



Running Campaigns for Change

16 Basic Guidelines

Campaigns vary – one size does not fit all.

1. Reality check: Do you really need to campaign?

Campaigning can be fun but it's often hard, dull, frustrating and unsuccessful.

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

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

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

2. Motivation, not Education

Campaigning lowers the barriers against action and increases the incentives to take action until desired change is achieved.

Education, in contrast, is a broadening exercise. It uses examples to reveal layers of complexity, leading to lower certainty but higher understanding.

Campaigning maximises the motivation of the audience, not their knowledge. Try using education to campaign, and you will end up circling and exploring your issue but not changing it. Campaigns do have some 'educational' effect, but it is education by doing, through experience, rather than through being given information. Information is not power until it leads to mobilisation.

3. Analyse the forces

You know what needs to change. Ask this: 'Why hasn't it happened already?'

Try mapping out the forces for and against what you want to happen. Draw a map of the problem (Problem Tree) – the people involved, the organisations, the institutions – work out exactly what the mechanisms are for the decisions you want to change. Then identify potential allies and opponents and work out who your target audience is for each step (see guidelines 4, 5, 6). Look at it from their point of view.

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

4. Keep it simple

Campaigns are needed because there is an urgent problem which has to be made public in order to be resolved. Non-urgent problems may require education or information, but they are unlikely to justify campaigns. Campaigns are communication exercises. Effective motivation needs simplicity in message and purpose.

Communicate only one thing at a time. Use a simple unambiguous 'call to action' which requires no explanation. Consider the "fire" notices you find on the door of a hotel bedroom. If you are asleep in a hotel and you smell smoke, you expect to find instructions a bit like this:

IF YOU FIND A FIRE:

RAISE THE ALARM

GO IMMEDIATELY TO A PLACE OF SAFETY

CALL THE FIRE BRIGADE

It gives the bare minimum of essential information. It fits the situation. It asks for action in the right order – you don't want guests looking for a telephone to call the fire brigade – they should first get out. Yet so many campaigns try to be explanations of the issue. They would produce a fire notice more like this:

IF YOU FIND A FIRE:

NETWORK WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURS.

EXPLAIN THE ISSUES & PROCESSES OF IGNITION, FUEL EFFECTS, OXIDATION & ION PLASMAS. ADDRESS THE SOCIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE DIMENSIONS.

EDUCATE DECISION-MAKERS REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ADEQUATELY RESOURCED FIRE BRIGADE & FIRE PREVENTION.

5. Right components, right order

The fire sign follows the sequence:

awareness → alignment → engagement → action

It says:

Fire → We are all in danger → Let's go this way → We are leaving

As a conversation this is very simple and short. It helps that we all know what a fire is. A real campaign is likely to be far longer and slower, but the basic sequence is likely to remain.

A more typical campaign plan might look something like this, introducing both the problem, the "enemy" (that is the responsible agent of the problem) and the solution.



The campaign involves a deliberate series of revelations or communication exercises to take the 'audience' from a state of ignorance, through interest and then concern (components of awareness), into anger and engagement (motivation), and finally into a state of satisfaction or reward. If that happens, the campaign participants or supporters will be ready for more.

