

12 BASIC GUIDELINES FOR CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Summarised from Chris Rose's www.campaignstrategy.com

1. Do you *really* need to campaign?

Campaigning can be fun but it's often hard, dull, frustrating and unsuccessful. Campaigning is usually only done when all else has failed. It involves a conversation with society, persuading people to take an unusual interest in supporting a move that would not normally happen. It means setting up and sustaining processes that are not normal or 'business as usual'.

If politics is the 'art of the possible', campaigning is the science and art of changing what is possible. Do it right and a campaign succeeds in inspiring its followers to go on to the next target. But unstructured or poorly focussed campaigns are hot air balloons kept aloft by burning idealism and goodwill, until they suffer 'burn out'.

So before you go any further stop and ask yourself: do I really need to campaign? Or can I get what I want by other means - 'business as usual' - can I buy it, can it be delivered by simply asking politely, or through quiet lobbying, or by trading or through politics?

2. Motivation not Education

Campaigning lowers the barriers against action and increases the incentives to take action. Education, in contrast, is a broadening exercise. It uses examples to reveal layers of complexity, leading to lower certainty but higher understanding.

Campaigning maximises the motivation of the audience, not their knowledge. Try using education to campaign, and you will end up circling and exploring your issue but not changing it.

Campaigns do have some 'educational' effect but it is education by doing, through experience, rather than through being given information. Information is not power until it leads to mobilisation.

3. Analyse the forces

You know what needs to change. Ask this: 'why hasn't it happened already?' Try mapping out the forces for and against what you want to happen. Draw a map of the problem - the people involved, the organisations, the institutions - work out exactly what the mechanisms are for the decisions you want to change.

Then identify potential allies and opponents and work out who your target audience is for each step (see guidelines 4, 5, 6). Look at it from their point of view.

Check - how will you now change the balance of forces for and against action in order to overcome the obstacle? If you don't know the answer to this, how can you specify an objective to be achieved?

4. K.I.S.S (Keep It Simple, Stupid)

Campaigns are needed because there is an urgent problem which has to be made public in order to be resolved. Effective motivation needs simplicity in message and purpose.

Communicate only one thing at a time. Use a simple unambiguous 'call to action' which requires no explanation.

5. Right Components – Right Order

You need to follow the sequence: > awareness > alignment > engagement > action

The campaign involves a deliberate series of revelations or communication exercises to take the 'audience' from a state of ignorance, through interest and then concern (components of awareness), into anger and engagement (motivation), and finally into a state of satisfaction or reward. If that happens, the campaign participants or supporters will be ready for more. Communicate them all at once and there's no involvement in the 'story' of the campaign. A good campaign has to be like a book or a drama - the outcome must be important but unknown.

Showing a problem may lead to concern but in itself that won't lead to action. Show them now is the opportunity to force a change, to implement the solution, and give them a way to act - and you have the conditions for engagement.

6. Start from where your audience is

A marketer finds out what you want, what you already do and think, and creates or finds a product that fits you.

When it comes to communication, do your market research. Say you need to persuade a group of councillors to take a particular decision about a forest. You may think it's important for frogs or as a watershed. But what do they see? What if they use it for jogging or 50% of their constituents are woodcutters? You may see a forest but they may see timber, or an exercise area. Put the issue in their terms.

7. Construct a critical path

All issues are complex but your campaign must not be. Complexity demotivates, it makes people feel confused - and if they feel confused, they will think you are confused, and not worth listening to.

Your campaign cannot be the 'whole picture'. Instead it has to be a way, a trail, stepping stones, a critical-path. Do not try to communicate 'the issue', however tempting it may be. Communicate your campaign - what you think, the problem as you see it, the solution as you see it, the opportunity as you see it - and only that.

Stick with each stage until it is achieved. Each stage is a target or objective in itself. Resist the temptation to talk ahead by giving 'the whole picture'. Plan a campaign as a series of steps where one leads to the next - like dominoes.

Try mapping out the forces for and against what you want to happen. Draw a map of the problem - the people involved, the organisations, the institutions - work out exactly what the mechanisms are for the decisions you want to change.

8. Campaign against the unacceptable

Your campaign may be 'about an issue', but to engage people it will need to have a much more specific 'battlefront'. Choosing that battlefield is a crucial task.

A campaign strongly supported by a tiny part of the population may sustain a vigorous organisation. It may survive for decades - for as long as its supporters have the energy. But to succeed, most campaigns need to attract much broader support - and to do that, you often need to narrow the focus.

Normally the task is to find the pieces of an issue or concern which are unacceptable to a big enough group of people to get the effect you need. In general it is better to campaign against a small part of a big problem, where that part is 99% unacceptable to the public, than to campaign against say half of the overall problem, where that is only unacceptable to 1% of the population.

9. Make real things happen

Don't argue, do. Events are the stuff of politics - whether formal politics, business politics, personal politics or the politics of the dung heap.

News is not about ideas or concepts it is about things that happen. Ask yourself every day, what is this campaign doing? What's the verb? Is it starting something, publishing, blocking, rescuing, occupying, marching, lobbying, painting What are you *doing*?

Too often campaigns become absorbed in collecting information or circulating it to people who already agree with the cause.

Some of the most powerful events are direct-actions, especially where these are non-violent and can be justified on moral and 'scientific' or 'economic' grounds. That way they gain widest support. But there are many other powerful ways to campaign.

10. Say what you mean

Directly or indirectly, a campaign consists of persuading others not just that you are right but that you are so right that they must take some form of action.

Everyday we are exposed to many thousands of messages. Almost all are ignored or immediately discarded. Very few things 'stick' and anything which makes a message hard work to understand, makes it less likely to stick.

