Discovering the Activation Point

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Kristen Grimm
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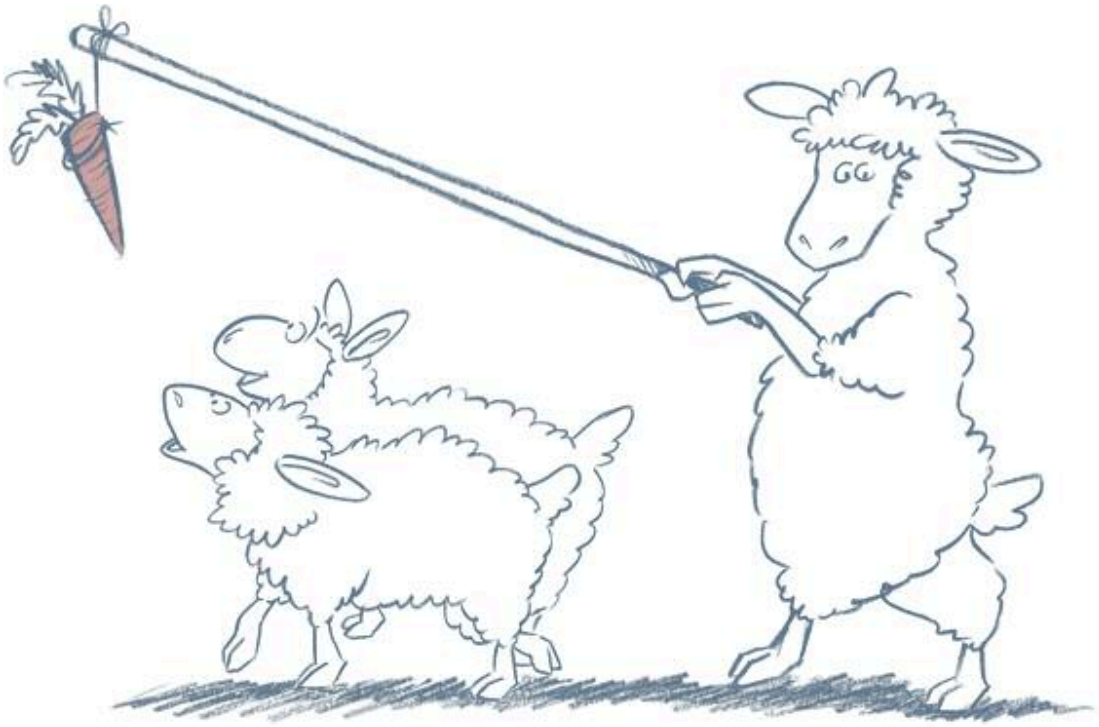
Smart Strategies to Make People Act

The following appendices can be found in the Activation Point section of www.CommunicationsLeadership.org

Sparking Will Into Action



It's easy for people to talk the talk—but translating that talk into action can be challenging. It often turns out people say they care one way but act another—or don't act at all. Nonprofit organizations frequently set out to raise awareness of an issue. But it takes more than awareness to move people. Activation requires motivation: The audience must have the will to act.

In 1992, William Greider penned the book "Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy." A better question is, Who will persuade the people to act? Each year, thousands of organizations—from giants such as the AARP and Bono's One Campaign to smaller groups like Forest Ethics and Better Jobs Better Care—wage social-change efforts. Whether they are trying to eradicate secondhand smoke, get healthy lunches to undernourished children, reform immigration policies or clean up the environment, these organizations all need active support to prevail.

Some of their efforts are wildly successful. Many more campaigns that seem like they should be winners fall surprisingly flat. The campaigns that fail are often the most puzzling—the polling data show strong public support for many of these issues. Yet when advocacy groups ask people to demonstrate that support, they are met with deafening silence—or find their issues co-opted by the opposition.

Too often, groups speak from their own perspectives, with their own vocabulary, and fail to consider the environment, language, perspective or character of those they need to engage. Without this consideration, they fail to persuade their target audiences to do more than pick up the phone and respond to a public opinion poll. Polling data alone does not create social change. It is only when people are motivated by the sentiments expressed in these polls that we see action and, ultimately, change.

In 2003, on behalf of the Communications Leadership Institute (CLI), Spitfire Strategies™ produced the Spitfire Strategies Smart Chart™ planning tool. The Smart Chart aims to help nonprofit organizations and the funders that support them plan and execute communications efforts that support social change. Thousands of organizations have used this tool.

This report builds on the Smart Chart and focuses specifically on strategies for mobilizing concerned people to supportive action by identifying and leveraging their activation points. We focused on studying issues that had high public support—as demonstrated through public opinion polls—but didn't have the action to back up that support.

It is not enough to simply educate an audience. For issue after issue, we found that audience targets were knowledgeable and did care, but often did nothing. An organization's messages must *build will* in order to *spur action*.

What does it take to build will? How does one know what's important to a target audience? What needs to be reinforced to increase the likelihood that they will act?

Answering these questions requires a much deeper look at the art of persuasion. To build will, the messaging must convince people that action is a good thing. To spur action, the messaging must reinforce the idea that it will result in something that is important to and will benefit the target audience. If corporate America can successfully get people to buy Hummers that are nearly impossible to park and cost a fortune to fuel, surely well-meaning organizations can get consumers to take a more active role in issues that impact their daily lives. Yet without eliciting desire and motivation from the people needed to move an issue forward, social-change groups will continue to find fighting the good fight an uphill battle. Persuasion can help groups find level ground faster.

Persuasion Is Not A Dirty Word

When asked about their misgivings as to persuading audience targets to do what they want them to do, nonprofit organizations all gave a similar response: We don't want to manipulate people.

Somewhere along the way, persuasion has become synonymous with manipulation. Yet they are two quite different things. Organizations don't want to manipulate people; they do want to persuade them. Creating social change means persuading people to act. Without action, there can be no change. This often means asking audience targets to take action outside their comfort zones that will have positive ramifications for them later on. Target audiences are more likely to respond if they believe there is something in it for them.

In creating this document, we've embraced that assumption: Being persuasive is not only a good thing but in fact social change depends on it.

Persuasion doesn't just happen. It must be planned for and accompanied by a set of proven best practices. The basic tenets of good persuasion have been studied and supported over the years by psychologists, academics, corporate advertisers and others. However, many organizations still fail to actively consider how to make persuasion a key part of their social-change campaigns.

Franklin D. Roosevelt provides a good example of why planning for persuasion is necessary. During World War II, ordinary Americans were asked to make enormous sacrifices. Many felt there was no end in sight. At times there was a strong sense of hopelessness. One of the ways Roosevelt persuaded people to continue their support for the war effort was to keep them informed and engaged. He persuaded them to remain supportive by reminding them what was at stake and why we were doing the things we were doing. He respected their intelligence when approaching them.

In her book "No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, the Home Front in World War II," Doris Kearns Goodwin writes: "Before a fireside chat Roosevelt told his speechwriters he was going to ask the American people to have a map of the world before them as they listened to him speak. 'I'm going to speak about strange places that many of them never heard of — places that are now the battleground for civilization….I want to explain to the people something about geography, what our problem is and what the overall strategy of the war has to be. I want to tell it to them in simple terms of ABC so that they will understand what is going on and how each battle fits into the picture. If they understand the problem and what we are driving at, I am sure that they can take any kind of bad news right on the chin.'"

Rich Neimand—a founder of the advertising and consulting firm BatesNeimand and one of the many advisers who contributed insights to this paper—highlights several important lessons from this story for organizations to consider.

"The most important lesson is that Roosevelt didn't think people were idiots," notes Neimand. "He trusted them. Roosevelt evidenced a willingness to move the public, not to manipulate them or to move toward them. This is important for two reasons: First, he educated them through persuasion, establishing a trusted relationship, and fully intended to deliver what he promised. Second, Roosevelt wanted to move people to his position on their terms."

In another example of successful persuasion for change, the Harvard Business Review explored the transformation of a revered Boston hospital close to extinction. The hospital was losing $50 million a year. Board, management and staff were at odds, and employees were demoralized. With pressure to sell the hospital mounting, the hospital tapped Paul Levy—leader of the Boston Harbor cleanup—to save the day. He began with the premise that if he could embody the core values of the hospital, rather than his own, the staff would be with him and choose to act in the context of the current grave threat to the hospital's survival. This risked frightening the staff, but he believed a strong wake-up call was necessary to get employees to face up to the situation.

He set the stage with a letter to all staff that opened with good news (proud history), noted that the threat of sale was real, signaled future action (layoffs) and described the open management style he would adopt throughout the turnaround.

Days later, in a memo following an anticipated outside report on the dire situation, Levy told the staff what to expect—more details of the turnaround plan. He also explained why past, less draconian plans had failed, attributing failure to their top-down impositions "with little employee ownership, buy-in or discussion." He then listed future actions and the rationale behind each in more detail. Within a day, he had received 300 e-mails with suggestions for change.

From this point, Levy followed the same pattern of honesty and dialogue, praised progress but was honest about challenges or missteps, and behaved according to the values he had transmitted. The effort succeeded. He successfully convinced employees that his plan of action was the one to follow.

In studying this case, the researchers at Harvard concluded that, "To make change stick, leaders must conduct an effective persuasion campaign—one that begins weeks or months before the turnaround plan is set in concrete. Like a political campaign, a persuasion campaign is largely one of differentiation from the past."

The researchers summed up the basic lesson of this case as follows: To create a receptive environment, persuasion is the ultimate tool. Persuasion promotes understanding; understanding breeds acceptance; acceptance leads to action.

Persuasion Is the Key to Creating an Activation Point

All of this thinking about persuasion led us to get some of the smartest people we know across a number of sectors to think through the big question: How can advocates move people from knowledge to action?

The answer to this question is rooted in three components: An activation point occurs when the *right people* at the *right time* are persuaded to *take an action that leads to measurable changes for important social issues*.

There has been much discussion about "The Tipping Point." The best-selling book by Malcolm Gladwell describes, "that magical moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire." The downside of this phenomenon is that the tipping point is something revealed in hindsight. We can look back and analyze the confluence of events that made it possible.

By defining activation points more clearly, we hope groups can create the architecture for efforts that create tipping points.

Warning: This Is Not a Silver Bullet

This document offers guidance, not hard and fast rules. An expert panel and teams at Spitfire Strategies and CLI examined literature from the worlds of science, commerce, politics and journalism that explores what evokes responses in Americans. Through this review, we identified models, ideas and lessons learned that might help to increase or even transform the tools we call upon and, more critically, the attitudes we bring to the table as we work to engage and move those affected by the issues we serve.