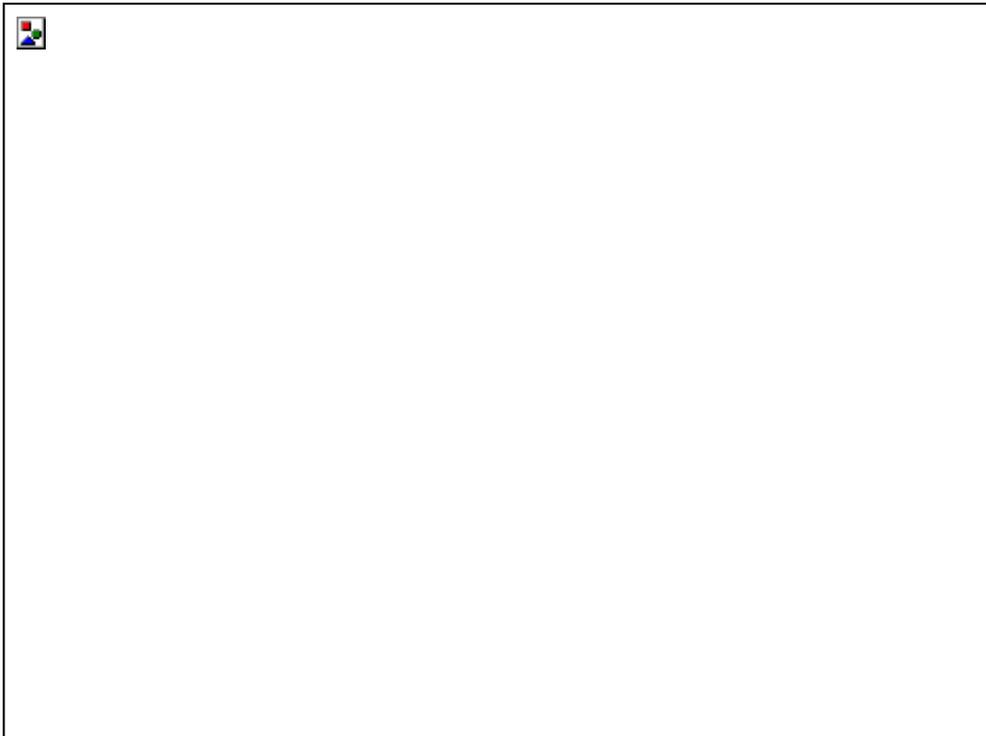
On their own, these components do not make sense. They will only get a 'so-what?' response. And communicate them all at once and there's no involvement in the 'story' of the campaign. A good campaign has to be like a book - the outcome must be important but unknown.

A very simple example is a petition. For example, Friends of the Earth, WWF and Greenpeace originally promoted www.climatevoice.org as an electronic petition aimed at generating over 10 million messages of concern to governments meeting at COP6 in the Hague (the 6th Conference of the Parties of the Climate Convention in 1999). The date of the meeting created a real deadline and the organisers had set a specific threshold - the website had a 'temperature dial' and counter showing how many people had signed up. There are many such online petitions to be found. Another large-scale case was the Greenpeace occupation of the Brent Spar oil installation. A struggle between activists and Shell went on over months and was covered daily by television,

radio and the press. The drama, which was only resolved hours from the intended sinking, was simple – would it be sunk or not.

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

Campaigns are not about knowing something – such as knowing a solution; they are about involving people in changing events so that solution becomes attainable.



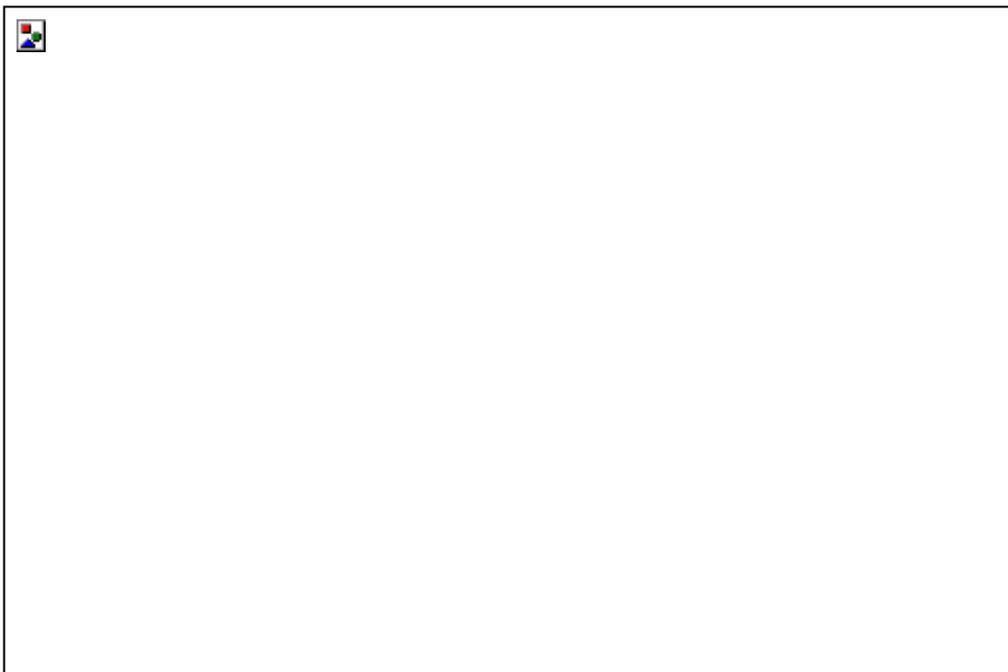
6. Start from where your audience is

"Start from where your audience is" is a well-worn motto of marketing.

