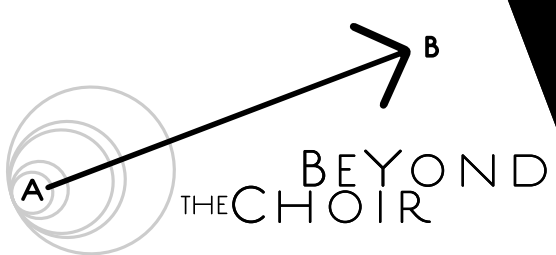
Building Successful Anti-War Movement

Tools & Methods for People Organizing to End The War



Three Roles

of an Antiwar Core

They won't do it. It's up to all of us to stop the war.

It's 2007, and the war continues. It is even escalating with Bush's maddening "surge." Equally maddening is the announcement from prominent Democrats that they will not be exercising the only power they have to rein in the administration. Instead of denying Bush more funds for the war—a move, with historic precedence, that would pressure a quick withdrawal of US troops from Iraq—they are opting for a non-binding resolution, a "political statement."

While a large majority of Americans want their leadership to bring the troops home, Democrats are using their new majority to state their heartfelt wish for the same—to pass a symbolic resolution—rather than to use actual power to make it so. New House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and most other Democratic representatives are parroting Bush by equating continued funding for the war with support for our troops. They should be refuting this manipulative frame, not reinforcing it.

Many rank and file Democrats and some progressive leaders like Representatives Jim McGovern (MA) and Dennis Kucinich (OH) are pushing to end the war by cutting off the Administration's requested funds. But it is becoming clear that the November election results—popularly dubbed a referendum on the war—are not enough for the new Democratic majority Congress to decisively exercise their power to *end* the war.

It is becoming clear that the majority of Americans who favor a quick withdrawal will have to exercise their own power—beyond voting—to pressure an end to the war. The politicians won't do it without the mounting pressure of a well-organized popular movement. It is up to all of us to build such a movement.

Truth is not enough.

With regard to the Bush Administration, progressives are a bit like backseat drivers. We know the way, and we're not afraid to say it boldly. But the driver isn't listening. Not only that – he's intoxicated, a lousy driver to begin with, and may not even have a valid license. He's been taking wrong turns from the start of this bumpy ride, with deadly results. It goes on and on, casualties mounting, and still we're sitting in the backseat, offering directions, making demands, and saying, "I told you so."

"Truth, unfortunately, is not its own arbiter. The neo-con cabal determining our country's foreign policy is not swayed by appeals to reason, values or truth. Our problem is not truth, but power. They have it. We don't. Yet."

It is not enough to be right or to have the truth on our side. We need the damn steering wheel!

From the start—or rather *before* the start—the antiwar movement has been correct on just about everything about Iraq. All of its warnings have most tragically come true. Has this translated into popular prestige for the antiwar movement? Has it increased the movement's power or influence? Has it dramatically bolstered our ranks? Has it forced capitulation to any of our demands?

For the most part the answer to these questions is no. To put it plainly, having the truth on our side has done jack for us.

It's time for us to scrap the motto "Speak truth to power." What has speaking truth to power gained us other than a clear conscience? Having the truth on our side allows us to wash our hands of Bush's bloody misadventure, but what else does it actually accomplish? Power responds to power, not truth – perhaps especially the current Administration. Yes, we need to both seek and speak truth, but truth is not presently our primary problem.

Public opinion isn't even our problem anymore. Popular sentiment against the Iraq War has reached a record high. Pundits from across the political spectrum tell us that the midterm elections were a referendum on the war. But beyond the vote, where is popular mobilization against the war? While many dedicated individuals and groups continue antiwar efforts, still, the movement is remarkably weak considering how firmly the public now opposes the war.

It is not enough that the neo-cons' still-unfolding failures have shifted majority opinion into alignment with the antiwar movement's position on withdrawal. It is people's active participation, not their passive agreement, that is needed. To end this war—and to prevent future ones—we need a mass movement. Mass means millions. We cannot afford to sit idly waiting for the new Congress to deliver on a symbolic and undefined referendum. Nor can we afford to do antiwar activism as if we might somehow, someday stop the war without first activating a mass base.

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Another perhaps more hopeful way of putting it: their power is kinetic, already in motion. Ours is still largely

potential, in need of activation. The task of antiwar change agents is to organize and activate a base strong enough to enact a vision of justice and peace.

If we are to end the war, and prevent future wars of aggression, we have to turn popular antiwar sentiment into an active, potent and coordinated political force. We can't think of ourselves as the lone prophet crying in the wilderness, as the righteous few making our stand, as the impotent conscience of a nation gone mad. We need to focus our attention outwardly, to mobilize the large constituencies that are now more approachable than before. We need to figure out the most appropriate and strategic role the present antiwar movement can play in building a popular movement many times as big.

Local antiwar organizers presently lack a common overarching conceptual framework to unite their efforts to grow such a movement. This series proposes that the present antiwar movement conceptualize three primary roles for itself, from which all its various tasks and tactics stem. These roles are 1) interpretive, 2) instructive, and 3) facilitative.

Three primary roles of an antiwar core

1) Interpretive: Translate our analysis into a potent narrative that connects with common positive values.
2) Instructive: Articulate a viable overarching strategy for broad-based action to end the war.
3) Facilitative: Inspire and facilitate mass participation. (Mass means millions.)

But first, what is an antiwar core? Presently it is the people who are already active in antiwar efforts on an ongoing basis, but it will shift and expand as the movement grows. Core, in this case, should not be an exclusionary term. It is helpful for a core to conceptualize itself as such not to exclude, but to consciously facilitate the participation of masses of people who do not have the time, energy or desire to be part of a core, but who do want to do *something*. The antiwar movement's success rests in harnessing that collective *something*.

Each of the three essays that follow explores one of the above-suggested primary roles of an antiwar core.

The aim of this series is to offer analytical tools to increase the effectiveness of an antiwar core. We believe that this core needs a concrete strategy to build a progressive political force strong enough to first end the Iraq War, and then to change the direction of US foreign policy so that it reflects common values of justice, peace, freedom and dignity, thereby preventing future wars of aggression. While this series does not hash out such a strategy, we hope that it may contribute to forging one.

While the series touches on objective conditions in Iraq, in the US power establishment, and in US society, it delves deeper into subjective conditions in current antiwar work, with an emphasis on potentials. The authors are active antiwar organizers, and this series is intended primarily for others who are organizing in their areas to end the war. We do, however, hope that at least some of the ideas may be relevant to anyone who hopes for a more just and peaceful world, whether or not they have as of yet found a satisfactory way to act on this hope. We wish to challenge the notion that people who are not presently active in antiwar activities do not care, and furthermore, that the workings of the antiwar movement are irrelevant to such persons.

> "If we are to end the war, and prevent future wars of aggression, we have to turn popular antiwar sentiment into an active, potent and coordinated political force."

Throughout this series we aim to challenge a dominant story in which civic engagement is a marginal niche identity, or a passing phase for the young or naïve, instead of a common responsibility and a public good. For this reason in most cases we replace the label *activist*—often used to effectively inoculate society against grassroots efforts—with *change agent*; which we define as anyone who consciously joins with others to intervene in the historical process. Our discussion of the current antiwar movement, including its shortcomings and negative tendencies, is rooted in a love and respect for fellow movement participants, and comes from the conviction that mass movement is the only likely vehicle by which we will positively change the direction of US policy.

We believe that the reasons why many people are not presently active in this movement should inform the work of those who are. We seek more strategic dialogue within the antiwar core and beyond it. We hope this series might serve as a small contribution to such dialogue, and that the dialogue might in turn contribute to a broader ownership of a stronger and more strategic antiwar movement.

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2 **Instructive**: Articulate a viable overarching strategy for broad-based action to end the war.

3 **Facilitative**: Inspire and facilitate mass participation. (Mass means millions.)