Some of the lessons are as basic as this: You need to plan to persuade. Other lessons offer an intricate analysis of principles broached by anthropologists, commercial ethnologists, political organizers and consultants, behavioral scientists, and marketing and advertising gurus. Together, the lessons presented here offer a road map to generating that all-important point of activation that moves passive audiences to action.

This document is by no means intended to be the last word on how to move people toward your goals. There are all types of factors, right down to the weather, that can influence the actions people take—if they choose to take action at all. This report offers ideas on how to harness factors you can control.

The lessons we have developed to guide organizations can be used across social issues. They will be most useful to organizations that already have audience targets with high awareness and knowledge of their issues—such as organizations working to strengthen reproductive health rights, secure universal health cover-

age for children or promote new environmental protections. They will also be helpful to groups that are still focused on generating the right level of awareness to spur their audiences to action. Last, the lessons will be helpful to funders who are trying to support social-change efforts in the field.

How We Studied Persuasion

We took a thorough approach to this study of persuasion. The experts we worked with—who are listed in the Activation Point section at www.CommunicationsLeadership.org and quoted throughout this document—represent a variety of fields. We also conducted an in-depth review of 11 case studies. You can check these out on the Web site as well. We studied efforts that successfully engaged people, as well as those that did not, to find lessons that are applicable to other organizations. We also read many articles and books, which are listed in the bibliography (also located on the Web site).

We tested, validated, challenged and added to our assumptions through two forms of qualitative research with The Curious Company, a research and strategy studio that specializes in developing proprietary research to solve intractable challenges. First, we conducted several traditional focus groups, which are referenced throughout this document as PowerGroups™. Second, we conducted proprietary cutting-edge research called PowerGames™. The findings are discussed throughout this report and detailed on the Web site in Appendix D, along with specific tips and techniques for organizations that want to undertake qualitative research. Finally, to make sure the ideas presented here are as strong as possible, we presented a draft of this report to a peer review board. A list of the peer reviewers who helped make this paper as solid as possible can be found on the acknowledgements page of this paper.

What Is the Big Takeaway?

We know that the organizations out there want to have the most impact they can. They work hard every day on some of the most complex, important issues facing the world. We wanted to find a way to condense what we've learned from studying the challenge of inaction so these organizations could have some tools to increase their impact.

In short, the big a-ha from this project is that organizations need to plan to persuade. Here are our best thoughts and strategies for getting this planning done.

Chapter One

You Don't Have to Set the World on Fire

(You Just Need to Start a Spark)

Number of soldiers' moms needed to galvanize the public to start questioning Bush about the war:	1
Number of parents who successfully petitioned a school board in Vista, California, for abstinence-only education:	9
Number of families that pressed for the 9/11 Commission:	10
Number of chefs who came together with SeaWeb to turn sustainable seafood into a hot commodity:	200
Number of members of Congress needed to move stem-cell legislation:	218
Number of engaged citizens posing the Number One question in Kansas and affecting legislative outcomes:	450
Number of immigrants throughout the United States calling out for immigration reform:	hundreds of thousands

Just how many people do you really need?

When it comes to determining how many voices are needed to move an issue, there is no magic number. However, the number of people needed to create change is rarely, if ever, "as many as possible." Small numbers can often make big things happen.

Andrew Blau, a scenario practitioner at Global Business Network, reminds us that while some issues need massive support to move forward, others need only a few voices to effect change. The number of engaged people needed to make a difference is relative to the issue at hand. In fact, well-known pollster Frank Luntz, principal of the Luntz Research Companies, recommends planning the campaign around the individual. For example, blocking the expansion of the United Nations meant persuading just one person: Joseph Bruno, majority leader of the New York State Senate. In this case, a single individual could make all the difference—an entire campaign was aimed at influencing him.

When planning change campaigns, do be wary of defaulting to overly broad grassroots organizing, which often wastes a lot of effort for little effect. Instead consider the spectrum of potential targets and select the set that can bring the biggest impact for the smallest effort.

For many campaigns, there may be multiple activation points. You may need to activate a different number of people at different stages of the campaign. While there is no way to divine the magic number, here are eight tips for narrowing it down.

1. The target is likely smaller than you think.

Most efforts target too many people. The smaller the audience target, the easier it is to create a focused campaign that will move the audience to action. An extremely targeted persuasion campaign can yield big actions and create more ambitious social change.

Human Rights First wanted the Bush administration and Congress to set clearer guidelines for the U.S. military on interrogation of prisoners in the war on terror. They could have gotten thousands of human rights activists to write letters to Congress, but there was no guarantee these letters would spark the desired conversation. Instead, the organization built relationships with approximately 40 retired military leaders who were able to do much more to move the debate forward. Once Rear Admiral John D. Hutson (Ret.) and General Joseph Hoar (Ret.) spoke in favor of these guidelines, people started listening. By activating this small target audience of military leaders, Human Rights First successfully started the conversation they wanted at the national level.

2. Ask the decision makers how many is enough to get their attention and change their behavior.

There is no need to fly blind on what number is needed to draw attention and create action. In many instances, it is a matter of asking the decision maker how many voices are needed. For example, several Capitol Hill staffers note that when a member of Congress gets 15 calls a day for several days on the same issue, a staff person will draft language for the rest of the office to use when talking to constituents or answering constituent mail.

The number of people it takes to activate a company to change its policies can vary greatly—but there is a pressure point. Michael Marx of the Business Ethics Network reports that The Home Depot was flooded with thousands of calls from Working Assets customers, tens of thousands of postcards from Sierra Club members, several full-page ads in major newspapers, and a lot of civil disobedience in its retail stores before the company agreed to stop purchasing wood from endangered forests. However, when 30 companies committed to end purchases of old-growth wood from British Columbia (an announcement punctuated by a full-page ad in The New York Times and a story on "CBS News"), it took only a few faxed letters from irate wives of loggers in remote towns in British Columbia to alarm companies like Starbucks, Hallmark and several others.

Says Marx: "Corporations hate controversy. In short, I suspect that one letter or call that points out a very serious potential company risk factor could be sufficient. What companies fear most are threats to their brand image."

Of course, if your decision maker and your target audience are the same—as is the case in campaigns aimed at getting parents to buy healthier foods for their kids or convincing teens to stop smoking—then you need to identify the target audience's major influences. Who are the one or two people or groups that influence how this target audience makes decisions and lives their lives? The number might still be quite small.

3. Focus on those you can actually persuade.

This seems like an obvious point but often gets overlooked in big-issue campaigns. For each issue there are those who are with you and those who are against you. Getting those who are against you to reverse their opinions is the hardest way to win. Instead, consider audience targets that are not part of your core base but have a reason to consider your side. Start with the target audiences that are not actively opposing you.

Defenders of Wildlife effectively taps this type of audience target in the debate over reintroducing predators, such as bears and wolves, into Western states. Many ranchers oppose this practice for fear it will endanger their livestock. However, some ranchers are interested in learning new methods for protecting their livestock from predators and are open to wildlife reintroduction programs that will compensate ranchers for lost livestock. These are the ranchers that are able to be persuaded. Over time, if enough ranchers participate in these programs, they may be able to help reach other ranchers and persuade them to join the program as well. However, in the short term it makes more sense for Defenders to focus its efforts on the more open-minded ranchers.

4. Segment audience targets until you can't segment anymore.

It is critically important to understand the groups that define your audience—what holds them together and what pulls them apart. Take time to know each audience segment by what they care about, even if these are different things (this will most likely be the case, as different groups come to the same cause for different reasons). But really knowing your audience segments isn't limited to knowing how they differ. Within that knowledge is the key to what holds them together: a shared, valued outcome. The activation point lies within the different ways in which they are motivated to reach a shared goal.

When it comes to farm subsidies, some audiences oppose them because they don't like federal dollars being spent on anything that is not absolutely necessary; others will oppose the practice because they consider it corporate welfare; and some will want to end the practice because they think it is bad for small farmers. Advocates who want to end farm subsidies can gain support by talking about this issue in any one of these ways. The key is to understand the interests of a specific target audience and choose the approach that will resonate. Segmenting may offer organizations a chance to see where there is common ground among disparate audience targets that will yield common messaging. Anti-corporate welfare groups and budget hawks both dislike corporate subsidies. Their reasons are different, but they can be approached in similar ways.

"Above all, communication must be authentic. Tailoring a message to your audience means taking the audience's perspective into account—speaking to audience members rather than at them. It does not mean losing your own perspective or compromising your values to tell people what they want to hear."

Purnima Chawla
executive director, Center for Nonprofit Strategies

It doesn't always work this way. Organizations may not find a compelling way to connect disparate audiences. If this isn't possible, don't try. It is better to create one persuasive communications strategy that targets one audience really well than to waste energy and resources on something that tries to do too much and ends up reaching no one.

5. Target the audience(s) with the greatest influence over your decision maker.

Even successful mobilization efforts yield no results if the mobilized audience has little credibility or influence with the relevant decision makers. It is important to identify the decision maker first and then pinpoint the target audience (if you can't go after the decision maker directly). The decision maker is the person or people that the campaign seeks to persuade.

Once you have identified the decision maker(s), determine which audience(s) to target by rating each audience's potential to influence the decision maker. For example, in general, using kids as spokespeople is a great way to attract media interest. However, when it comes to legislators, kids are not big influencers because they cannot vote. On the other hand, young consumers (ages 8 to 12, known as tweens) are responsible for personally generating $51 billion in sales every year. When it comes to business leaders, kids can have a high influence rating.

If the target audience and the decision maker are one and the same, there is no influence rating. Instead, segment the targets into early adopters, the herd and the laggards. Each group needs a different approach: Early adopters like to know they are first; the herd wants to fit in; and the laggards need new information to persuade them to move.

6. Find and activate social reference groups.

A smart way to go after a small number of people but end up with a large number of supporters is to pinpoint the audience target(s) that are likely to bring along additional supporters. This means targeting the right social reference group (a group of people that certain audience targets look to for affirmation of what they think and believe, and to gauge if and when action is necessary).

To get The Home Depot, the world's largest lumber retailer, to stop selling old-growth wood, Forest Ethics mounted a successful public shaming campaign against the company. Not only did the campaign succeed in getting the company to stop selling old-growth wood but The Home Depot's capitulation caused

its competitors to change their practices. The Home Depot is the social reference group for many other retailers and sets the industry standard. What The Home Depot does, the others do, too. The Home Depot is now working with environmental groups to transform the practices of its industry.

