

*Speech given to the North Texas Association of Non-Profits
2002*

HOW TO GET YOUR AGENCY GOALS THROUGH THE CLUTTER

MERITS OF ARGUMENT

First – consider whatever you are involved with a **CAMPAIGN**. You may say, this is no campaign, this is about getting funding for our cause.... that's a campaign. It may be for money, may be about getting media, and may be about public policy, whatever, **IT IS A CAMPAIGN**.

No matter how complicated your cause you must get your goals into three bullet points. You are always in a campaign and most winning campaigns are based on three main issues.

There may be many more but the winning campaign can always look to three main issues that were their margin of victory.

Unfortunately the whole world thinks in sound bites, thanks to CNN we must be able to describe a world tragedy in 30 seconds or less. While it may seem shallow it does force all of us to get to the point and make it fast. This does bring discipline to your organization. You must learn to tell your story in the same way.

Avoid the temptation to have a new issue every day and every day work the issue and message you have developed.

WHO CARES

Why should a State Representative or Senator who represents 250,000 people care about something that impacts so few?

That is YOUR job, to make them care.

You must find ways to make the few seem more important than the great majority. Either it is the people it is impacting or the nobility of the cause.

It is always more difficult to push public policy issues for those that have no voice. You must give them a voice or become their voice.

You must always think in terms of making something that is important to you into a compelling, urgent matter for the legislator and you must set a time line that requires action or none will ever take place.

The system is set up to do nothing. Our founding fathers wanted it this way. Similar to a doctors "DO NO HARM", government is set up "TO DO NO HARM". Nor harm is to do nothing.

The system is set up to grind to a halt with just the slightest sand thrown into the cogs.

Shiavo case...it took over 5 years to get attention and than it was too late. Government did not get interested until they were ready to pull the feeding tub and you are faced with the same situation.

How do you give your cause urgency in the mind of the legislative body?

Think of the number of times government has nearly shut down because a budget could not be agreed upon.

You must understand the system and how it works. More good people and great ideas go without hearing or funding because people were naïve and did not understand the system.

Not only must you know how the elected official functions but you must get to understand and respect the staff otherwise known as The Bureaucracy.

The Bureaucracy has no vested interest in getting anything done. They make no extra money when something goes through, they get no credit for a job well done, in fact there is usually no up-side to action.

Strategic Planning is key and matching your board members to your plan is critical. It's great to have people on your board who are committed to your cause but they also must serve the strategic plan.

If your needs are marketing put a marketing person on the committee.

If your needs are fundraising, put a fundraiser on the board.

If your needs are policy, find a former elected official for your board.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

And you will have enemies no matter how noble your case. You not only need to know who they are but you must be realistic about their strength. They will rear their ugly heads in the form of:

Organizations who are after the same money

Businesses that will not benefit from your generosity (homeless shelter)

Great case study about people with no voice given a voice by the mayor and city council, Tom Dunning, and those selfless people who serve our homeless population.

Seems like a wonderful plan until the site is picked and of course no one wants the shelter in his or her area. All sides have valid concerns, there are no right or wrong, and just a train wreck getting ready to happen with no one getting everything they want in the end.

Neighborhoods that want no change

A City Council person serves thousands of people but a few will hold sway. Why, because they are the very few who got the councilperson elected and the councilperson determines zoning.

THE BIGGER THE CORPORATE ENEMY, THE SLOWER AND MORE ARROGANT THEY USUALLY ARE

Drug Companies

Big Oil Companies

The Airline Industry

Insurance and HMO

If you are to go up against these mammoth industries the challenge will seem daunting. You must win with a unique strategy knowing that they are tend to be slow moving with a tendency toward arrogance. Consider that you are lean and mean and able to change directions at a minutes notice.

These industries are always thinking about their stockholders and there is only one thing that they care about, **THE BOTTOM LINE AND A PROFIT**. This is their responsibility. You must learn to use this against them.

They are adverse to bad publicity, are unable to move quickly and they usually assume you will cave early and that you will not have an effective strategy. **BIG MISTAKE**.

Think like the militia in the Revolutionary War, they hid in the bushes and attacked a bloated military that marched in the open in bright colored uniforms.

**WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS CREATE THE “WIZARD OF OZ” SHOW
AND HOPE THAT NO ONE PULLS THE CURTAIN.**

Whenever you are planning a strategy and are going against the odds, which is almost always, go and rent THE WIZZARD OF OZ. We are so caught up with Dorothy and Toto finding their way home that we forget about the little man behind the curtains.

He is my favorite character in this little drama. There may be “no place like home” but I have always been fascinated by this little man behind the curtains who had the entire kingdom trembling with his might.

Your organization is the little man behind the curtain.

The media usually does not look behind the curtain as they are too busy recording the smoke and noise of any event. Use this to your advantage.

THE ROAD THROUGH THE PROCESS IS COMPLICATED BUT THE SOLUTION IS USUALLY VERY SIMPLE

When I first started out my career I would often find myself in a room with the titans of industry or the leaders in the City.

I would listen and think this is not that complicated, surely they have thought of that, no way they would not have thought of that, something so obvious but I would keep quiet being so afraid of stating the obvious and seeming stupid.

So I kept quiet and guess what, they had not thought about the obvious and then I would spend a lot of my time thinking, “How in the world did they get where they are” and that is still true today. The difference is I speak my mind now.

And low and behold, what I seem to be best at is cutting through the garbage and stating the obvious.

IT’S THE PRINCIPAL OF THE THING

How often I have heard these six little words and think “WHOOPY” I am going to make some money today.

These words are often stated after some questioning on why they did something, said something, and reacted to something that makes no sense.

In great frustration the words are finally uttered: “It was the principle of the thing.”

If you ever hear these words you will know that decisions have been made on emotion and not based on a sound strategy.

So in closing:

Know the merits of your message
Know who really cares
Know who your enemy is

Know how to fight

Know that the solution is usually simple

And know that it usually not the principle of the thing