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Contents:

This pamphlet brought to you by
the Beyond the Choir Collective

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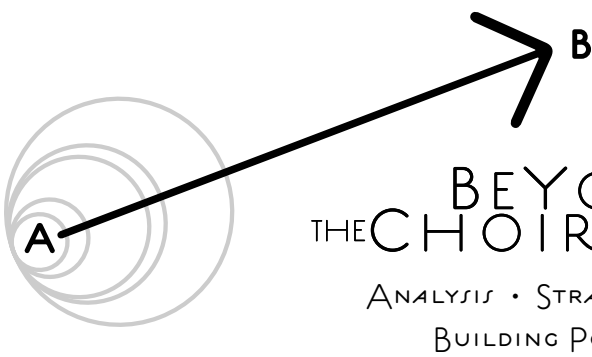

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Role 1: Interpretive

Speak the Truth, Tell a Story

Interpretation

The first primary role of an antiwar core that we will discuss is to attach meaning to unfolding events and help shape common understandings – to interpret reality based on the patterns we observe.

Imperialism, for example, is an observable pattern where the government of one country extends its dominance over other countries or colonies to increase its own wealth and power. Progressives see US military interventions, political and economic pressuring, and even cultural exports through the lens of a story of US imperialism. This story helps us to understand the situation.

Stories can expose underlying motives. They turn the actors into types of characters: protagonists and antagonists, victims, villains, heroes, and so on. Stories connect events, and strip them of their randomness and neutrality. Stories place judgment.

> "We need to tell stories that activate, stories that people can see themselves stepping into."

But stories can also obscure motives and distort reality. For example, there is another story used to explain the various manifestations of the US government's meddling in the world. The story of US benevolence has deep roots in the culture, relying heavily on popular accounts of World War I and, especially, World War II. This story assumes that our government is genuinely interested in spreading freedom, justice and democracy (rather than undermining and overthrowing it).

Different stories produce different lessons from the same set of events. Consider the following example. We find out that Rosanna got laid off. Then that Joe got laid off too. Turns out that the local factory fired many workers. It moved much of its production overseas, where it can pay the workers far less than their American counterparts. Rosanna and Joe are going to be hard up, and they know it. But what else do they know? How do they assemble these events, experiences and observations in their heads? What stories help them and others to explain their situation?

There are multiple options. Maybe the blame rests with the unions that are forcing companies to move overseas because they can't compete here. Maybe it was fate, or the mysterious will of God. Maybe the workers who got fired just weren't working as hard as those who kept their jobs. Or, of course, maybe the company is greedy. Maybe the system is flawed. Maybe the workers need to organize. Or maybe the company's greed is just the natural order of things, and there's nothing anyone could ever do to stop it anyway.

People do not just let facts stand on their own. We interpret them. We are constantly assimilating experiences, events and information into narratives we carry with us. These stories are not neutral. They have consequences. They affect behavior. Rosanna and Joe's next move might be to join a union, or it might be to scab at the factory in the next town over. Their decisions will be shaped by the stories they tell themselves about their situation.

Bread and butter needs (and other material incentives) affect such choices too. So do the specific opportunities that come our way. But neither of these is deterministic. Humans are thinking creatures. And we think in narrative. Our stories, our beliefs, our assumptions hold enormous power in our lives.

Dominant Narratives

The *smart*Meme Strategy and Training Project[1] explains the basic psychological function of narrative: "Story is a lens through which we process the information we encounter: cultural, emotional, experiential, political… We remember our lived experiences by converting them to narrative and integrating them into our personal and collective web of stories."[2] Through narrative we explain the world, including our place in it. Key to understanding the power of narrative is that, more than we tell stories, "stories *tell us*" what to think and do.

The importance of narrative as a cultural, economic and political force should not be underestimated. Its value is certainly not questioned by those in power, evidenced by a public relations industry in the US measured in the hundreds of billions of dollars. In a society where wealth and power is held as disproportionately as ours, the power-holders will project a *dominant narrative* onto the populace to both legitimize and obscure this disparity and political order. While the singular term dominant narrative can be helpful conceptually, the reality of it is multilayered; an accumulation of stories spun by sometimes competing elites, tailored to fit specific agendas, consumed and internalized by the public – though this last critical step is not an inevitability.

It comes as no surprise that those who wield disproportionate power in controlling wealth and shaping policy also wield comparably disproportionate power in shaping the grand narratives people rely on to make sense of the world. Still, it is the beginning of a potentially useful analysis: that dominant narratives often do not reflect the authentic will of the people, but rather prescribe it.

The Bush Administration's story about the Iraq War is a control narrative that was designed to manufacture and corral the people's will, rather than to empower people to discover and act on their own authentic will. Following 9/11 politicians and pundits opportunistically punctuated a powerful fear-based control narrative, coining and parroting phrases like "War on Terror," "Homeland Security," "Axis of Evil," and so on. These phrases were designed to tell a story that would help push agendas, preclude alternatives or dissent, and consolidate power. False dichotomies are a hallmark of fear-based control narratives. For example: "You're with either with us or you're with the terrorists." In the thick of the political climate of fear that followed 9/11, to argue with this statement was to be relegated to the latter of the two options – with the terrorists.

9/11 jostled Americans' anxieties like a rock on a hornets' nest. Many people struggled to make sense of the attacks, working through feelings of anger, fear and sadness. The Bush Administration quickly wove together a story to explain the attacks in ways that would channel people's emotions and draw lessons favorable to the neo-cons' ambitious agenda. Their story was first and foremost about why we must go to war. They used classic narrative devices; America was the victim, al Queda the clear villain. The story started on what would have been a pleasant Tuesday morning in September, with America waking up to a new day, only to be savagely surprise-attacked by a villain so evil that his only rationale was a rabid hatred of freedom itself. He might have destroyed freedom and "our way of life" entirely, unless…

In stepped our hero, George W. Bush, already resolute while most Americans were still reeling. He knew who did it, and he knew what he was going to do to them. The only thing America could do in this story was to fight back, to not be a victim. *These colors don't run!* The story demanded that we go to war. It precluded any other options.

While fear has been the cornerstone of the Bush Administration's narrative strategy, it is certainly not the only value they exploit. To effectively use narrative to control, elites must appeal to positive values as well: freedom, justice, democracy, etc.[3] Of course delivering substantively on these values tends to interfere with their primary goal of staying (and growing more) rich and powerful. So they co-opt the values. They take positive popular themes, mix them up, and feed a distorted version back to us.

Effective elites feed their agenda to the populace using common language and appealing to common values. It wouldn't work if they were to invent their own vocabulary to explain it, and try to force it down people's throats. They know better than to directly battle the culture—they leave that for the fundamentalists—if they can find a way to ride it instead. They recognize the importance of keeping a finger on the pulse of popular culture.

This doesn't mean that politicians are "in touch" with common people. They don't need to be. That's what PR firms, think tanks and speechwriters are for. Elites' access to this vast industry of cynical sugar-coaters is limited only by the dollar figure they cough up. (And they're willing to pay a pretty penny, knowing how a spoonful of sugar helps the big fat tax break for the extremely rich go down.)

Their Story, Our Story

The antiwar movement must not be too proud or purist to learn a few things from our opponents, even though their techniques repulse us. Karl Rove and company are essentially doing a perverted version of something all good organizers must do. They are listening (albeit through hired intermediaries) to common people, weaving their words and sentiments into a meaningful story, and feeding it back to them.[4]

There are important differences between Mr. Rove's storytelling technique and what the antiwar movement should be doing. Foundationally, there is the difference in motive: the antiwar movement genuinely wants to amplify the truth—for objective facts to be widely known—while the Bush Administration has a vested interest in hiding facts, withholding information, and silencing and obscuring truth. This fundamental difference between their ends and ours creates corresponding differences between their means and ours. To put it simply, they tell stories to deceive and control, while we should tell stories to inform and inspire. As a result the stories themselves and the ways in which they are told, tend to be qualitatively different. Their storytelling appeals primarily to fear and co-opts positive values in order to achieve public acquiescence; the stories we tell should appeal genuinely to positive values, conscience and reason in order to promote civic engagement. Their stories prescribe the public will; the stories we tell should encourage people to formulate their own opinions. Their stories limit options and close debate; the stories we tell should open broader dialogue and possibilities.

Again, different stories promote different kinds of actions. In short, the "action" the Bush Administration wishes to inspire is for everyone to sit down and shut up. There is, however, something that the antiwar movement should strive to share with Karl Rove: a recognition that people think with stories, and a strategy to accompany this recognition. We cannot afford to give our opponents a monopoly on story-based strategy.