When global climate change became stuck in a debate over whether or not it was real, advocates broke through the stalemate by activating Nobel laureates to sign a statement attesting to the fact that global climate change is very real. By weighing in on the issue, these scientists drew the attention and support of people who were waiting for scientific consensus. For this audience target, the Nobel laureates represented the social reference group they needed to validate their concerns.

"Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent," edited by Theodore Glasser and Charles Salmon, offers more information about researching and identifying an audience target's social reference group.

7. Show strong public support by picking audiences that are willing to show (not just voice) their support.

Audience targets willing to publicly support an issue are a premium group. Whether by displaying a yellow ribbon on a car to show support for U.S. troops or taking to the streets to march for immigrant rights, public proclamation is incredibly important to building the perception of broad support for an issue.

Matthew Nisbet, a professor of communications at American University in Washington, DC, talks about why this is so important. "It's actually about creating the perception that other people are getting involved. People will generally overestimate how many people agree with them on a certain issue. That's why requests within a community group are important. It infers that others in the group are all interested."

Each year on the last Tuesday in April, the youth-oriented pro-life organization Rock for Life stages its Pro-Life T-Shirt Day. The event encourages students at public schools throughout the country who consider themselves pro-life to step up their activism and wear their opinions about abortion on their chests. Inevitably, at least one student is sent home to change his or her shirt. When this happens, Rock for Life publicizes the incident and threatens to sue the school system involved. The stunt is part of a strategy to spur more students to become pro-life activists. Wearing a pro-life T-shirt turns the student into a catalyst for a discussion about abortion both close to home and through the resulting media coverage.

This also speaks to the greater effectiveness of showing support versus reporting it through a poll. People want to see other people like them involved in an issue. If they hear about a poll that says X percent of people are for or against something, and they have no real-life experience backing that up, they will dismiss the poll results as unreliable. The same is true of decision makers. A poll that says X number of Americans say X issue is a top priority has little influence over policymakers if they are not also getting letters and phone calls from constituents to back up these statistics.

This can lead to one of the biggest obstacles to social change: empty threats. If you tell a company or an elected leader that people care about something, but when they go against you nothing happens, this is an empty threat. Empty threats can seriously compromise the credibility of an issue or an organization. Having people who are willing to publicly commit to an issue and take action when needed is critical to sustaining a movement. This is an area in which the NRA delivers every time. Whenever legislation that may impact the rights of gun owners begins to move, policymakers hear directly from NRA members. These policymakers know there is an activated constituency watching them and there will be consequences at the voting booth.

8. Test the activation point before launching a full-scale campaign.

The hard thing about traditional focus groups and polling is that people have high aspirations, but their opinions do not always align with their behavior. They say education is the number-one issue when they look at a candidate, but exit polls show national security is more likely to influence a vote. People say they will pay more for organic products or oppose products made in sweatshops, but when it comes to actual buying habits, price is the top motivator. Finding the activation point means figuring out what people will actually do—not just what they say they will do. It also means finding out what audiences care about most and finding the most relevant and believable way to link your issue to that top concern. This may mean identifying a competing value that is higher and will get the desired change. In the case of organics, marketers like Whole Foods give up on price as a motivating value but force the consumer to weigh the value of price against the value of health. For people high up on the scale of self-actualization, health trumps price in terms of value.

Audience research can help guide persuasive communications, but a small "live" test is the best approach. Mike Podhorzer from the AFL-CIO has been performing these live tests for years. First he creates several small pools of people with different interests and priorities. Then he asks each group to do something. He carefully tracks which of the small test pools respond by calling, visiting a Web site or attending a meeting. Once he knows which small pool had the greatest response, he enlarges that small pool and takes the effort to scale.

For proven insights and useful tips for performing effective and nontraditional qualitative audience research, including who to talk to and how to recruit; where to hold research activities; and techniques for creating comfortable, honest and revealing conversations, visit the online version of *Discovering the Activation Point*™ located at www.CommunicationsLeadership.org and download the complete research report from The Curious Company (Appendix D).

Who are you trying to persuade?

- What are you trying to persuade people to do?
- What is the smallest number of people you need to activate to get what you want?
- How can they be persuaded?
- How many audience segments do they break into?
- Do they bring others with them (i.e., are they a social reference group)?
- How can you test your requested action to make sure it will compel your audience target?

Notes

Chapter Two

Testing the Temperature

Just as several pieces need to come together to create an activation point, people need to go through stages of activation.

Stage One:
They need to know, believe and care enough to want to act.

Stage Two:
They have to have the will to act.

Stage Three:
Once they act, they must be rewarded for doing so.

Here are some strategies for moving target audiences through these stages and toward an activation point.

Stage One: Making Knowledge Stick

People need to have basic knowledge of an issue before they can even consider whether or not to engage on it. They need to care about an issue and believe in an issue (which often means trusting the organization sharing the knowledge) before they can act.

Share knowledge so people can learn.

To create this basic level of knowledge—one that leaves people believing in and caring about an issue—it is important to share information in a way that helps the target audience tune in, rather than allowing it to tune out. Here are some tips when doing this.

Don't overwhelm them.

When sharing information, it is important not to overwhelm. The research The Curious Company did for this report found the following: "There is a long-standing theory that if advocacy groups just educate people more, those people will change their behavior. Surely if they understood the facts, they'd see their way to acting! And yet, if people already have a high level of awareness of an issue, they don't appear to be motivated by more facts. Quite the contrary. In many cases, more information turns them off and adds to their sense of helplessness and feeling overwhelmed."

> "Not acting is not the same as not wanting to act. Education and information alone are rarely enough to overcome inertia and inspire committed action. Creating will—a personal sense of the rightness of acting now—is key."
>
> Diane Tompkins
> *founding partner, The Curious Company*

When people feel overwhelmed, they become paralyzed, disempowered and incapable of acting. Inertia and feeling overwhelmed can be strongly linked and neither inspires a person to get engaged in a productive way. One particular way groups overwhelm people is by using dramatic language or visuals to communicate the urgency of a problem. When we tested messaging that talked about childhood obesity as an epidemic, most respondents agreed that is the case but said the language made them feel overwhelmed by the problem. In our research, participants appreciated that advocates need strong messaging, but they almost always responded negatively to the use of hyperbole, extreme phrasing and alarmism as techniques to get their attention. What gets and holds their attention are the most relevant facts, presented in an honest manner, so they can make an informed decision.

Poorly used statistics can also overwhelm an audience. If an issue already has a high level of awareness, people do not need more information—they need motivation.

Show respect.

Condescend to a target audience when sharing knowledge, and the audience will turn off. Instead, show your audience respect. No one likes to be railroaded. We know this, but we still see advocates engage in brow beating in an effort to drive social change. Brow beating is not persuasive. Coming at someone with the idea that you have all the information and the answers will seem condescending, not compelling. Instead, try suggesting rather than insisting, especially when asking the audience to make conclusions about a problem or a solution. You cannot make the horse drink, but if you bring it to water and it is thirsty enough, drinking is apt to seem like a good idea.

The Truth campaign asks young people to learn the truth about tobacco companies. The rationale is that if young people learn the truth—that these corporations are trying to manipulate them into smoking so they can turn a profit—they will stop smoking, or decide never to start. In short, show target audiences that you respect them and their ability to make a good decision. Then let them then decide on their own where they stand.

Pro-life advocates have done this very successfully. They discuss the value of life and show a picture of a sonogram. They do not release report after report about how this is a baby. They let the picture speak for itself. If it looks like a baby, most people agree it is a baby. Using this suggestion, they have successfully framed late-term abortion as partial birth abortion.

This strategy works well when the issue can be framed as a question rather than a statement. The Evangelical Environmental Network of Iowa asked people, "What Would Jesus Drive?" to get people thinking about their car-buying habits from a moral perspective. The Partnership for Children in Kansas promoted key issues by asking, "Is it good for the children?" and trusted that people would generally act in a way that is best for children. Amazon.com merely suggests other items you might enjoy based on your current purchase. It does not insist you will like the other alternatives. Only you know what you like best.

Using this strategy successfully requires you to respect your audience by believing that if you offer the right information or pose the right question, the audience will come to the conclusion you want. The National Environmental Education & Training Foundation does this by providing important global climate change facts to broadcast meteorologists through Earth Gauge. The meteorologists in turn give these relevant facts to their audiences during their daily weather reports. Audiences naturally connect the dots that global climate change affects their weather—and their daily lives. When giving information, give audiences a chance to learn more or dig deeper. You are respecting that they know what they are most interested in and providing them a way to learn more if they want to.

Don't stick your label on target audiences.
When sharing knowledge, it is important to understand that audiences hold their own identities. It is tempting to think that people who support a cause consider themselves advocates or activists, but approaching the target audience in this way may actually create distance between organizations and the people they are trying to influence.

Audiences may be concerned parents, responsible homeowners or pet lovers—and this is likely how they identify themselves emotionally (though perhaps not literally). Some audience targets cringe at the thought of being considered activists or advocates. Those are our labels, not theirs, and they reflect what we need them to do, not what they care about in their lives. Effective communications must take into consideration how an audience identifies with an issue.

Share knowledge so people believe.

Audiences need to trust the veracity of information provided to them. To achieve this, advocates need to gain an audience's trust—not just assume people view them as trustworthy. When researching this topic, The Curious Company found that when people need more facts to form an opinion, they are often skeptical about where those facts come from. However, the one area in which people showed less skepticism toward statistics was in illustrating the concrete impact of a social change. For example, if 1,000 Americans stopped receiving junk mail, how many trees would be saved? When kids limit their TV watching to three hours per week, how does that impact academics and health? If I turn my thermostat down four degrees in the winter, how much money would I save? Quantifying the end goal and benefits seems to be significantly more motivating than dramatizing worst-case scenarios that do not always pan out and can damage the credibility of a cause.

Gay civil rights is an example of an issue that has progressed over a long period of time. In 1924, the Society for Human Rights in Chicago became the country's earliest known gay rights organization. In 1969, the Stonewall Riots in New York City became a symbol of gay civil rights, as people took a physical stand to declare their right to exist in society. In 2004, same-sex marriages first became legal in Massachusetts. In between, audiences had to learn and believe new information. The knowledge ramp-up happened very slowly, and of course there is much ground left to cover.

