out there). So what do you do? Well firstly why not simply explain that whilst you've enjoyed meeting them, there's lots of other people you need to talk to today. Suggest that you can continue your conversation another time, when you're not in the middle of something (but not if this is a barefaced lie!).

Dealing with Hostility –

You might be met with aggression, incomprehension or any number of other negative responses whilst you're out communicating your message. The important thing to

remember is that these are not personal attacks. People may disagree with your beliefs but they aren't attacking you as a person (even if it may seem like it). Let's face it, in 99% of cases you've never seen them before, and they know nothing about you. They're responding to stereotypes. Try not to do the same!

- ◆ It might help to remind yourself why you're out there. Reaffirm the importance of the campaign work you're doing.
- ◆ Think before you respond to avoid escalating the situation, and make sure you are calm, assertive and using non-threatening body language.
- ◆ Buddy-up before you set off and stick with your buddy throughout the day. At least that way you're guaranteed some moral support and there's someone that can intervene if anyone (including you!) 'loses it'.

So, to summarise:

- ★ Remember your body language and the way you use your voice – relax, smile and try to enjoy it. If you're having fun the people you are communicating to are much more likely to enjoy the encounter!
- ★ Pick no more than 3 messages that you want to communicate. You don't have to offload the whole campaign message instantly. Concentrate on making contact and getting one of your key messages across.
- ★ Remember to meet people where they're at – that means that you'll have to change the way you communicate to suit your 'audience'.

For more briefings on grassroots activism, and to find out about training workshops look at our website:

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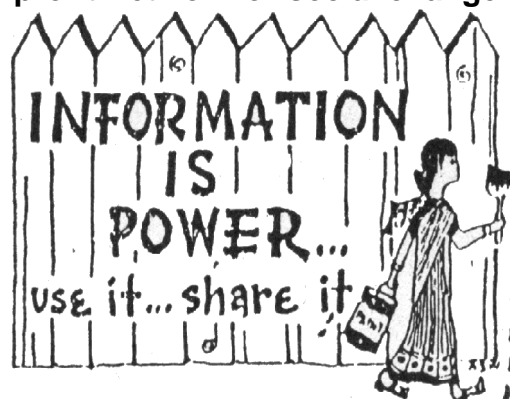
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