The simplest thing you can do to help your message is to be direct and straightforward. Forget about being 'clever'. When all else fails (as it probably will): say what you mean. (Try telling a relative - when they 'get it', use their way of saying it).

11. Find the conflicts in events – make the news

This is often misunderstood. Conflict is inherent to campaigns. Without a conflict of interest, a campaign would not be needed.

Campaigns make news when they create change, make a difference, or threaten to do so. A conflict, formed just of ideas is of interest only to academic or political theoreticians. What counts for the rest of us is who comes out on top, what gets changed, how does it affect me, my family, my life and how it can be lived? In other words 'outcomes'.

News connects with politics through events. Events are also the things that change our views. A campaign is about forcing a change to the status quo. Conflict is therefore built into it, indeed almost defines campaigning.

12. Communicate in pictures

At every level, think out your campaign in steps, leading back from the objective you want to achieve. Create a chronological story board - your critical path - and work out how you will make that happen. If you can't, then change your objective. But don't try to do the job of the press. Don't try to create 'cartoons'.

Things that aren't real for example, are 'addressing the issue', 'working on the subject', 'developing awareness' and 'reaching the public'. Things that are real could include: occupying a tree, releasing a dove, conducting a survey in a shopping mall, visiting your MP, writing a letter, sending an e mail, speaking to a crowd, or invading the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant.

Create events that actually generate those pictures - or lead them to occur. Then make sure you communicate in pictures, not just words.

If you find this difficult at first, try involving a local photographer. Take them through your campaign plan and get them to say whether they could tell the story in pictures. As a rule, if there's nothing to photograph, there's no actual activity, no objective to achieve, and no campaign to join in with, report or support.

Pictures are far more powerful than words. Good ones tell the story and the best need no caption. And pictures cannot be interrogated or argued with. Make your campaign speak in characters and symbols that are larger-than-life. The only things stronger than images are face to face contact and direct engagement in doing the campaign.

ADVANCED TIPS – IF YOU HAVE BEEN CAMPAIGNING

Campaigning is a creative and a technical process - an art and a science. It's all too easy to get 'too close' to the subject and to lose perspective. Sometimes it's good to step back and reconsider, to try a different tack, to go round an obstacle instead of through it - and even, when you're winning, to remember that running the current campaign is not an end in itself.

This section contains three things you might try in self-diagnosis of your campaign if it 'isn't working':

1. Testing a strategy

Ideally no campaign should be started until you have tested your strategy. In reality campaigns often 'just grow' and the opportunity to properly test them never arises.

I recommend testing a strategy with two types of research - qualitative research to investigate language, and 'political' research to investigate obstacles, decision-making, attitudes of key individuals, potential allies and opponents.

Qualitative research should not be confused with quantitative opinion research conducted by groups such as Gallup, NOP or MORI. Quantitative or 'polling' research tells you *how many* people think something. Qualitative research tells you *why* they think something.

The best known type of qualitative research is 'focus groups' - i.e. mediated discussion groups run by a skilled mediator. This research is essential for getting beneath the skin of 'issues' and past the initial responses people will give based on trying to 'be helpful' to the questioner, what they've been 'told' to think about it in the press, or the influence of the group. In my experience *good* qualitative research throws up major challenges to any campaigner's assumptions about what messages are 'effective'.

A company with extensive experience of qualitative research on environmental issues is KSBR at www.ksbr.co.uk.

Most campaign groups ought to be able to conduct their own 'political' research. It is mostly a question of gaining access (often this just involves a phone call and a visit) to the people who know, and following up every lead. A huge 'public affairs' industry exists to help businesses do such research but public interest organisations ought, with common sense, to be able to use goodwill among politicians, business people, journalists and officials to find out what they need to know.

2. The scandal equation

Does your campaign rely on a sense of scandal or outrage? Often this is the case - or the campaigners think it ought to be.

If your campaign 'isn't working' consider changing your focus. Note that scandal is not just composed of awfulness. This is the thing journalists and the press usually focus on. 'Just how bad is it?' they ask as they try to turn a disaster into a more newsworthy claim of 'catastrophe'.

On its own though, an awful problem can be a tragedy but not a scandal. To be a scandal it has to be avoidable. This is the component which campaigners more often overlook. It has two parts - what can be done about it, and what is being done about it. The more that could be done, and the less that actually is being done, the greater the scandal. If nothing can be done, or if everything possible is being done, it's not a scandal at all.

3. If you've been campaigning: Are you being co-opted?

Do you understand your opponent well enough?

Officialdom (and some companies) will try to marginalise those who can cause real 'damage' to their interests, use those who have uniquely useful information or expertise, and simply patronize the rest. The latter two are both forms of co-option, which for most groups is the main danger.

Ask yourself these questions. Is your campaign regarded as 'constructive' and 'responsible' by your opponents? Do those with power to make the decisions you want to change, give you grants or other help? Do you rely on them for information? Has your campaign resulted in greater access to officials or politicians or executives but still no real result? Have you been invited to join a task force or working group or commission (etc) in which time no decision will actually be taken? If the answer to any of these is 'yes', then you may well be on the way to co-option.

A campaign should get its resources - its capital of funds and information and support - from the public, not from other institutions. It needs to remain free to act and with the legitimacy that comes from expressing a public sentiment rather than an institutional interest.

Learn the ways of your opponent. Learn their language - get to know ex-politicians or ex-officials or people from inside a company who understand the culture and way of thinking.

All too often, the government is acting not in the public interest but to keep the public from affecting some entrenched commercial interest or to defend the power of officials or politicians.