For groups working on decreasing, and ultimately eliminating, unnecessary antibiotics in meat, the knowledge ramp-up happened quickly. In the weeks following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent anthrax scare, Americans were deluged with media coverage of the impact of antibiotic resistance. Suddenly, a seemingly distant, complex issue was a real, immediate

threat. Advocates were able to seize this opportunity and insert their own messages about the overuse of antibiotics in livestock into this hot news story. These messages resonated more quickly and more deeply with an already concerned audience.

Share knowledge so people care.

When sharing knowledge, groups often get stuck. People know about and believe an issue, but they still don't care enough to act. News about the dangers of global climate change raised awareness and knowledge of the issue. Many people believed climate change was happening—but still did not take action. Polls showed people knew about the problem and even believed the polls, but it was not a top priority. That shifted for people of faith when their faith leaders started talking about taking care of God's creation. When environmentalism was framed as stewardship, more faith communities cared about global climate change and were willing to take action. Organizations need to find ways to help people see and act on their own values.

> "The barriers (e.g., lack of time or money) that cause people not to act are often very rational; however, the motivations that help people overcome these barriers are almost always wrapped in emotion."
>
> Pam Scott
> *founder and principal, The Curious Company*

Make them care by reflecting their values.

One way to get people to care more is to package information so that it aligns with their existing values. People need to see their own values reflected in an issue before they will act. When sharing knowledge, organizations need to understand and embrace the "values lens" people bring when considering issues. The Office of National Drug Control Policy found this out when, in an effort to get teens to not smoke marijuana, it promoted the following message: "Teens who smoke marijuana are five times more likely to engage in sexual activity." This message might well enlist parents to help deter teens from smoking pot. But when directed at teens who wanted to engage in sex (a much higher value than not taking drugs for some)—this message actually backfired.

It is important not to project our value system on an audience. We must respect the audience's values, not what we think they should value. We also need to understand how different audiences interpret values. In The New York Times op-ed "Is Freedom Just Another Word for Many Things to Buy?" (February 26, 2006), psychologists Barry Schwartz and Hazel Rose Markus, and editor Alana Conner Snibbe report on research that demonstrates a deep split between working class Americans and the middle and upper-middle class on "choice" as a value.

"Choice," they write, "even in mundane matters, embodies the larger ideal of the individual as arbiter not just of what tastes or feels good but also of what is good. As behavioral scientists, we have found that the people who frame freedom in terms of choice are usually the ones who get to make a lot of choices—that is, middle and upper-class white Americans. The education, income and upbringing of these Americans grant them choices about how to live their lives and also encourage them to express their preferences and personalities through the choices they make.

"Working-class Americans," they continue, "often have fewer resources and experience greater uncertainty and insecurity. For them, being free is less about making choices that reflect their uniqueness and mastery and more about being left alone, with their personality, integrity and well-being intact."

Organizations need to recognize that in addition to understanding people's values, they need to know people's priorities. Although target audiences' values may line up with an organization's, their priorities may lie elsewhere.

To address this, groups must articulate why, in fact, their issue is relevant to their audience now and deserves higher priority. Only when an issue is relevant and consistent with the target audiences' values will it rise on their list of priorities.

To understand target audiences' values most accurately, try to go straight to the source. A variety of useful tips and techniques for performing qualitative audience research can be found at www.CommunicationsLeadership.org in the complete research report from The Curious Company (Appendix D).

Wrap values with strong, empowering emotions.
Many social-change efforts discuss values, but few efforts actually make deliberate decisions about what kind of emotion they want to invoke. Anger? Hope? Empowerment? All of these can be powerful motivators when it comes to getting someone to act.

> "In the chaotic nature of our lives, there are literally dozens (if not hundreds) of priorities that come before social change. These include paying the mortgage, keeping the kids safe, getting a promotion, caring for an ailing parent, holding a marriage together, etc. Worrying about a social-change issue is, quite frankly, a luxury."
>
> Pam Scott
> *founder and principal, The Curious Company*

Many people talk about appealing to hearts before minds to emotionally draw an audience to an issue. Yet we continue to see campaigns that are based on facts with little emotion. Advocates often do not even realize their efforts are not eliciting the emotional response they are aiming for—or worse, are eliciting emotions that make people turn off rather than engage.

The Truth campaign moved away from rhetoric that was meant to elicit fear. For years, anti-smoking advocates tried to scare young people with black lungs and negative messaging. Fear can motivate. But it can also be disempowering. And it may have less impact on young people because of their sense of vulnerability. The Truth campaign elicited a different emotion: outrage. It exposed what tobacco companies were doing to young people to manipulate them into buying and getting hooked on cigarettes. Many young people chose to forgo or quit smoking because they were outraged, not scared.

Advocates need to determine which emotions they want to elicit and devise a plan for creating those emotions—not work with whatever emotions they end up with.

Get them to care by making it personal.
One of the top reasons cited for why people act is because the issue affects them personally. It goes without saying that enlightened self-interest is a strong motivator. Putting one's self on the line—figuratively or literally—looks easier when you know that the action has a likelihood of making your life better. There are four ways to bring an issue home for people:

- Make it personally relevant.
- Make a personal connection.
- Get people personally involved.
- Give them a personal reward.

Make it personally relevant. People readily admit that they are drawn to causes with personal relevance to them, their families, their pets or something else they care about. It should come as no surprise that the issues these people can relate to tap strong, existing emotions. They do not try to manufacture new feelings.

> "It's a matter of showing people that they can make a difference. It's about showing them that there's a reason to their efforts and that these efforts will have an impact on their lives. In one phrase: 'Show them relevance.'"
>
> Frank Luntz
> *founder, The Luntz Research Companies*

When an issue has no personal relevance (such as malaria), there may not be existing personal feelings to tap. People are less compelled to act when they are unable to relate to a situation.

One of the challenges for social-change organizations is to reframe the big, impersonal, too-vast-to-get-your-head-around issues so that people can begin to engage in a way that makes sense in the context of their lives. Climate change is a great example of how this can happen. At the conceptual level, this issue is one people may understandably throw their hands up at, claiming their actions are too small to impact the

whole. And yet, people talk about little actions they are taking that feel easy and relevant: lowering thermostats, doing laundry later in the day, carpooling, riding bikes to work and recycling. They have hope that collectively, these actions might make a meaningful difference.

Whether it means showing how secondhand smoke affects people's health now, or that run-off from pollution makes water dirty in a specific community, organizations need to make a clear connection as to why someone is personally affected by an issue; the connection should be something he or she already understands and believes.

It is important to note that *relevant* is not the same as *urgent*, and the two should not be used interchangeably. The definition of urgent is: compelling immediate action or attention. When organizations can use urgency, they should. But don't overuse it or you risk becoming the group that cried wolf in the mind of your audience.

While not the same, *relevant* is a close cousin to *urgent* and can also build will. Things become relevant to people at different times. Children's issues suddenly become very relevant to first-time parents; property taxes are likely most relevant to first-time home buyers; and the cost of insurance has high relevance to the recently laid off or first-time small-business owner. Smart timing takes relevancy into account. Advocates do not have to manufacture new feelings; they simply need to tap them.

Make a personal connection. When making a plea for support, many social-change organizations make the mistake of not connecting with people as people. Organizations want the public to take important issues personally. However, in our communications, we sometimes treat people impersonally by misspelling their names, calling at dinnertime, mailing them appeals that seem cookie-cutter, asking for money without thanking them for their last gift or otherwise missing opportunities to recognize them as individuals.

People want to be respected, treated considerately and acknowledged. They apply the expectations they bring to any relationship to these exchanges. Amazon.com and many other online merchants apply these things amazingly well. They greet the customer by name upon log-in, track each customer's likes and dislikes, and use past buying patterns to make helpful suggestions—in short, they connect with their visitors. Many organizations do this with donors, but less so with would-be activists. They miss an important opportunity to engage more supporters by making the experience personal.

> "It's true most women don't get up in the morning and think, 'I hope abortion stays legal today.' More likely they get up and think, 'I hope the babysitter shows up, nobody gets sick, the car holds together one more year, the older kids don't get shot at school, and the boss doesn't pat me on the rear and promote the guy I trained over me.'"
>
> Martha Burk
> *founder of the National Council of Women's Organizations and author of "Cult of Power: Sex Discrimination in Corporate America and What Can Be Done About It"*

Organizations don't need to view this as the organization getting personal with an individual. They can find ways to encourage their supporters to get personal with others. This helps make the personal connection. For example, Lance Armstrong's foundation asked athletes to wear a distinctive LiveStrong yellow rubber bracelet to show their support for the ongoing battle against cancer, and to tell others who noticed the bracelet why they were wearing it and what they could do. The foundation also asks cancer survivors to tell their LiveStrong stories to others in person and via the Web site.

By connecting people to issues through friends and peers, you can use this connection to make an issue personally relevant too.

Get people personally involved. People gain great satisfaction from seeing the tangible outcomes of their support, not from simply writing a check. A surprising number of people in the qualitative research groups wanted the option to make (and claimed to make) a commitment of time or a donation other than money. Not only did this seem to ease their skepticism about how cash donations are used, it also addressed a need to make a personal impact.

> "We cannot allow our campaigns to fall into 'paint by numbers' and 'sing with the bouncing ball' style participation. The more we train and reinforce ideas that supporters cannot shift our directions, influence our messages, or contribute skill, time, and creativity on the terms they are comfortable with, the more we sow the seeds of apathy. We must build respect for our supporters into the DNA of our campaign strategies. We must find ways to absorb the drive, creativity, professionalism and talent of the public into our campaign efforts."
>
> Marty Kearns
> *executive director, Green Media Toolshed*

The issue of trust is tied to control. When a man donated money to help a hungry family and received a photo of the livestock they were able to purchase for their household, he felt personally involved and knew that his action had an impact. The research shows that the less people trust an organization, the more keen they are to take responsibility for what is provided to those in need and to deliver it themselves. The level of mistrust of groups asking for support was striking. Reports of Hurricane Katrina fund mismanagement disgusted many donors and was emblematic of their worst fears that donations line the pockets of the wrong people rather than help those in need. Getting target audiences involved is a good way for organizations to gain credibility and establish a track record for being trustworthy and effective. MoveOn.org harnessed an enormous groundswell of activation during the 2004 election by leveraging the desire of like-minded individuals to organize and take action together. MoveOn.org now applies this convening, empowering approach to a host of political and civic issues including media policy reform, Social Security and the preservation of public broadcasting.