Changing the Story

*smart*Meme advocates a "narrative analysis of power," meaning that the powerful project a control narrative – a story that tells people what to do, and the limits of what is possible – and that change agents must work to "change the story."

The antiwar movement must do much more than interpret events for the sake of its own understanding and analysis; we must tell a persuasive story to the broader society, especially to the constituencies that we aim to organize. And convincing people to agree with us is only a first step. A large majority of Americans already share our opposition to the Iraq War. This hasn't translated into a mass movement powerful enough to end the war. We need to tell stories that activate – stories that people can see themselves stepping into.

For many people to see themselves stepping into the antiwar movement, we first have to overcome negative stories about us. We have to grapple with the fact that, for a substantial portion of the population, activism itself has been *negatively branded*. That is to say that the term and concept of activism has been so maligned that it now conjures negative associations in many people's mind.

Corporations are very concerned about their brand image; the antiwar movement should be too. Brand image, in the corporate world, refers to the stories, meanings,

Who Is Telling the Story?

THE MESSENGER MATTERS

Messengers are oftentimes just as important if not more important than the message itself. The messenger embodies the message by putting a human face on the conflict, and putting the story in context. In order for our stories to resonate, people with whom the audience can identify and trust must tell them. (Most often this does not mean merely "activists.") Frequently power holders will claim their policies are intended to help whatever marginalized group is challenging them. Thus it is essential that change agents amplify the voices of those most impacted by the issue. The antiwar movement's strategic messengers—or *sympathetic characters*—include key constituencies that are rejecting the Bush Administration's leadership: Iraq war veterans, soldiers and their families, faith leaders, representatives from different communities of color—especially from New Orleans—economists, policy experts, and Iraqis.

-*smart*Meme (www.smartmeme.com)

memories and emotions that people associate with a particular company. A company with a tarnished brand image struggles to sell product.

Change agents need to recognize how negative stories and stereotypes about us are used to inoculate society against even hearing our message, let alone taking action or joining our ranks. We have to create new stories in the culture about civic engagement and social movement. We have to break our own monopoly over the issues and values that we struggle for, as well as the means by which we struggle. As long as *activism* is all about *activists*—a niche role, a type of person—it will remain an ineffectual undertaking of a few.

Too often we play into the negative stereotypes. There is a tendency within large currents of the movement to project ourselves as outsiders, as defectors (read "traitors"), as different and distinct (read "better"). We talk disdainfully about society. We talk about America as if we were not part of it. This approach suits our opponents very well. In fact, whenever and wherever people start to effectively challenge power, the textbook counter-attack is to malign change agents as outsiders. When we willingly identify and project ourselves as just that, we cooperate with our opponents' strategy to inoculate society against progressive change. We forfeit the possibility of building a popular movement. Ultimately, our goal is to change destructive and limiting assumptions long-held in the mainstream culture. We have to "change the story" but in order to do so we must approach popular cultural narratives as insiders, not outsiders.

Too often activists engage in *narrative attack*. Narrative attack means attacking one narrative or worldview from the point of view of a different one. For example, "Amerikkka is NOT a democracy!" may seem like a coherent statement to the person holding a sign that bears this message. They may be aiming to undermine the story of "America, the great nation," the "land of opportunity," etc. because they see these claims as hypocritical given the United States' history of genocide, slavery and imperialism. This is not to dispute the sign-holder's politics, but it is to say that their presentation will not be well received by many people who have mostly positive associations with the word *America*. Narrative attack can be subtle too. But it characteristically involves some form of disparaging or disassociating from something that someone else values. Narrative attack fortifies people's defenses and rarely changes minds.

When activists engage in narrative attack, it is usually against a mainstream narrative from the perspective of a marginalized worldview. It's not that we should abandon our perspective or politics – not in the least. The problem is not our interpretation of reality: the alternative narratives we collectively construct to explain unfolding events and power relationships. The problem is the chasm between our alternative narratives and prevailing narratives in the culture. Again, change agents must do much more than interpret reality for our own understanding; we must tell a persuasive story to the broader society, especially to the constituencies we aim to organize. We cannot expect people to have a clue as to what we're talking about—much less to join our cause—when we make critiques using our own internal rhetoric, in the language and logic of our self-understood alternative narratives. It doesn't matter how precise or correct we may believe our analysis to be, if it's incoherent to a broader audience. If we don't use common language that speaks to people's common values, we will be seen as outsiders.

Narrative Insurgency

If we are to transform cultural meanings, we need to think not in terms of attacking culture from the outside,[5] but rather in terms of homegrown insurgency, indigenous to the culture. The root of the word insurgency is "rise up." Insurgencies rise up from within. *Narrative insurgency* rises up from within a cultural narrative. To effectively play an interpretive role, antiwar change agents have to be *narrative insurgents*, changing the culture from the inside out. (With the term *narrative insurgency* we are stressing that new meanings must rise up *within* existing cultural narratives – a nonviolent and thoroughly political process.)

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Cultural narratives (e.g. America: Beacon of Liberty, Purveyor of Democracy) are characteristically complex, often rife with contradictions, and vary from one person to the next. Narrative insurgents do not reject narratives wholesale, but distinguish between those components that are allied, hostile or neutral to their cause. They embrace as much of a cultural narrative as possible—the allied and neutral components—and encourage the further development of the allied components, using these as the foundations for their organizing efforts in the given community. Because direct confrontation tends to polarize people and fortify their positions, the narrative insurgent is cautious, selective and strategic about when to engage in it, often preferring to dance around a narrative's hostile components rather than engage these head-on. The strategy here is to feed the allied components within a narrative until they are strong enough to burst out of the old framework. The old narrative is often never explicitly rejected; it just fades. Feeding the allied components gives the transitioning individual, group or society something to hold onto through the transition process.

Numerous studies have shown that children learn best through positive reinforcement; that is, being encouraged in what they are doing well rather than rebuked for their errors and shortcomings. Why would adults be any different? No one wants to hear that they're doing something wrong or that they're not doing enough. People are similarly turned off when they feel the symbols and institutions that they identify with are being maligned (e.g. the flag, the military, America, religion, etc.). Too often change agents relate to people in ways that can trigger feelings of guilt or defensiveness. While guilt can occasionally motivate positive changes in people, it is not a sustainable motivating force. In the long-term, and often in the short-term too, guilt triggers more resentment than it inspires change. Besides, guilt is a tool of social control, not of liberation. It is only effectively wielded when accompanied by the threat of social penalties such as ostracism. For example, if a church hierarchy uses guilt as part of a strategy to control its members' sexuality, it can do so to the degree that it holds power over their lives. Generally organizers and activists don't possess this kind of power. (Nor do we want it.) If we make people we talk to feel guilty or defensive, they're likely to avoid us and talk to other people instead.

An effective narrative insurgent rejects guilt as a manipulative and generally unhelpful tool. S/he seeks to avoid triggering feelings of guilt and shame in the people around her (with the occasional exception of targeted opponents), regardless of whether s/he believes their actions or inactions warrant such feelings. Instead s/he utilizes positive reinforcement with an analysis of *confirmatory bias*. *smart*Meme summarizes the concept of confirmatory bias as "people's habit of screening information based on their own beliefs. In other words, people are much more likely to believe something that reinforces their existing opinions and values than to accept information that challenges their beliefs."[6]

The narrative insurgent plays with ambiguity, resists labeling attempts, and does not seek to nail others to rigid positions. S/he is not overly preoccupied with the correctness of people's political analysis. S/he herself did not

arrive at her political analysis overnight, and thus recognizes that the development of analysis is a process that cannot be deposited into people's heads. It comes through experiences and dialogue and is a self-determined process. The organizer's role then is not so much to provide the most correct political line, but rather to create cultural and relational space wherein people have opportunity to reflect critically on shared experiences and develop and arrive at their analyses together. This is particularly important given that those who identify as activists and organizers, because we have devoted the mental resources to it, tend to have more developed political analyses than the people we may be trying to engage, and we tend to articulate it in a very specific rhetoric. Our analysis then, if laid out on the table all at once, is likely to alienate us from people we want to engage.

Again, most of us who have a developed political analysis did not arrive at it overnight, and we cannot expect to be able to walk others through a logical proof in one sitting. We can play an important role in helping people to reflect dialogically on their own experiences, but we cannot give them our experiences. We have to be patient enough to allow them to make mistakes, harbor bad ideas, etc. And, in creating space for this, we may actually learn from them. Maybe it is we who are making the mistake or harboring the bad idea? The teacher always has something to learn, and the learner always has something to teach. This is essential to any true dialogue.