A salesman tries to get you to buy something by adding value – extra features, extra benefits. A marketer finds out what you want, what you already do and think, and creates or finds a product that fits you.

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

Remember the chicken story. In the 1970s an aid agency ran a successful development project in one part of East Africa. It wanted to explain this idea to villagers elsewhere. So, it sent a film crew to make a short film explaining the project and equipped a vehicle to show this film as a mobile cinema. The film was made and toured to the target villages. Afterwards, a survey found that what villagers most remembered about the film was "the chickens". The agency was puzzled. Chickens had nothing to do with the project at all. Eventually they looked at the film. A cut-away shot showed an agency Landover speeding past a hut, and as it did so, a large group of chickens flew across the screen. Unfortunately, in the target village area, chickens were a sign of wealth, and this therefore was by far the most interesting feature of the film. [This may be an apocryphal tale but it's a good one].



7. Construct a critical path

All issues are complex, but your campaign must not be.

Complexity demotivates, it makes people feel confused - and if they feel confused, they will think you are confused, and not worth listening to. Your campaign cannot be the 'whole picture'. Instead it has to be a way, a trail, stepping stones, a critical path.

Do not try to communicate 'the issue', however tempting it may be.

Communicate your campaign...

- what you think,
- the problem as you see it,
- the solution as you see it,
- the opportunity as you see it

...and only that.

Stick with each stage until it is achieved. Each stage is a target or objective in itself. Resist the temptation to talk ahead by giving 'the whole picture'.

Plan a campaign as a series of steps where one leads to the next – like dominoes.

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

8. Campaign against the unacceptable

Your campaign may be 'about an issue', but to engage people it will need to have a much more specific 'battlefront'. Choosing that battlefront is a crucial task. A campaign strongly supported by a tiny part of the population may sustain a vigorous organisation.

It may survive for decades - for as long as its supporters have the energy. But to succeed, most campaigns need to attract much broader support – and to do that, you often need to narrow the focus.

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

9. Make real things happen

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

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

Too often campaigns become absorbed in collecting information or circulating it to people who already agree with the cause. Too often campaigns lose sight of the practical changes required in real life and get bogged down in other people's agendas – boxed in by the forces of business as usual. It's easy to do. Campaign organisations 'campaign' just by responding to outside interest and invitations. It's all activity. But they should be setting the pace and changing real things.

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

10. Say what you mean

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

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

The simplest thing you can do to help your message is to be direct and straightforward. Forget about being 'clever'. When all else fails, say what you mean.

The name of a campaign is case in point. One of the most successful anti-motorway campaigns in the UK was called 'Stop The Box'. It was a 1970s campaign to stop the construction of the inner London 'motorway box'. It succeeded: today you can drive along the few fragments that did get built; complete with over-size junctions and elevated spurs that end in mid-air. Other campaigns, with more complex names, did not get so far.

Obviously, a name is only one element, but a puzzling name is no help. Who remembers for example what ALARM or SAFE stood for? Both good 1990s campaigning organisations but with names that needed to be explained before you got to what they wanted. The 'Stop The Box' campaign however had its name in the title. Nobody from the campaign could even be interviewed on TV or radio without the journalist acting as a publicity agent for the campaign.

11. Find the conflicts in events – make the news

This is often misunderstood. Conflict is inherent to campaigns. Without a conflict of interest, a campaign would not be needed. That is not to promote conflict, confrontation or aggression. Greenpeace for example is committed to using non-violence in order to confront things that it believes are morally and technically wrong.

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

Whatever style or method is adopted, campaigning is in essence about a struggle for power, and generally the redistribution of power through exerting influence. An example is the rise of consumer influence over food production. Some power has shifted from food producers to food consumers. It was not farmers, not even organic farmers who caused the growth in organic farming: it was consumers.

News connects with politics through events. Events are also the things that change our views. Sometimes campaigns achieve a 'dialectical moment', that decisive instance where society, or someone in it, struggles with a choice between two opposing options, and chooses the new one. When one talks of 'forcing an issue to ahead' or people say 'I remember the first time I realised that...' this is what they are talking about. A campaign is about forcing a change to the status quo. Conflict is therefore built into it, indeed almost defines campaigning.

This is one reason why news focuses on conflict. Most significant changes are fiercely opposed. 'No opposition' usually means not much news.

12. Communication in pictures

At every level, think out your campaign in steps, leading back from the objective you want to achieve.