Give them a personal reward. It is human nature to expect some return on your investment, whether of time, money or energy. When an organization makes a plea for support, it often asks people to go out of their way and make a change or sacrifice. No matter how stimulating a message or plea for help, an audience will not be persuaded to act unless it feels like there is some return.

This is where nonprofits can take a lesson from corporate marketers, who frequently tout things like, "Buy one, get one free. Free shipping on orders over $100. Act now and receive a free gift." The benefits vary, but the concept is the same: Give folks a personal incentive to take action. In 2004, a campaign called Rhythms for Health went to 14 cities with the Ladies First Tour, featuring Beyoncé, Alicia Keys and Missy Elliott, and offered fans the chance to win free tickets by volunteering for H.I.V. testing and answering a questionnaire.

When it comes to acting for a social-change cause, the rewards and benefits people look for can vary enormously, although it is unlikely any of them are looking for a free toaster. Helping a friend or family member, bolstering a cause that affects someone they love, personal growth, being admired by their community, gaining recognition in front of their peers or simply feeling good about themselves are all factors that can drive people to act. According to The Economist, helping others literally feels good; recent studies indicate that altruistic donation by an individual activates the brain's reward center, commonly associated with sex, money, drugs and food. What is important is that the perceived benefit of taking an action outweighs the perceived sacrifice—and that the group that is making the "ask" recognizes and rewards the audience for making this sacrifice.

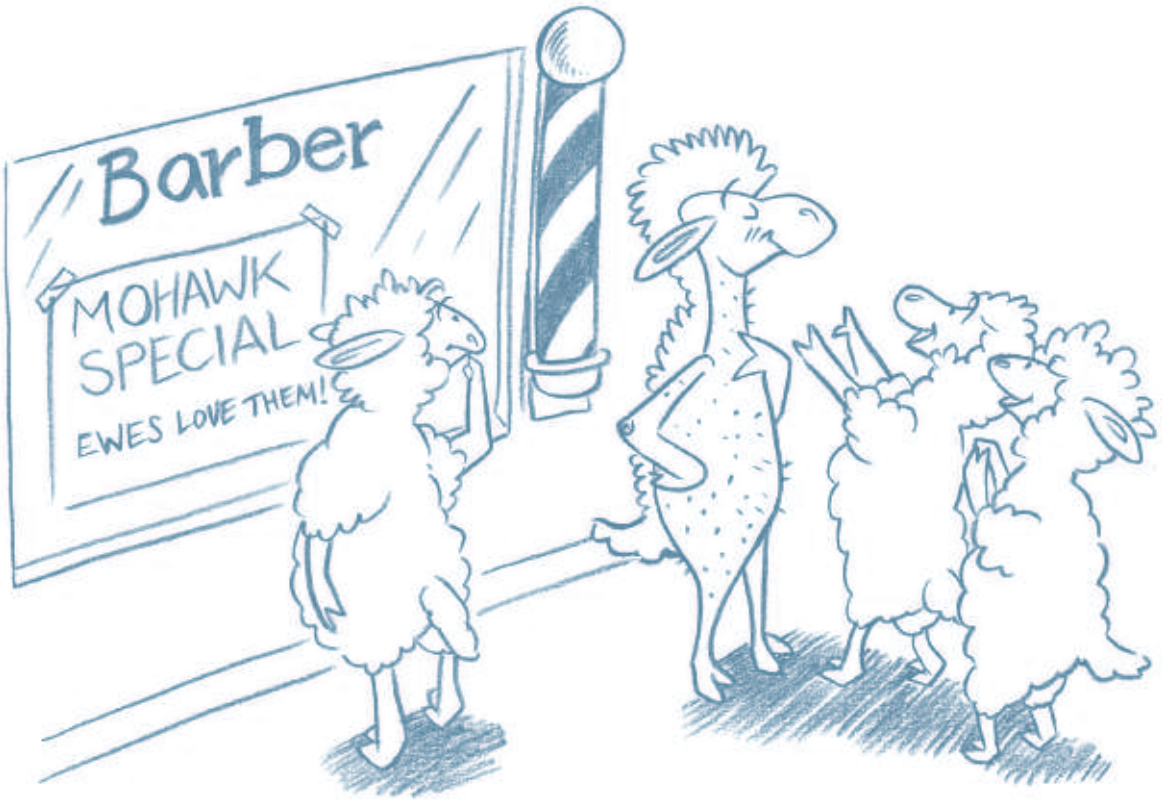
Don't rely on assumptions or conventional wisdom to identify what makes an issue personal for target audiences. Organizations will make the most persuasive arguments when they have carefully researched what is most personally relevant to their decision makers. Proven tips and techniques for performing qualitative audience research are provided at www.CommunicationsLeadership.org in the complete research report from The Curious Company (Appendix D).

Once organizations have shared knowledge in a way that sticks—and that means getting audiences to know, believe and care—they can move to the stage where organizations build will to take action.

What does your audience know and feel?

- What does your audience already know (or think it knows) about your issue?
- How does your audience feel about your issue?
- Does the audience trust your organization? If not, how can you build trust?
- How can you show the audience respect?
- How can you demonstrate that your issue is aligned with the audience's values?
- Does the audience need more information, or more will to act?
- How can you make the issue more emotionally relevant to your audience?
- How can you make it personal?
- How can you phrase your "ask" as a suggestion rather than a command?

Notes



Stage Two: Creating a Will to Act

Building the will to act means overcoming the associated barriers and risks. This is no easy task. People have a long and varied list of reasons for not taking action, some of which were volunteered in The Curious Company research:

I don't have the time.
I don't have hope that change is possible.
What I do won't make a difference.
What's in it for me?
It's not my cause.
Other people are worse than I am.
I fear I might… fail… be rejected… be judged….
I don't relate to the people involved.
Where's everybody else?
I can't do everything.
I'm already doing all I can.
Sometimes I'm just lazy.

Rather than devising a plan or crafting messages to move beyond or around these barriers, organizations often soldier on, hindered and frustrated by the lack of action. Figuring out how to overcome these barriers is another key to finding the activation point. Here are some strategies for removing these barriers and the many more that can prevent a target audience from taking action.

Understand people's comfort zones.

Research shows there are clear limits to what even the most passionate people are willing to do, especially if the ask is outside their comfort zone. Actions taken inside a person's comfort zone appear to reinforce a person's positive self-image. Taking actions within one's comfort zone allows that person to feel good about helping without putting him or herself at significant risk.

Organizations may choose to push people out of their comfort zones or try to expand their comfort zones. First, though, they need to understand the comfort zone and then decide how to proceed.

People's willingness to act is directly tied to how safe they feel about taking an action. The riskier the action is perceived, the harder it is to get people to act. In our research—with both PowerGroups and PowerGames—participants found it hard to publicly support politically charged issues (abortion was the lightning rod example, but apparently benign acts like publicly supporting a local candidate were also charged), make a statement that others might not agree with (putting a pro-life bumper sticker on the car or a candidate's sign on the lawn) or be the first to take on an issue that did not yet have broad support. Taking any of these actions made people feel vulnerable. The possibility of being judged, labeled or even attacked by their peers or neighbors made these acts quite risky.

There are ways to overcome these feelings of risk. Having to initiate or take a stand alone is perceived as risky and requires a big return. However, being part of a like-minded group focused on common goals creates a feeling of safety.

The war and the issue of patriotism offer a perfect example of this. People are cautious about opposing the war if it means they will be labeled unpatriotic. The risk for many is too great. In response, many groups are working to redefine patriotism as a citizen speaking out against an unfair war. However, The New York Times op-ed "There Is Silence in the Streets" pointed to opposing efforts to keep people quiet: "The pressure to be silent is great. This week, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld compared critics of Mr. Bush's Iraq policy to those who appeased Adolf Hitler. And antiwar protesters are told they're un-American, cowardly and lending aid and comfort to terrorists."

Notably, an individual's willingness to step out of his or her comfort zone appears to expand and contract depending on life events or a specific stage of life. Right after a friend or family member's death, during a grave illness, at times of national or global crisis, or after becoming a parent, for example, people seem more willing to act and get involved in ways they had not been willing to before. At these times, their emotions (e.g., helplessness, anger, responsibility, gratitude or hope) are higher, making them more compelled to act. Sometimes this appears to be a time-sensitive occurrence (i.e., as time goes on, the will to act diminishes). For others, the event can permanently expand their comfort zone.

> "We humans are still tribal creatures; we are hard-wired to belong. So any actions that pose the risk of being separated from our 'tribe' are pretty scary unless we can identify with a new tribe."
>
> Brian Lanahan
> *managing director, Character*

To successfully engage people, advocates need to know what their audience target's comfort zone is. When possible, organizations should find a way to couch what they are asking people to do in a way that stays within that comfort zone. If organizations want to get people out of their comfort zones, they need to find ways to make the risks worth the benefits (see below). If organizations want to expand a person's comfort zone, think both about an audience's lifestyle, and life events that might make this possible (see lifestyle, discussed below, and timing in Chapter 3). Information on audience research best practices can be found at www.CommunicationsLeadership.org in the complete research report from The Curious Company (Appendix D).

Fit actions into the audience's lifestyle.

People often note they fail to act because the action "just isn't me." This could be asking the mother of six to give up her SUV or imploring a busy person to give up an entire day to save the (fill in the blank). The best way to move an issue up an audience target's priority list is to make it relevant to that audience's lifestyle.

Race for the Cure used to ask people to pay a registration fee and then run or walk a race. But some people simply couldn't find the time. Their lifestyle did not permit it. Instead of fighting this barrier and trying to make people feel guilty about their priorities, the group gave people another option: Sleep In for the Cure. Participants still pay a registration fee (that goes to the charity), but instead of getting up at the crack of dawn to run a race, these folks slept in—and they still received T-shirts to show and be recognized for their support.

Make sure the benefits outweigh the risks.

The target audience must understand exactly what will happen when it acts, and the result has to be something that is worth the risk. The further outside the target audience's comfort zone the ask is, the bigger the reward must be. But even an ask that fits squarely within the target audience's comfort zone has a better chance of success if there is a concrete payoff to the audience.

Sometimes advocates need audience targets to do really big things that carry a lot of risk. Sometimes the prospect of failure or ridicule is great, or there are tangible downsides such as job loss or violence.

Really big asks need to carry really valuable outcomes for participants, whether it is something concrete, like the safety and well-being of their children, or something more intrinsic, like public recognition. The AIDS ride uses the latter to get people to raise funds and undertake a grueling physical journey to help find a cure for AIDS.