While strategy is important, a true narrative insurgent is more than a calculating tactician. Their primary motivations should always be love and compassion. As Che Guevara said, "At the risk of sounding ridiculous, the true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love." If change agents do not love the people and communities they are engaging, then narrative insurgency for them will likely be an unsuccessful attempt to manipulate people to further an agenda. It is not enough for that agenda to be human liberation or even love itself – in the abstract. A change agent must love the specific people and communities s/he engages. S/he must value each relationship in its own right. While s/he will often disagree with others' opinions, s/he still values and even empathizes with their perspectives. S/he is forgiving toward their shortcomings. S/he is always rooting for them, always finding something worthy of praise, even when it seems like finding a needle in a haystack. As such, narrative insurgency begins to come naturally; s/he does not have to feign identification with the allied and neutral components within the narrative, within the culture. Narrative insurgency is not Machiavellian. A change agent learns the intricacies of cultural narratives not to deceive people, but to communicate common values in a language that holds meaning for them. S/he does not use people as pawns, as passive props or objects. S/he encourages people to realize their own empowerment.

Psychic Breaks

We have to honor that people are complex beings who simultaneously hold multiple beliefs. Sometimes events put these beliefs into conflict with each other, which can threaten to unravel long-held assumptions. Take someone who is in the armed forces and believes strongly in the military as an institution. They believe that going to war is at times a necessary way to solve problems. They believe in US benevolence and the importance of patriotism. Coming from a working class background, they believe in hard work and are more willing to trust other people who work for a living. They believe in fairness and the importance of family. They are critical of corruption and often distrustful of politicians. Someone may hold all of these beliefs and see no contradiction between them. But what happens when the corrupt politicians whom they distrust start a war that they must fight? While they as an individual may have good intentions toward other people around the world, will the story of US benevolence hold up when they can't trust their own government? Before, patriotism had implied obedience to authority, but now might it not require something else instead?

A *psychic break*[7] occurs when people's sense of reality changes so dramatically that it cannot adequately be assimilated into a narrative or belief system. Long-held assumptions and beliefs become untenable, and the individual, group or society becomes more open to alternate interpretations of reality, to new beliefs.

Patrick Reinsborough of *smart*Meme explains, "A mass psychic break is a point where you can predict a significant percentage of society is going to have their basic assumptions… challenged by events."[8]

Mass psychic breaks can be key opportunities for social movements to advance progressive values and to grow. These contexts hold the peak potential to reach out to others, to challenge long-held assumptions in the culture, and to transform grand narratives. Widespread disillusionment about the Iraq War is catalyzing a mass psychic break, opening new possible directions for popular beliefs. Antiwar change agents have a window.

Many people initially went along with the invasion because they were predisposed to believe the Bush Administration's control narrative. But Bush's story was a lie. And the nature of lies is to breed more lies. Soon you have lie upon lie upon lie – a new lie to answer every question, doubt or contradiction. Some lies manage to continue for many years. But sometimes the evidence becomes too compelling; the lie becomes untenable. Part of the lie is that we can trust the liar, but once they have been discredited then everything they ever said becomes suspect. People tend to be attached to their beliefs and assumptions, but if an important one is shattered, more may fall like dominos. Lies build upon each other, and if a cornerstone is removed, the whole control narrative structure can come crashing down.

However, beliefs don't die easily, especially when held for a lifetime or for generations. People often find ways to resurrect their worldview once the storm has passed. You can see this already with the emerging story of the "Worst President Ever!" While George W. Bush may very well deserve this title, still, the danger of this story is that it can allow for key negative assumptions—like the story of US benevolence—to go unchallenged. Bush is merely an aberration to an otherwise good system. On the other hand, if someone who was never willing to question US foreign policy at all is now at least willing to question George W. Bush's foreign policy, then we have an opening. It is up to us to take it.

Summary:

We have argued in this essay that a primary role of change agents is to interpret reality. We have described how elites project their own self-legitimizing interpretation of reality onto society through dominant narratives. We have argued that their narratives speak primarily to fear while co-opting positive values, and that our narratives must speak genuinely to people's positive values. We have argued that change agents must overcome negative stereotypes about themselves, and we have introduced narrative insurgency as a way of thinking about engaging the culture as insiders. Finally, we have described the current political context as a psychic break, wherein antiwar change agents have new opportunities to challenge dominant assumptions and to grow our movement.

(Endnotes)

[1] www.smartmeme.com

[2] From an unpublished *smart*Meme document.

[3] A favorite psychological tactic of the Bush Administration has been to alternate between appeals to people's positive values and their fear emotions: "Iraq has weapons of mass destruction…We're liberating the Iraqi People…We're fighting the terrorists there so we don't have to fight them here…We're spreading democracy in the Middle East…"

[4] If it's too much to stomach learning something from the likes of Mr. Rove, fortunately we have good examples of this concept in progressive movements, perhaps especially from the late popular educators Paulo Freire and Miles Horton who consistently stressed listening to common people and feeding their own words back to them as part of an empowering process of dialogue. The authors recommend Horton's "The Long Haul" and Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed."

[5] like an invading army, but without power.

[6] *smart*Meme

[7] Ibid.

[8] Patrick Reinsborough. *Building a Real Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Lumpen Magazine, 2004)

Role 2: Instructive
Articulating A Strategy

> "Progressives often talk about how bad things are. We sometimes talk about what a better world might look like. But what we need is a compelling story about how to get from where we are to where we want to be. Without this we will continue to mobilize relatively few people."

Context is the ground we build on.

The second primary role of an antiwar core that we will discuss is to formulate winning strategies and articulate them in a way that will inspire broad action to end the war.

Taking action with a *faith in the possibility* that we may somehow end the war is very different from taking action with a *strategy* about how to do it. The former is a shot in the dark. The latter is a hard target, but one we're likely to get closer to the more we practice.

Faith in the possibility of affecting change is an important starting point - a prerequisite for social change work. Given the profound level of political disempowerment in our society, such faith should not be undervalued. But good strategy must be informed by much more than faith. The more information we have, the more likely that our strategy will be on target. What kind of information are we looking for? Well, who are the decision-makers? Who or what influences them? What are the decision-making processes? What alliances and tensions exist within "the system"? What are the possible legislative and legal points of intervention? Who are our allies? Who are our *potential* allies? What related issues are other progressive groups working on? What are the big concerns in our communities, and how are they articulated? How do people get their news and information? What are the cultural narratives that hold meaning to the people around us? What are people's attitudes toward "activism" or "activists?" What is the history of social change, and how is that history perceived?

Answering these (and many more) questions will give us a lay of the land that will help to inform our strategies. The more detailed our information the better, as outcomes are determined by the complex interplay of details. The success or failure of a social struggle can ultimately come down to the smallest details. It is therefore to our advantage to rid ourselves of any tendency to oversimplify, over-generalize, monolithize or mystify our circumstances, and to shift to a mentality that appreciates complexity and studies detail. This requires learning to see the world as it is, rather than as we may want it to be.

Failing to attain an intimate knowledge of our particular organizing contexts, we tend to rely on our assumptions[1], which can be false or at least not fully true in important ways. Sometimes change agents incorrectly assume that we are the only ones who care about an issue; we see "the system" (or even society) as monolithic, preventing us from leveraging important fissures and vulnerabilities, and from finding potentially key allies and defectors.

Strategy is not built upon assumptions, worldviews or projections. It is built upon intimate knowledge of context. Without contextual knowledge, change agents will lack a strategy. And without a strategy we go into battle armed with principles, maxims and truths. As the saying goes, you don't go into a gunfight armed with truth. You go with a gun. Our struggle is not a gunfight, but it is in part a struggle for power. While truth and principles are important, we can't end the war armed only with these; we need strategy.

To be fair, change agents usually go into battle armed with more than truth. We usually go with tactics. Some change agents have developed and honed a large arsenal of tactics. But to be effective we need an overarching strategy to guide and shape our tactical choices.

Issue, Goal, Strategy, Tactic

Indeed, there is a large amount of confusion about the difference between strategy and tactics. A strategy is an overall plan about how to obtain a goal. Tactics are the specific actions and methods used to carry out that plan.