If you want a politician to sign a decree, write that down or sketch it as if it was a newspaper front page photo. What actually has to be in that picture, or to have happened in the lead up to it, to make that happen?

Create a chronological story board – your critical path – and work out how you will make that happen. If you can't, then change your objective. But don't try to do the job of the press. Don't try to create 'cartoons'. that are real could include: occupying a tree, releasing a dove, conducting a survey in a shopping mall, visiting your MP, writing a letter, sending an e mail, speaking to a crowd, or invading a nuclear reprocessing plant.

Create events that actually generate those pictures – or lead them to occur. Then make sure you communicate in pictures, not just words. If you find this difficult at first, try involving a local photographer. Take them through your campaign plan and get them to say whether they could tell the story in pictures. As a rule, if there's nothing to photograph, there's no actual activity, no objective to achieve, and no campaign to join in with, report or support. Pictures are far more powerful than words. Good ones tell the story and the best need no caption. And pictures cannot be interrogated or argued with.

Make your campaign speak in characters and symbols that are larger-than-life. The only things stronger than images are face to face contact and direct engagement in doing the campaign.

13. Don't just send messages

Campaigning is a conversation with society – a two-way process like a phone call. It is not a one-way broadcast of your views or 'messages' like a radio programme.

Talk Listen Hear Respond Engage

What activities are you going to do with your target group? How will you campaign together?

Communication occurs when your ideas get into the head of someone else and it is understood – not just when your message is sent, not even just when it arrives at 'their end'.

Useful communication occurs when their ideas also get into your head. Many campaigns fail because they are communicating only with their existing supporters, and not with the audiences who can bring about change. Others fail because campaigners are more concerned with getting 'coverage' – getting on TV or radio or in the press – than they are in looking for signs of the effect of the campaign. Remember that your ears are as important as your mouth is.

14. Testing a strategy

Ideally no campaign should be started until you have tested your strategy.

In reality, campaigns often 'just grow' and the opportunity to properly test them never arises. We recommend testing a strategy with two types of research – qualitative research to investigate language, and 'political' research to investigate obstacles, decision-making, attitudes of key individuals, potential allies and opponents. Qualitative research should not be confused with quantitative opinion research conducted by groups such as Gallup, NOP or MORI. Quantitative or 'polling' research tells you how many people think something. Qualitative research tells you why they think something.

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

15. The scandal equation

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

American public affairs adviser Peter Sandman sells businesses his own 'outrage' analysis to help them defend themselves against environmentalists and others. Here is our version) – the scandal equation.

**Scandal = Awfulness x
What can be done
What is being done x immoral profit from it**

If your campaign 'isn't working' consider changing your focus. Which parts of this equation can you change best?

Note that scandal is not just composed of awfulness. This is the thing journalists and the press usually focus on. 'Just how bad is it?' they ask as they try to turn a disaster into a more newsworthy claim of 'catastrophe'. Campaigners who are seduced into that game are asking for trouble. But by showing convincingly that the problem is getting worse, you can increase the sense of scandal.

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

Lastly, 'immoral profit made from it' is a compounding factor. If someone is making a profit from a terrible problem - such as knocking holes in the ozone layer - that makes the scandal a whole lot worse.

16. Are you being co-opted?

Do you understand your opponent well enough?

In the 1990s a senior British mandarin (civil servant) in the then Department of the Environment, used to tell incoming officials that there were 'three types' of environmental organisation. 'Those you need to take notice of because they know what they are talking about; those you must take notice of because they can do real damage, and those whom you just have to be nice to'. I think he probably said the same thing to incoming Ministers.

Broadly speaking – and without revealing which groups were in which categories – the way officialdom (and some companies) will try to deal with non-governmental organisations, is to marginalise those who can cause real 'damage' to their interests, use those who have uniquely useful information or expertise, and simply patronise the rest. The latter two are both forms of co-option, which for most groups is the main danger.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is your campaign regarded as 'constructive' and 'responsible' by your opponents?
- Do those with power to make the decisions you want to change, give you grants or other help?
- Do you rely on them for information?
- Has your campaign resulted in greater access to officials or politicians or executives but still no real result?

- Have you been invited to join a task force or working group or commission in which time no decision will actually be taken?

If the answer to any of these is 'yes', then you may well be on the way to co-option.

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

Learn the ways of your opponent. Learn their language – get to know ex-politicians or ex-officials or people from inside a company who understand the culture and way of thinking. In this way you can learn to interpret the signals when your campaign begins to have some effect.