Be careful not to pick the wrong reward. In the 1970s, in an effort to increase the blood supply, some blood supply/donation systems offered to pay for blood. People could give a pint and get a couple of bucks. This didn't work well. It wasn't worth the risk of pain if donors were only going to get some money. A study from Britain showed that people are more apt to give blood when they are asked to do so in order to save a life. Saving a life was something that made it worth the risk. Today, ads for blood donation often feature this approach and proclaim that people who give blood are superheroes. In this case, the benefit of cash did not warrant the risk—potential donors valued saving a life more than money.

When possible, efforts should attempt to eliminate or mitigate risk. Advocates working to minimize secondhand smoke achieved their goal when they pursued city bans rather than asking people to boycott their favorite bars or asking total strangers to stop smoking.

"The emotion people say they experience most in their comfort zones is confidence. The confidence to act, speak up and trust themselves. If this confidence is tapped into, there's a much greater likelihood that people will act on their beliefs—even in ways that surprise themselves."

Diane Tompkins
founding partner, The Curious Company

Perceived risk is not always something as obvious as getting sued or injured. It can also mean having difficult conversations—such as asking parents to talk to kids about sex and drugs, or getting adult children to talk to their parents about living wills. The prospect of an uncomfortable conversation or social situation can be perceived as very risky.

"Effective campaigns offer you a story you can believe in, and you can see yourself reflected in the narrative, so you want to take the risk and be a part of making it happen. Oftentimes, the story that advocacy organizations tell casts everyday folks as bystanders, or in worst cases, 'the apathetic public' as the problem. But people do care and want to make a difference; often we just don't do a good job telling them how. So our challenge is not just knowing when to ask but also thinking strategically about what we ask. How can we invite people into a relationship with the organization and give them an empowering experience that deepens commitment?"

Doyle Canning
change agent, smartMeme

In the qualitative research conducted for this study, anything that could provoke confrontation was considered risky, including posting a sign for a political candidate on the front lawn or putting bumper stickers on cars. Some people do welcome the debate, but many prefer to feel that they are among like-minded people and that the actions they take will be popular.

Organizations that need people to go outside their comfort zones must plan and create scenarios that make this possible—otherwise, their efforts at persuasion will fail.

One thing to consider is openly acknowledging the risks that organizations are asking people to take as a way to validate their fears. Social risk is powerful and is not something everyone will easily own up to fearing. Acknowledging that taking action carries the risk of conflict, and that it's uncomfortable, might diminish its power over audiences.

Give them hope for positive change.

Our research demonstrated that hope is a powerful incentive for bringing a person to an activation point. The stronger the hope, the more likely the action. A sense of possibility enhances one's desire to help. In fact, hope is a critical concept—among the most frequently named in conversations about emotions.

Not surprisingly, hope emerges when a person feels in control, while hopelessness arises when people feel no control over adverse outcomes. Any successful call to action must build upon a sense of possibility. The audience target must believe it can make a difference and expect a positive outcome. Albert Bandura, a renowned social-learning psychologist at Stanford University, suggests that organizers initially structure situations "to bring success; don't prematurely put them in situations where they are likely to fail." Disease groups trigger this sense of hope when they talk about someday finding a cure.

The Living Wage campaign uses hope as an activation point. In Florida in 2003, a broad coalition of labor unions, community organizations, churches, senior citizen groups and others set out to offer a living-wage referendum to voters to raise the state's minimum wage to $6.15 an hour. They made it clear that raising

the minimum wage would help everyone. The message was more about consumer spending and adding jobs, as well as boosting employees' morale, leading to lower absenteeism and higher productivity. They called the campaign Floridians for All. They faced considerable and well-funded opposition from the powerful restaurant and tourism industries. But the campaign tapped hope for economic improvement for low-income families, and hope for success at the ballot box to move a coordinated and multilayered effort forward. Despite concerted attacks by big business and the Republican Party, the minimum wage measures won in every county in Florida, even the most conservative.

On the other hand, some rhetoric is devoid of hope. The Institute for Public Policy Research in the U.K. tracked rhetoric around global climate change and found one pervasive pessimistic model described as follows in the Warm Words report:

"Climate change is most commonly constructed through the alarmist repertoire—as awesome, terrible, immense and beyond human control. It employs a quasi-religious register of death and doom, and it uses language of acceleration and irreversibility. It contains an implicit counsel of despair—'The problem is just too big for us to take on.' Its sensationalism and connection with the unreality of Hollywood films also distances people from the issue. In this awesome form, alarmism might even become secretly thrilling—effectively a form of 'climate porn.' It also positions climate change as yet another apocalyptic construction that is perhaps a figment of our cultural imaginations, further undermining its ability to help bring about action." —Warm Words: How Are We Telling the Climate Story and Can We Tell It Better?, 2006

The problem with this model of rhetoric is that it emphasizes that the problem is too big to solve. People can either panic or dismiss the problem. Very few say to themselves, "I will be the one to fix this insurmountable challenge."

Instilling hope means showing audience targets that change is possible. Optimism is a critical component of persuasion.

"Some people will say that my (positive) image of the future is counterproductive—that the doom and gloom is necessary to keep us all on our toes, to get us to respond to the warnings. I understand this. I have witnessed how politicians are unwilling or unable to take action until there is a crisis in front of them. But it doesn't have to be an either/or. Yes, a good cautionary tale is a powerful thing. What makes me crazy is that cautionary tales are all we get. We need hopeful visions to give us something to work for, as opposed to always working against something."

Karen Hurley
Grist.org

Make them the hero, not the villain.

It's hard to convince people that they're bad. We have seen social campaigns focused on pointing out things that are bad—overeating, smoking and drunk driving are all bad things, therefore the people who do them are "bad people." However, if you are trying to motivate these "bad people" to change, this may not be the best approach.

Anti-smoking groups learned this lesson and switched from vilifying individual smokers to going after the true villains: tobacco companies that lied and concealed how addictive cigarettes are. Other groups that once vilified all gun owners have learned to split responsible hunters from irresponsible gun owners. When they talk about responsible gun ownership, they can call attention to those who believe the public should be allowed to own Uzis and keep responsible hunters on their side.

The point is, no one wants to be seen as the bad guy. For guilt to be a motivator, it usually needs to be self-imposed, not inflicted from the outside. Target audiences find it neither appropriate nor motivating for social advocacy groups to assume the role of moral conscience. Many choices that groups cast as good or bad are actually understood by target audiences as much more complex than that—"I care about the environment, and yet I need a large car to safely and comfortably transport my family." If people feel chastised when they are trying to cover all their bases, they are apt to feel frustrated and stuck.

A recent editorial in The Philadelphia Inquirer about Al Gore's movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," released by Paramount Pictures , stated, "Truth traffics in fear, and when not scaring the heck out of us, it's trying to provoke contrition." If motivation by guilt is part of the plan, consider whether this guilt will motivate an audience to change, or merely motivate it to make excuses?

People want respect for their expertise and the efforts they are already making (even if imperfect). Advocates must assume an audience target has some level of expertise in their issue area—and that they are trying to be good parents, conscientious consumers, concerned homeowners, loving spouses, responsible pet owners and so forth. Messaging that starts from the point of view that the audience is off to a good start is more likely to get through.

Ask them to do something they can actually do.

People are more likely to take action if the act is something that is reasonable and easy to do. Requests that are simple, largely low risk and perceived to have the best chance of succeeding are most likely to draw action.

For starters, keep it simple. Make one ask—not 35. Organizations often give people too many actions to take. The erroneous rationale is that people will self select what they want to do. Studies show that when people have too many choices, they frequently make no choice at all. Instead of giving them multiple ways to conserve water, give them one: Hang up your towel at the hotel. Once that request catches on, move to the next step. It is more effective to take people through actions step by step than overwhelm them.

To break down pre-existing barriers, the requested action must account for the audience's other priorities. If the ask is for parents to turn out for an evening school board meeting, providing child care will address a key priority that might otherwise prevent them from attending.

"We know that you would just love to 'do the right thing' for yourself and the planet if it were convenient, fun, inexpensive and made you feel good. But until now, you have lacked a good source of advice for real people leading busy lives."

IdealBite.com

Inertia can help make things really easy. For many issues, it is as simple as making "doing the right thing" the default. In the case of childhood obesity, an organization could choose to go after each student and ask them not to buy a soda at lunchtime, or ask parents not to provide their children with money for the soda machine. Or they could ask schools to stop selling soda. This third option uses inertia in its favor and makes the choice much easier. Students cannot buy soda at lunchtime if it is not available at school. They may choose to bring soda from home, but buying it at school is no longer an option.

Recently, companies have turned around lack of action by employees who don't sign up for 401(k) plans by setting up plans with an opt-out, rather than opt-in, format. Employees only have to act if they want to make changes to their plan or if they choose to withdraw from the plan altogether. As Stephen P. Utkus, director of the Vanguard Center for Retirement Research, notes in "How to Make Employees Take Their 401(k) Medicine," "All the behavioral finance research that documents the pull of inertia and inaction in our investing decisions perfectly applies to the 401(k)s. In the past year or two, we are seeing sponsors and providers putting it all together and beginning to move toward 401(k) structures that address the shortcomings of human behavior." Companies have realized that the best way to overcome the effects of inertia is to use it to their benefit. They recognize that it is sometimes easier to lean into an existing behavior than to try to change it.

A really ambitious ask must be delivered by a credible source. An audience will not go along with just any mission-driven nonprofit—especially if the ask is risky. Groups can build this trust by starting with small, easy asks that yield immediate, demonstrable results. As the trust grows, the asks can become bigger.

Show them a leader doing it first.

When faced with the choice between two restaurants, one empty and one with a crowd outside, many diners will opt for the busy restaurant. Few of us will say, "Let's be the first to try the empty place." It is more comfortable for most people to try something they have already seen someone else doing.

This was the case with family-friendly workplaces. At first, very few companies offered day care or other child-friendly work options. Then a few big ones like IBM and Johnson & Johnson started offering on-site child care and flex schedules. This was followed by reports that family-friendly policies increase productivity and decrease absenteeism. Then a second, broader tier of adopters put these policies in place—these companies waited until they were tried and validated by a leadership group.

When Katie Couric wanted to encourage more people to get screened for colon cancer, the "Today" show televised her having a colonoscopy. When Angelina Jolie adopted children, The Boston Globe reported, "American couples are adopting more African children, prompted by an increase in the number of orphans, the end of wars and even by movie star Angelina Jolie's adoption of a baby girl in Ethiopia last year, according to analysts and agencies that help place the children."