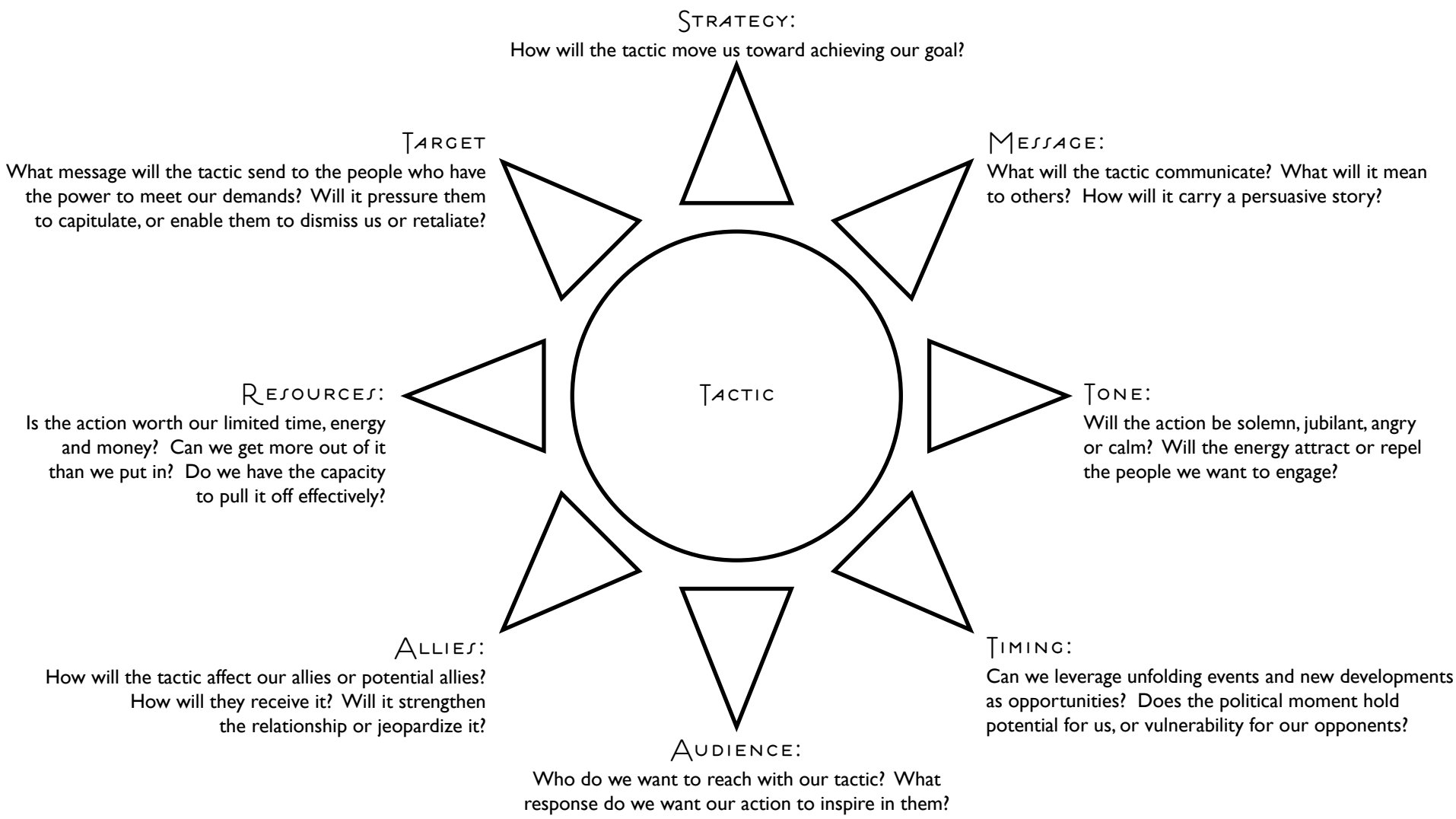
In their campaign strategy workshops for social justice change agents, *The Ruckus Society*[2] presents a framework that progresses from *issue* to *goal* to *strategy* to *tactic*. The first step is to define the issue. The goal is what the change agents want to accomplish. Their strategy is their overall plan for how they intend to reach their goal. Finally, their tactics are the specific activities utilized to carry out their plan.

For example, if a group's issue is a waste incinerator in their neighborhood, their goal may be to close it down. Their strategy may be to organize the neighborhood around the issue and pressure the local political system to close the incinerator. Their tactics may include holding public meetings, circulating a petition, going door to door, and meeting with local politicians. Each tactic should be evaluated for how, specifically, it will further a strategy that moves the group toward achieving its goal. Again, the more specific the group's contextual knowledge, the better. Which people in office actually have the power to deliver the goods? Who or what influences them? And so on.

When a group is working toward a very large goal, like ending a war—or even changing the very nature of US foreign policy—they have to break it down into a series of steps for how to get there. They need to set interim goals that are both concrete and attainable. The *issue* / *goal* / *strategy* / *tactic* framework will be most helpful for local antiwar groups when applied to specific interim goals that are winnable within a measurable amount of time.

The antiwar movement's focal issue is (obviously) the war. Our goal is to end it. Broadly, our strategy could be to mount strong enough pressure to force the political establishment to capitulate to our demands, and more specifically to pressure Congress to de-fund the war. Interim goals may include winning over specific legislators to our position. These interim goals of the larger movement could serve as the primary focus for specific local antiwar groups, according to their specific regions.

To achieve their goals, local antiwar groups' tactics may include holding public meetings, circulating petitions, door-to-door organizing, lobbying representatives, holding educational events, public vigils and mass demonstrations, writing letters to the editor, and grabbing headlines through creative direct actions such as following their representatives around with super-sized checks from Halliburton. Multiple and complex factors should



The Tactic Star

for planning and evaluating tactics

Choosing or inventing a successful tactic often involves some intuition and guesswork – and always risk. But the more we study our contexts, the better we become at judging when to pull which punches. Projecting and measuring success is complex, but we should not let the murkiness of these waters deter us from diving into them. Patterns do emerge. We can learn a great deal from our experiences when we critically analyze them. This *tactic star* names some key factors that change agents should consider when determining their tactics. The same tool can be used to evaluate actions after they have been carried out.

be considered when choosing or inventing a tactic. First, a tactic should be framed intelligently within a coherent strategy that is projected to move the group closer to achieving an attainable goal. Tactics should be informed by what the group wants, who can give it to them, who can help them (natural allies), who is their audience, what is their message, and much more. The *tactic star* (above) describes some key factors to consider when determining a tactic.

Tactics carried out without regard for strategy or context may be as effective as shots in the dark. This is not to say that just because a tactic lacks a conscious strategy it therefore has absolutely no strategic value. After all, sometimes shots in the dark do hit targets. Also, in most situations at least some of these factors are considered to some extent, even if informally. But a more formal examination of these factors when considering tactics will increase the likelihood of success. In lieu of a strategy, change agents will often search for the "perfect tactic", or the "most radical" tactic. Sometimes we experience or hear about a tactic used one place, and then attempt to replicate it somewhere else without appreciation for the changed local context. While it is valuable to continually explore new tactics and expand our toolbox, still context is essential. We have to accurately gauge our local contexts.

Objective and Subjective Conditions

When we speak of winning strategies we are not talking about easy solutions or the "perfect tactic." Sometimes the search for the perfect or "most radical" tactic causes activists to believe in tactics rather than believing in people. What progressive person hasn't heard (or thought) some version of the following? "If we could get enough people to engage in Gandhian nonviolence…" or "If we could get enough people to vote for the right candidate…" or "If we could get enough people to observe a boycott…" or "If we could get enough people to take up arms…" and so on. The reality is that probably all of the above tactics have potential to be effective, if indeed *we could get enough people* to participate. There is no silver bullet tactic. The trick to social change is precisely getting enough people. While choosing (or inventing) the right tactic at the right time can profoundly influence participation levels, tactics are still but a small part of the "getting enough people" equation.

Getting enough people is what organizing is all about. There is no magic tactic that, on its own, will instantly set wildfire to our proverbial prairie. There are moments when the right tactic can act as a spark to set the prairie ablaze, often giving the illusion that the fire was caused solely by the spark (e.g. Rosa Parks). But, to extend the metaphor, you can ignite sparks, light matches, or even use a flamethrower, but if the conditions of the prairie are not ripe, the fire will not spread.