"We've learned that people respond much better to positive and empowering messages about global poverty, as opposed to the 'global mayhem' frames: We showed images of girls in Africa going to school, mothers taking their children to be immunized. People got it: With a bit of support, people can lift themselves out of poverty."

Edith Asibey
principal, Edith Asibey Consulting

Most people look for leadership. Leadership does not have to come from celebrities, but rather can be most powerful in a target audience's immediate community or social circle. The constituency perceived as taking action on something first will help define the issue and thus really impact who else gets involved. The key to getting teens to participate in after-school programs is getting the most popular kid in school to come.

The important thing is to show other people taking the action—not just say it is a good idea. People are looking for proof that someone took an action, feels great about it and, if possible, was applauded for doing so. This is particularly important if the action is controversial. Bob Dole speaking on behalf of Viagra is a good case in point. Dole's willingness to speak about erectile dysfunction lessened the stigma surrounding the condition—and helped make Viagra a wildly profitable drug for Merck. When Governor George Ryan (R-Ill.) took on the unfairness of the death penalty, he proved it is possible to take a stand on the issue and not be called soft on crime. When The New York Times announced its wedding pages would include same-sex couples, 148 papers followed suit.

It is important to note that the leaders in these examples received positive recognition for their actions. This makes others likely to follow. Conversely, any negative reaction is likely to have a chilling effect. In 2003, when the Dixie Chicks lead singer Natalie Maines spoke out against President Bush, public response was quick and primarily negative—and affected ticket and record sales. Since then, the group has recovered and continues to speak out. However, the backlash had a chilling effect on other celebrities lending their voice to political issues if they are unsure how their audiences will react.

Sometimes, when an organization needs to show leadership, it may look to something related or smaller scale. While working to get large meat wholesalers to buy beef free of antibiotics, the Keep Antibiotics Working campaign showed the buyers that the restaurant chain TGI Friday's had introduced antibiotic-free beef to their customers and received very positive media coverage. While a

restaurant is not exactly the same as a large wholesale meat buyer, it gave an example of the kind of public praise a company might get for taking this action.

The leader that gets highlighted must also have credibility with the audience target. Governor Ryan was able to take on the death penalty in part because he was a Republican supporter of the death penalty who had a change of heart. Katie Couric lost her husband to colon cancer. Popular kids have credibility because they are popular.

Make your take on the issue the perceived social norm.

People are often interested in what their peers—people they perceive to be like them—think about an issue. Social proof gives people a sense that their thoughts and behaviors are acceptable because the rest of their social group is thinking and behaving the same way. People look to this group and tend to mimic what it does.

Whether it is called a convergence factor, a bandwagon effect or social pressure, this phenomenon is important for planning successful persuasion. In "Influence: the Psychology of Persuasion," Robert Cialdini says that social proof is most influential when people are unsure and the situation is ambiguous. This is when they are "more likely to observe the behavior of others and to accept that behavior as correct." Cialdini notes they are "more inclined to follow the lead of others who are similar".

"Far too often, those of us working for change make the mistake of focusing on what our audience doesn't know, when the problem is often what people do know—the existing stories and assumptions that filter out messages about an issue. In order to activate people, we have to both understand these pre-existing stories and be working to transform them."

Patrick Reinsborough
change agent, smartMeme

Organizations should take into consideration how interconnected their target audiences are with others when trying to establish social proof around their issue. The more networked an audience target is, the more quickly they can spread an idea or point of view among those they know. This is true on an individual level (popular teenagers) or an institutional level (organizations in active coalitions).

In many cases, this means defining and presenting a specific take on an issue as mainstream, but for many organizations, this seems difficult to do. Instead they choose to frame themselves as outside the mainstream.

Word choice can also take an issue outside the norm. Words like "alternative" imply an issue is outside the mainstream. To many people, an alternative is something you get when you cannot have what you really want. People want a better energy source, not one that is an alternative. Alternative makes things sound different—and that is not always preferred.

One way to offer social proof is to show people the actions you want them to take, rather than telling them all the reasons they should act. This is a staple of Madison Avenue advertising. Nearly every ad on television models an effect corporate sponsors hope to convince consumers they will get if they purchase their product—be it the perfect lawn that results from Scotts fertilizer or the glamorous and slimming effect of a particular brand of jeans. Effective social change modeling can essentially sell issues to an audience to create an activation point. Amazon.com does this by suggesting that people like you bought the same book, then shows other books they bought.

The Harvard Alcohol Project's Designated Driver campaign demonstrated that an activation point can be rapidly diffused through American society through mass communications that model behaviors. In the 1980s, the project broke new ground when TV writers agreed to insert drunk-driving prevention messages, including references to designated drivers, into scripts of top-rated television programs, such as "Cheers," "L.A. Law" and "The Cosby Show." The shows helped shape social reality by modeling specific behaviors presented by characters who served as role models within a dramatic context. These models significantly contributed to the project's ability to influence people's perceptions and subsequent adoption of new behavior.

Another important piece of this persuasion is offering value for showing up. In 2006, immigration-reform demonstrations became an excellent example of the bandwagon effect serving as an activation point. The massive numbers who turned out in cities across the country heard the voices of "people like them" telling them it was time to get involved. Marchers came with friends and family, neighbors, co-workers and church congregations. They observed the behavior of others, accepted that behavior as correct and adopted it themselves.

Sometimes an effort needs to correct mainstream perceptions. If an audience target perceives that its peers are doing something, it accepts that action as the social norm. This is the case with both teen sex and binge drinking. In both instances, studies show that teens overestimate their friends' behavior, assuming more of them are having sex and drinking than is actually the case. In both instances, advocates launched campaigns showing that most teens are waiting to have sex and are drinking in moderation or not at all. Perceiving waiting and drinking less as social norms, teens became more willing to follow this behavior.

How can you overcome barriers and build the audience's will to act?

- How can you respect people's time?
- How can you demonstrate that hope for change is possible and show that individual participation can make a difference?
- How can you protect the audience from feelings of failure, rejection or judgment?
- What other barriers does the audience face when considering action?
- Are you asking the audience to leave its comfort zone? If yes, how far?
- What is the audience's perceived risk and how can you mitigate this risk?
- How can you position the issue and requested action as the social norm?
- Are there leaders, peers or others you can point to that are already taking action?

Notes

Stage Three: Reinforcing Action

Finally, to spur action, there must be immediate gratification to audience targets for the actions they take. Feeling like they did the right thing will make them much more likely to take another action next time. Our research found several ways to achieve this.

Give immediate reinforcement.

In hotel rooms across the country, there are signs claiming that by hanging up used towels rather than sending them to the laundry after each use, guests can help conserve water, prevent detergent from polluting nearby water sources and save energy—all that before they even get their morning coffee. The signs offer immediate reinforcement by letting hotel guests know exactly how their actions can help. It is something the hotel guest can feel really good about. In short, it spurs immediate action and reinforces that the action leads to good things. This can not only make people feel good but also ensure that they will take action this time and in the future.

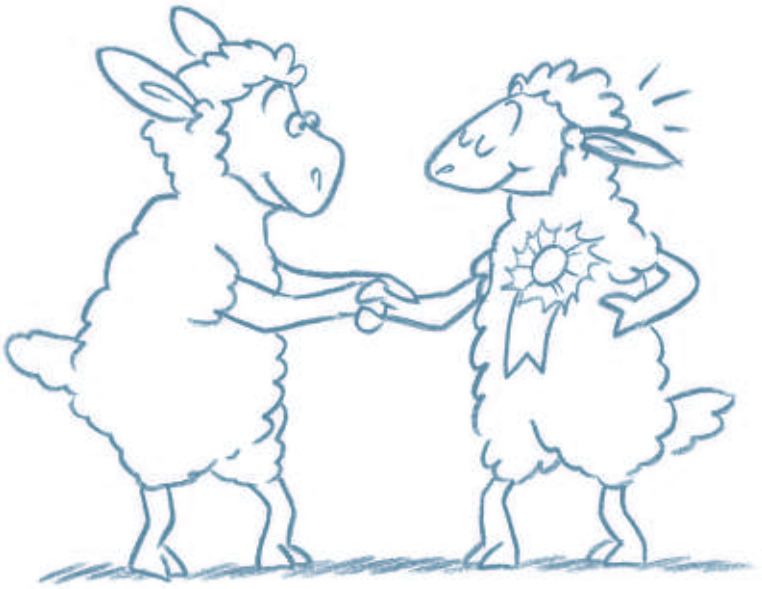
> "People are often motivated to take actions that reinforce how they like to think of themselves. Better still, for many people, is the ability to reinforce that positive self-image to other people."
>
> Pam Scott
> *founder and principal, The Curious Company*

This reinforcement needs to be positive—aggressively positive. It needs to show the difference people have made. Show the rainforest with people harvesting critically needed medicines. Show women selling wares because of microfinancing that will lift them out of poverty. Reinforcement reminds people that there is something they care about deeply and that they can do something about it. It makes them more likely to take more ambitious steps in the future because now the link is clear and they have experienced an ability to make a difference.

Remind them they are good people for taking action.

On Election Day, people proudly wear "I Voted" stickers on their lapels. Spurred by the yellow LiveStrong bands, colored rubber bracelets are increasingly prevalent, representing a range of causes. Some parents sport bumper stickers that read, "I have an honor student at Main Street Elementary." Each of these items demonstrate a reward people get for doing something good—often it is something that holds them up publicly as a good person. It says they are a hero in some way.

Our research provided proof of the obvious: People are more inclined to act when they see a personal benefit for doing so. Rewards can be major, such as finding a cure to a cancer that runs in your family. But they can also be as small as the good feeling that comes from wearing a sticker that says "Be nice to me.



I gave blood today!" Often the reward addresses fears, like curbing the likelihood that your daughter will get pregnant, or sorrows, like supporting research to find the cure to the illness that killed your mother. It can promote desires, like protecting the open space where you hike on weekends; warm hearts, like receiving a thank you letter from "your child" in a village in Africa; or be an ego boost, like being seen as more important after leading a successful fundraiser at your child's school. These rewards make the actions worthwhile and tangible. Big or small, these rewards serve as validation after the fact.

Celebrate wins, both big and small.