In speaking of conditions, movement strategists commonly refer to *objective* and *subjective* conditions.

Objective conditions include factors such as poverty level, disparity of wealth, structure of governance, degree of control and repression. Subjective factors pertain to us, the agents of change. How many of us are there? How organized are we? To what extent are we connected to a base? Have we built bridges between different communities? Objective and subjective conditions are not entirely separable, and both are important in determining our likelihood for success in particular contexts.

The fact that a large majority of Americans now oppose the Iraq War should certainly be counted by the antiwar movement as a favorable objective condition. However, other conditions are limiting what we have been able to accomplish, even having popular opinion significantly aligned with our position on withdrawal. These conditions act as obstacles to building a force strong enough to achieve our goals. Objectively (pertaining to the broad social and political context in the US) these obstacles include a government with little public accountability, a corporate-owned media, widespread resignation, lack of political agency, a spectator society, fear, consumerism, lack of personal stakes, deep race and class divisions, ignorance, and negative attitudes in the culture about activism, social movements, collective action, etc. Subjectively (pertaining to the current antiwar movement) obstacles include limited resources, a shortage of skilled organizers, lack of an overarching strategy, structural limitations of many progressive organizations, sectarianism, purism and self-isolation.

Popular bitterness about the war will certainly aid antiwar organizing. We should not underestimate its significance. But we should equally not underestimate the importance of overcoming the above-mentioned obstacles. These constraining conditions must inform the antiwar movement's strategies. We have to be both realistic about the present limitations and visionary about how to push those limits.

While the antiwar movement needs to address all of the above and additional constraints, for the purposes of the remainder of this essay we will focus on two constraints that feed each other: 1) widespread resignation and, 2) negative attitudes about "activism."

Our Project: Hope

While public opinion about the war is no longer much of a problem for the antiwar movement, public resignation may be our biggest challenge. It is a common error to mistake resignation for apathy. In reality the two feed each other. If you can't make a difference, why make an effort? Change agents have to convince people that collectively we can make a difference; we can end the war and make the world a better place.[3]

The antiwar core is in a bit of a Catch-22. To attract more people we have to convince them that we have a winning plan. But our winning plan is reliant on their participation. So, while our primary strategy should be to build a bigger movement with enough power to achieve our goals, to do this we have to get much more specific in the strategies we articulate to the public.

Progressives often talk about how bad things are. We sometimes talk about what a better world might look like. But what we need is a compelling story about how to get from where we are to where we want to be. Without this we will continue to mobilize relatively few people. The previous essay argued that the antiwar movement must interpret events not just for our own understanding, but also to tell a persuasive story to the broader society (especially to the constituencies that we aim to organize). It is the same with broadly articulating a strategy. If our public presentation doesn't include strategy, then our story has only an oppressive beginning and a wishful fairytale ending – lacking a convincing plot for how to move from the former to the latter. People may suspend their disbelief when listening to stories for entertainment, but not when they are being asked to take action and invest themselves. We have to articulate a viable plan. We have to map the political machinery and explain specifically how we can leverage power to end the war.

> "We are not entitled to lead by virtue of holding the most correct political line, the most radical tactic, or the highest principles... We have to demonstrate an ability to make good decisions that result in some interim victories. We have to make headway."

And we have to examine the various mechanisms and stories used to inoculate so much of society against the idea of participating in collective change efforts. The antiwar core's role of articulating a viable strategy for broad-based action to end the war is essentially *instructive*. To pull off an instructive role, one has to be seen as credible and trustworthy in the eyes of those receiving instruction. The word *instructive* is not to depict an active movement relating to a passive society – quite the opposite. This is about the recurring historical phenomenon in which everyday people look to a core of change agents for direction. Again, *core* is not meant to exclude, but to clarify roles so that the core—those who can give a lot of time and energy—may consciously facilitate the participation of people who want to do something but do not have the time, energy or desire to be part of a core.

Today's antiwar movement has to gain some ground before whole layers of society will look to us for direction. We have to break down negative stereotypes about us. We have to reinvent ourselves as insiders. We have to create new stories and meanings in the culture about collective struggle. But we need to do more than just appear credible. Fundamentally, we have to earn confidence and trust. Being right or righteous will not cut it. We are not entitled to lead by virtue of holding the most correct political line, the most radical tactic, or the highest principles. Yes, we have to prove we will not betray guiding principles, but we also have to demonstrate an ability to make good decisions that result in some interim victories. We have to make headway. We have to project ourselves as winners. Building hope is more than telling a hopeful story; if we are to hold people's attention, there must be signs (evidence) of hope unfolding throughout the plot.

Summary:

We have argued in this essay that a primary role of antiwar change agents is to formulate and articulate a strategy for mass action to end the war. We have described how effective strategies are informed by an intimate knowledge of context and a thorough study of objective and subjective conditions. We have argued that strategies should determine tactics. We have named several conditions that presently act to constrain the antiwar movement. We have argued that a pressing project of progressive change agents is to build hope, and suggested that broadcasting a believable strategy with attainable interim goals is a necessary part of this. Finally we have stated that to play an instructive role, change agents must not only become credible; they must gain people's confidence.

(Endnotes)

[1] making an ass out of you and me.

[2] www.ruckus.org

[3] When we mistake widespread resignation for apathy, we sometimes take to sustaining ourselves with a story of "the righteous few." *Maybe most people don't care, but I do. I'm taking a stand. I am a person who is willing to take risks for what I believe.* This courage and character is laudable and an asset to any movement. The problem is when we become attached to marginalization, as if we'd be selling out if our ideas were ever to become popular or take hold. The story of the righteous few is self-perpetuating. Lacking a strategy, we can't get our minds around winning. If you can't win, the next best thing for a conscientious person is to be righteous. Putting righteousness (our intentions) before effectiveness (our impact) discourages strategic thinking. Thus we lack a strategy. Lacking a strategy, we can't get our minds around winning… ad infinitum.

Role 3: Facilitative

Activating Popular Participation

*First person voice in this essay is Matthew Smucker.

Kinetic and Potential

There is a tendency among people active in social movements (like the antiwar movement) to look at ourselves and think that *this is it*, that we are the whole of the movement, that we know all the players. When we think we know all the players, as well as how to talk to them/ourselves, then we can become lax on communicating with a broader public. This limits efforts to recruit, activate, or make alliances with, additional players. If we think about the antiwar movement only in terms of its kinetic energy (i.e. that which is already in motion) we will look around at the actors currently on the stage and think that it is up to us alone to end the war and prevent future wars of aggression. This would require magic. We cannot realize our vision of peace and justice with only our current numbers mobilized. We must build a far larger movement. We have to activate potential energy.

The third primary role of an antiwar core that we will discuss in this final essay is to build the movement's capacity by facilitating the participation of large numbers of people. Change agents must provide more opportunities for everyday people to take meaningful action to end the war. We must set others up to play helpful ongoing roles that they can sustain. We have to accommodate multiple levels of participation. And we must activate existing social networks and institutions to work to end the war, rather than only building the movement one recruit at a time.

This facilitative role—perhaps more than either of the previously discussed roles—requires an antiwar core to conceptualize itself as such and to understand the nature of its relationship to a broader movement.

Tiers

Antiwar core essentially refers to committed antiwar change agents; those individuals who, through whatever combination of circumstance, experience, effort and choice, find antiwar organizing among their primary commitments. Having a critical number of these folks will be indispensable to a successful antiwar movement. However, a serious impediment to building a bigger movement is the tendency among such uniquely positioned individuals to act as if we alone might somehow end the war. Sure, we can have some impact. But if we are talking about posing a potent challenge to entrenched power structures, then we have to look far past ourselves. To succeed, the antiwar movement needs to effectively tap hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of people who are willing to give *something*. Many such folks are already out there, but organizers need to attract them and give them some direction. If the antiwar core can't effectively activate the next tier of potential movement participants, it will certainly fail to engage the broader society. These potential participants are not even the base, but rather the *start of the base* needed to change the direction of US policy. Therefore, the interplay between these tiers of movement participants is of critical importance.

If the kinds of progressive changes we imagine are ever to be realized, it will be through the active participation of large numbers of teachers, nurses, factory workers, barbers, artists, service workers, students, religious communities, civic organizations, unions, allies within the existing power establishment, and, especially, soldiers, veterans and their families.

> "The antiwar movement cannot afford to have a high bar for entry. If we are to build a popular movement, we need to accommodate a continuum of levels of involvement, as well as levels of political analysis."

These participants will come as they are, and as such we must welcome them. They will give what they are willing to give, and we must affirm the smallest contributions. The antiwar movement cannot afford to have a high bar for entry. If we are to build a popular movement, we must accommodate a continuum of levels of involvement, as well as levels of political analysis. There will be problems, challenges and struggles. But there will also be learning, growth and development.

Providing Opportunities

The antiwar movement needs a development plan, a growth trajectory. Growth means getting more people involved in antiwar efforts. So how do we do that? What motivates people to become active in such work? What makes an activist or change agent?

I had always explained my own activism in terms of my beliefs.[1] Somehow I had developed a set of beliefs, and then those beliefs demanded action. However, I began to question this assessment as I discovered that many people held similar beliefs that did not translate into activism.

In their essay *Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices, and the Life of a Social Movement*, Debra Friedman and Doug McAdam cite proximity to movement activity as the single biggest factor for why people become active in grassroots change efforts:

> …Structural proximity to a movement, rather than any individual disposition, produces activism. Although individuals differ in their dispositions, the opportunities afforded by structural location relative to a movement determine whether they are in a position to act on these dispositions. Empirical support for these positions is unimpeachable…[2]

In other words, while many people hold beliefs compatible with the antiwar movement's goals, a small percentage are taking action; and a primary factor for why some people do become active is simply that they encounter opportunities provided by people close to them who are already active. Proximity to movement activity can activate people's dormant beliefs. If we want a growth trajectory, then a primary role of antiwar organizers is to provide opportunities that turn others' favorable dispositions into activism.

For this reason it is essential that antiwar change agents be embedded in common social networks and institutions within their communities. If change agents perpetually cluster in their own separate spaces, if they surround themselves only with each other, how many opportunities can they provide for others to get involved? If activism occurs more from proximity to opportunities

to become active than from individual dispositions, then shouldn't change agents try to get close enough to people to be able to effectively provide them with such opportunities?

Plugging People In

The initial lead-up to the Iraq War provided circumstances that encouraged a lot of people to act on their dispositions to try to stop the war before it started. There was a feeling that perhaps public opinion against an invasion was strong enough to deter the Bush Administration. People who were generally hesitant or disinclined to participate in street protests did so anyway, hoping that a large showing might make a difference. And they certainly did turn out in big numbers. The antiwar demonstrations around the globe on February 15, 2003 marked the largest coordinated protest in world history.

In January of the same year a small group of folks in Lancaster, Pennsylvania advertised for a public meeting to plan local action to stop the impending war. To their surprise this meeting drew more than 200 people, all upset about the prospect of war, but glad to be there together. I was beyond pleased to see so many people come together in this politically conservative area. We decided we should keep meeting. It was clear to me that, while a meeting of 200 people was valuable, we would have to structure the next meeting differently if we were to harness the energy and skills of those in attendance. I volunteered to co-facilitate a follow-up meeting in which we formed working groups to focus on specific tasks and projects. I had prior experience with the working group model, and it seemed a good fit for getting so many people active quickly. The meetings and working groups continued and became the Lancaster Coalition for Peace & Justice (LCPJ), which is still working to end the war today.

So, while it is often challenging to get people to take the first step of getting involved, sometimes circumstances—like the lead-up to the Iraq War—encourage larger numbers of people to take this step all at once. In such circumstances a little bit of effort can go a long way in providing opportunities to new participants, as was the experience of folks in Lancaster. In these situations organizers have to struggle just to keep up. Plugging in new volunteers and getting them to stick around is generally far more challenging than initially attracting them.

> "One day it suddenly struck me as ludicrous that our primary recruitment strategy was 'come to a meeting.'"

In Lancaster we suddenly found ourselves with an abundance of new volunteers. The first wave of leadership in the LCPJ was mostly comprised of such persons who, like most people, already had important responsibilities in their lives. A few individuals in particular had taken on some overwhelming responsibilities. As the LCPJ took on a longer-term existence, many of these people were unable to sustain the level of sacrifice the LCPJ seemed to demand of them. For the most part these folks, while still supportive of the LCPJ, dropped off as active participants.

Conversely, those who took on more manageable (but still meaningful) ongoing tasks are mostly still active, attending to the same roles or tasks that they originally committed to (e.g. our treasurer, archivist and designers).

In their essay *Mobilizing Technologies for Collective Action*, Pamela E. Oliver and Gerald Marwell explain:

> …a lot of the technological knowledge about mobilizing volunteer time is about organizing and dividing labor and structuring events and jobs so that people can be invited to participate in well-defined and limited ways… A technology often used in the charitable sector but only occasionally used in social movements involves creating long-term jobs that involve only a few hours a week such as calling for Jewish charities for three hours every Tuesday night or being on call for the rape crisis center three nights a month. Many people who are unwilling to make the major short-term open-ended commitments that activism entails are quite willing to make a long-term commitment to a well-defined task. They also are aware that failing to keep their commitment will cause a noticeable problem for the event or the organization's mission.[3]

By the end of the LCPJ's first year, recognizing the limits of our all-volunteer organization, we decided to hire a part-time coordinator whose primary job it was to maintain regular contact with point people from our various working groups. When the coordinator position became vacant in January of 2005, I became coordinator and began working to "package" task-sets for volunteers. I invited specific individuals to take point on specific ongoing tasks. I aimed to design roles that would not be too overwhelming, so that people could more easily sustain their involvement. With this set-up new volunteers were able to plug in meaningfully, and there were usually ways for them to take some creative autonomy in the particulars of their roles. While it is important to leave space for people to increase their contribution and take on more leadership if they are so moved, at the same time putting too much on people can set them up to fail. When new volunteers commit to a heavy workload, they often end up flaking on their tasks or burning out and dropping off entirely. I've found that transparency helps. I've already said to people, "I want you to be sure that you're not taking on too much. You do a good job and your contribution is important to the coalition. Please make sure it's sustainable for you."

At first when people would ask me how to get involved with the LCPJ, I would encourage them to come to a monthly meeting. One day it suddenly struck me as ludicrous that our primary recruitment strategy was "come to a meeting." I had noticed for some time the low retention rate of folks who took this initial step. Groups inevitably develop some level of internal culture that can be alienating or intimidating to newcomers (though less so when the group makes a conscious effort to be accessible and inviting). So I started taking time to sit down one-on-one with individuals who expressed

interest in the LCPJ. I started taking an hour or two with such persons, first inviting them to tell me about themselves—their interests, experiences, talents, etc.—and then I would tell them about some of the LCPJ's projects. Together we would try to find a good fit for them. I would also identify pieces the coalition was lacking that I thought they might be interested in working on. I encouraged volunteers to find or invent an ongoing role or task that they could sustain.

For every new role someone would fill, we increased our collective capacity. We could accomplish more, thereby increasing our visibility, thereby attracting more participation. And telling this story of the parts working together as a whole to build and exercise grassroots power gave meaning to even mundane tasks by putting them in the context of a collective trajectory.

Stories like this can give people a sense of meaning, purpose and personal agency. These are all important if we want new participants to stay involved. But there is something else that is even more important. If we want to inspire people to stick with the antiwar movement for the long haul, then we absolutely must make them feel valued and appreciated. It's basic. People like to be around people who are nice to them. If we want to compete with the myriad of often more appealing options for people's free time, then we have to treat each other well. We have to be very, very good to each other, to take care of each other, to rise above the social elitism that infects our society. This work is about love. Yes, the world is in crisis, and the work is often draining, but if we are to appeal to broader participation, we have got to step out of crisis mode organizing and take the time to love—not only humanity in the abstract, but each other specifically—along the way.

Here again, the concept of an antiwar core is helpful; those change agents who recognize themselves as part of a core have to take additional responsibility for the group culture, to make sure that people feel appreciated.