A strong way to reinforce action is to make the target audience part of a winning effort. Experts say people like winners. This is no big surprise. Yet advocates frequently talk about themselves as losing or on the verge of losing, rather than as winners. It is the difference between choice groups regularly reminding us that Roe v. Wade is about to be overturned, and President Bush declaring "mission accomplished." Regularly we hear from progressives that the right wing has beaten them in the war of ideas, citing the success of the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute. They use this as a rallying cry, but it is more defeatist than motivational. There is a big difference between being the underdog and being a loser. Americans love underdogs that have a chance at triumphing, but they really do not like losers.

Often when groups win, they don't spend significant time reminding people of their success. Instead, they talk about the pieces that fell short or the next hurdle.

Since its inception, the Endangered Species Act has been 99 percent effective. Only seven out of 1,800 species listed have been lost. Yet for years, environmental groups have largely ignored the act's success. Instead, they dwell on its shortcomings—it doesn't do enough to protect habitats, it isn't funded right, and so forth. Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Calif.) was able to step into this negative frame and start defining the act as a 99 percent failure because not one animal that has been listed has fully recovered. Although this was never the intent of the act, his positive posturing left the act very vulnerable. During recent focus groups to test new messaging around the act, Defenders of Wildlife told people the act was 99 percent effective at stopping extinction. One participant summed up the problem with his reply: "That's not true. If it were true, environmental groups would be talking about it." To protect the act, advocacy groups need to spend more time touting its successes.

To activate people to continue taking action, they need to see the small wins they are making and know they are moving closer to solving the bigger problems.

Remind them how their core concerns and values are being met.
Connect the wins back to the values that people hold most dear. Remind them that every animal saved from the brink of extinction shows good stewardship on our part, if that is what they care about most. Show them how talking to kids about preventing pregnancy in fact decreases teen pregnancy and increases young people's respect for themselves and for the institution of families, if that is what your audience cares about. Show them that each of these wins is a symbol that their values are being upheld.

Continue to make it personal (again).
Whenever possible, make human contact with those who have been activated. This can come in the form of a call, an e-mail, a personal letter from a staffer, a volunteer, or a person who has been helped by their action. Also, continue to offer ways for that person to feel personally involved with the issue or campaign—to have a sense of ownership over its success.

The Children's Christian Fund program—the international child sponsorship program popularized by celebrity spokesperson Sally Struthers—allows donors to connect with a specific child in need. The would-be donor selects a child from the CCF Web site and receives a package about the child that includes a local address, pictures and information about his or her condition. Donors are encouraged to engage in a correspondence with their sponsored child, send cards for birthdays and other occasions, and in some cases even visit the child.

Since its inception in 1938, CCF claims to have provided more than $2.5 billion in services to children, primarily through this individual contributor program.

Don't forget to have fun.

Our research also showed that Americans want nonprofits to lighten up and have some fun. It's OK for people to help a cause and have a good time doing it—in fact, it is a welcome approach.

To encourage and reward donations, the Crisis Line of Central Virginia invites supporters to *flock a friend*. Through this program, people can make a financial contribution to the crisis intervention and support hotline, and in return the nonprofit posts a flock of plastic pink flamingos on the lawn of the donor's choosing.

How will you reinforce action?

- How can you turn the audience into heroes?
- How can you showcase the benefits that happened when people took action?
- How can you highlight small wins to keep the audience engaged?
- How can you portray these wins as consistent with the audience's existing values?
- What follow up can you do to make sure the action and outcome are personal?

Notes

Chapter Three

Knowing When the Iron Is Hot

Ask an advocacy group when it's the right time to try to activate people, and the answer is likely to be 24/7. But is this true? Are people able to be persuaded all the time, or do we need to pick our moments?

Arguably, groups that follow the 24/7 rule risk one of the most dangerous phenomena for social-change organizations: issue fatigue.

Determining the best time to persuade people can be tricky. There is no easy calculation. As Hurricane Katrina and the Southeast Asian tsunami disaster have

shown, people can be activated, but then they need a rest. For other issues that are not as crisis-driven, the timing question is even more important.

Although there is no exact science to timing an issue, there are some factors that can help with planning.

Ride the waves of persuasion.

Groups seem inclined to ask people to act every day. They hurl their energy and resources against the wall of inaction with the hope that it will eventually collapse. But this is very unlikely to happen. It would be better for groups to time their requests for action in waves. If the timing is of the everyday "the sky is falling" variety, audience targets inevitably do one of two things: tune out or stop believing. Both are dangerous to issues and make it even harder to drive action.

> "Instead of shoehorning a new 'activation' moment into someone's busy life, it's better to figure out the existing timing opportunities within a person's life, when the person is open and even predisposed to being activated. Setting up a free blood-pressure monitoring service inside a drugstore—which I see all the time in Walgreens—makes sense in terms of timing. Setting up the same blood-pressure service inside Church's Fried Chicken probably won't get many folks."
>
> John Bare
> *vice president for strategic planning and evaluation, Arthur M. Blank Foundation*

Approaching waves with an ebb and flow can help keep audiences engaged. For some issues, the waves are obvious. There are times when target audiences are more open to being activated and engaged. The best time to mobilize people to do more to protect and financially support national parks is in the spring and summer when more people are out enjoying them. It is also proven to be a good time for groups to approach Congress and the administration to financially support the parks, as spring and summer are times when their constituents are likely visiting the parks, and Congress is likely working on appropriations bills.

For other issues, the waves need to be created. Breast cancer advocates have done this by focusing on October as breast cancer awareness month. In October, the world becomes awash in pink and it's hard to escape information about breast cancer and actions target audiences can take to support cancer research—from buying products to joining a walk to writing to members of Congress.

Strategic readiness.

Groups also need to look for—and be prepared to ride—rogue waves that they do not create but that can be very advantageous when they happen. This is one of the most overlooked timing opportunities. Groups spend enormous effort trying to get on people's radar screens, but they don't plan for sudden opportunities. Instead, when opportunity knocks, groups go into emergency-response mode and cannot realize the full potential of the moment—or worse, let the moment pass them by altogether.

The Terry Schiavo case, which captured national attention, provided a number of advocates—such as the advance directive groups that promote living wills—with a strong platform they could never have seen coming. Some, like the California Coalition for Compassionate Care, were able to move quickly. Others had no plan to take advantage of such an opportunity, and therefore missed a chance to push their messages through an existing news story.

> "One way to think about this is to understand the timing of 'rituals' in folks' lives. Emotional experiences at hospitals, baby stores, pet stores, veterinarians (vets' offices are full of posters of missing pets, for example, and customers are activated to want to help), etc., are all timed to line up with activation."
>
> John Bare
> *vice president for strategic planning and evaluation, Arthur M. Blank Foundation*

The perpetual time and budget constraints faced by nonprofits make it easy to postpone this sort of preparation—to perceive it as a luxury they cannot afford. Yet this preparation is crucial. Moments of opportunity may emerge only once or twice in the life-cycle of an issue, and no advocate can afford to squander them when they occur.

Sometimes an opportunity is not right on point, but it is a sign that the time might be right for an issue to come into vogue. The obesity epidemic offers a lesson in this. When obesity was first exposed as an epidemic, the focus was on Americans getting fat. But shortly thereafter, the focus shifted to specific interventions, like individual physical activity. Then it shifted to more systematic interventions, like environmental factors that can lead to obesity, such as sodas in schools. These shifts created new opportunities for a variety of organizations—from environmental organizations pushing for creation of more parks and trails to parents wanting safer walking routes to school for their children to local policymakers interested in improving community design. Look for opportunities that give you possible springboards to issues that you want to talk about.

If lightning strikes close, the next strike might be even closer—or make a direct hit. Groups that are smart and strategic with their planning can draw the lightning. They can see that the time is right to link their issue to something hot.

When will you persuade?

- When is the issue naturally hot? Certain times of year? Certain times of people's lives?
- What related things could happen that might make efforts more timely, and how can you prepare?
- What waves can you create, and when is the best time to do that?

Notes

A Few Final Words

When looking at successful and unsuccessful case studies, we noted that organizations that integrated many of the persuasion methods mentioned into their efforts had more success spurring action from audience targets. Not all persuasion measures will work in every instance. Organizations still need to consider what they know about an issue and their audience targets, and make the best strategic decisions they can.

The strong suggestion here is that organizations deliberately think through the issues raised. Specifically, to determine an activation point, groups need to:

- Be very clear about who they need to persuade;
- Understand the barriers that exist; and
- Know when the timing is right to approach audience targets.

We hope we have given you enough here to build both your knowledge of how to persuade an audience and your will to give some of these strategies a try—and that your future success offers plenty of reinforcement to try these methods again. The strategies and tips presented here are the result of an extensive research process that included case-study reviews, interviews with a variety of experts and the original research conducted with The Curious Company. To review this work and find additional resources including qualitative research tips that can help you plan your next persuasion campaign, log on to www.CommunicationsLeadership.org and click on the Activation Point™.

Getting Started

Use these questions as a starting point for discovering the activation point for your target audience.

Who do you need to persuade . . . to do what?

- What do you need to persuade people to do?
- What will their action accomplish for your organization or issue?
- What is the smallest number of people you can activate to get what you want?
- How many audience segments do they break down to?
- Can you test your requested action to learn where it falls in the audience's comfort zone?

What stage of persuasion is the audience in currently (build knowledge, build will or reinforce action)?

- What does the audience already know (or think it knows) about your issue?
- Does your audience need more information or more reason to care or act?
- How can you connect your issue to your audience's existing values?
- How can you make the issue more personal and emotionally relevant to the audience?
- How can you phrase your ask so it sounds like a suggestion rather than a command?
- Do your messages show you respect your audience?

What can be done to build the audience's will to act?

- What are the audience's current barriers?
- Is your request in their comfort zone? If not, how far out of their comfort zone do you need them to go?
- What is the perceived risk and how can you mitigate that risk?
- How can you make the benefits appear greater than the perceived risk?
- How can you position the issue and the requested action as the social norm?

What barriers need to be overcome and how?

- How can you acknowledge that the audience is pressed for time? Are there easy ways for them to get involved?
- Can you demonstrate a real hope for change?
- Can you show the audience that individual participation makes a difference?
- Can you protect the audience from feelings of rejection, failure or judgment?

When is the best time to persuade?

- When is your issue already on the public radar? Are there certain times of year or is there a certain point in an audience member's life when your issue is more likely to resonate?
- What would make your efforts timely? How can you create those opportunities?

Once your audience takes action, how do you reinforce that action?

- How can you showcase the benefits of people taking action?
- What small, ongoing victories can you show to keep the audience engaged?
- How can you reflect that this win reinforces your audience's values?
- When you follow up, how can you make it personal?

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