Increasing Visibility, Drawing People In

The Lancaster Coalition for Peace & Justice (LCPJ) concentrates much of its energy on a few high-visibility projects that attract new people. One such project is their bi-monthly community newspaper, The Lancaster Voice. By raising a few thousand dollars a year—some of it through the paper itself—they are able to distribute 3500 copies of each issue free of charge throughout Lancaster County, including a mailing to over 500 households. The LV keeps local progressives in the loop about peace and social justice activities. It has helped to dramatically increase turnout not only for LCPJ events but also for the events of other progressive groups in the area. In addition to covering national and world news, the LV features issues of local importance through a progressive lens (e.g. surveys of political candidates about their views on social justice issues). The paper has the look of a community magazine, and can be found at many local businesses. While it's a big project that takes a lot of work, it also lends legitimacy to the coalition and attracts new people.

To grow and build their capacity, local antiwar groups need to find ways to draw in new energy. Maybe it's a newspaper like the LV; maybe it's an event or a series of events; maybe it's a visible campaign that also aims to change policy. Whatever the method, one important thing to remember is that attracting new folks is only the first step; the next trick of course is getting them to stick around!

Engaging Existing Networks and Infrastructure

When local antiwar groups like the LCPJ organize events, the temptation is to expend what limited resources we have on outreaching to constituencies that are more likely to attend, which usually means outreaching to other progressive groups and constituencies. By default, and to some degree necessity, outreach efforts focus on harvesting already existing consciousness rather than planting new seeds. Let's say a group has a budget to make 300 leaflets for an antiwar event, and has five volunteers to distribute the leaflets, it makes good sense, with a short-term goal of getting good turnout to the particular event, to devote such limited outreach resources to posting flyers at places where likeminded people are likely to see them. However, the short-term goal of using limited resources to get good turnout is in tension with the long-term goal of growing a movement by reaching (and providing opportunities for) new people.

Moreover, if an antiwar group is focusing predominantly on attracting other progressives to attend an event, this is likely to shape the language used to promote it. A flyer written to attract people who are already solidly "with you" may look substantially different than one written to attract a broader audience. Similarly, the character of an event may be drastically different if it is assumed that everyone present is already in agreement. This is a huge contributing factor in explaining why many social movement groups become insular and isolated; we grow too accustomed to talking to each other – preaching to the choir. The language we use references commonly held meanings within our progressive groups and networks, and is often alienating or even unintelligible to people who do not share those meanings.

The problem is not just about where we place flyers and whom we have in mind when we write them. The outreach limitations groups have are real, and it may not always be feasible to flyer a broader constituency. But flyers don't usually make the best "seeds" anyway. *Seed work* requires reaching people where they are, within the spaces and with the references they are accustomed to. For example, getting an event listed in a church bulletin (by finding an ally in the congregation) will likely prove more effective than posting a flyer on the wall. But we need to move beyond promoting *our* events too. We need to *bring the event* to cultural spaces that already exist – classrooms, religious centers, neighborhood groups, etc. I can easily spend twenty hours planning and promoting

an antiwar event at which I'll be happy if a few unfamiliar faces turn out – and such events can have their place and value. But I can also spend just two hours preparing to talk to a classroom of high school students, presenting a more in-depth antiwar critique than many of them will have ever previously encountered. This is critical seed planting work. It requires finding and maintaining allies within existing cultural spaces and institutions (in this case the teacher who invites me to speak).

Often our events—meetings, forums, cultural events or demonstrations—are geared toward us, the change agents, and what we feel comfortable with, rather than toward the people we need to engage, with consideration for what they may be able to relate to. Coming together with likeminded people can feed and sustain us, but we can't afford to lose interest in attracting broader participation. And we must not neglect to engage already existing cultural spaces. Sometimes we become disinterested in or even hostile toward such spaces because they house the values of the dominant culture. But these spaces also house the people. We cannot expect people to meet us where we want them to be. We have to meet them where they are, with the language they use, in the spaces they frequent.

Entering existing networks and institutions allows the people within them to consider taking action to end the war without feeling that they would have to lose their identity to do so. They can take action as teachers, or union members, or students, or members of a religious community. They do not have to become an "activist"—a distinct identity that many people are uncomfortable claiming—in order to take action. Instead they can begin to imagine working to end the war as an expression of who they already are, alongside people they already know.

This is one of the biggest lessons from US social movements in the 1960s and 1970s: movements usually grow (in size and capacity) quickly not by building their own separate infrastructure from scratch, but by organizing within existing social networks and institutions until they identify strongly enough with the movement that their already existing infrastructure and resources go to work for movement ends. The Civil Rights Movement spread like wildfire and dramatically increased its capacity when black churches and traditionally black schools came to identify themselves as part of a movement. People didn't have to leave their social networks to become part of the movement. Rather, membership in these institutions came to imply movement participation. These institutions and networks then used their resources—most significantly people power—to further movement goals.

Building our own separate infrastructure from scratch is resource-intensive. And resources for such infrastructure are harder to come by because of the small pool of invested persons. This is not at all to say that specific movement organizations like (in the Civil Rights Movement) the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) are not important. Movement organizations can be critically important, often playing irreplaceable roles.

However, social movement organizations cannot bring about sweeping changes alone. Organizers and movement organizations are valuable mostly in their role of organizing and mobilizing social sectors, which is to say facilitating broad participation.

Our organizations are invariably to some extent a reflection of our values, but we have to keep this in check. We must not seek such a pure reflection of our values that we become disinterested in effectiveness and lose sight of our purpose of ending the war. When groups and organizations become overly concerned about their purity, they cut themselves off from the people they should be working to organize. If such groups seek to grow at all, their recruitment efforts will be impaired by the fact that they are building a righteous—but alienating—identity more than a viable vehicle for change.

Change agents must not focus exclusively on building their own alternative infrastructure to feed an alternative narrative that distinguishes them from others. Those who maintain this tendency confine themselves to living a story of the righteous few, in which they lack inevitably the ability to affect the changes that they long for. The necessary numbers will elude them and the necessary resources will remain in the hands of others. If, on the other hand, we succeed in connecting with others, then there is no *other*. The walls between others and us start to come down. Resources become available and doors open, not magically, but through effective organizing that is made possible through relationship.

Returning to Lancaster County, another peace and justice organization was founded in April of 2004 called the Lancaster Interchurch Peace Witness (LIPW). From the start the LIPW has worked collaboratively with the LCPJ, while playing a particular role that the LCPJ is not as equipped for. As a group of local leaders and members of Christian churches, the LIPW is able to work for peace and justice by engaging their own church memberships in ways that no organizer or organization would be able to do were they outside of the Christian faith. The LIPW can serve as an important model for the broader antiwar movement, not because of their particular faith, but because they are a group of conscientious people active in similar social networks and institutions who get together to talk about how to promote peace and justice within those networks and institutions, and how to move them to work for peace and justice in the broader society. Fundamentally they are insiders, genuine and sincere. While some people in their churches may disagree with them, they cannot easily dismiss them.

The antiwar movement does need to build its own organizations, but they have to be organizations that focus outwardly, beyond "the choir." Some of these organizations may cast a wide net , as does the LCPJ, while others, like the LIPW, may go deeper into specific networks. As they say, different strokes for different folks.[4] But all of our organizations—local and national—must learn to see past themselves in order to do their part to grow the antiwar movement.

Summary:

We have argued in this essay that a primary role of antiwar change agents is to activate and facilitate popular participation in efforts to end the war. We have argued that to achieve the strength required to realize the changes we envision, an antiwar core must activate the next tier of potential movement participants by providing them opportunities to take action, by plugging them into long-term roles, and by nurturing them along the way. Finally, we have argued that in addition to building our own organizations, antiwar change agents must engage existing cultural spaces, social networks and institutions to move whole layers of society into action.

"Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world." –Howard Zinn

(Endnotes)

[1] First person voice for remainder of essay is Matthew Smucker.

[2] Debra Friedman and Doug McAdam. "Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices, and the Life of a Social Movement" in Frontiers of Social Movement Theory, Aldon D. Morris and Carol M. Mueller, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1992.)

[3] Pamela E. Oliver and Gerald Marwell. "Mobilizing Technologies for Collective Action" in Frontiers of Social Movement Theory, Aldon D. Morris and Carol M. Mueller, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1992.)

[4] Or we could say different strokes to reach different folks. It should be noted that as separate vehicles the LIPW and the LCPJ are better positioned to fulfill specific complimentary missions. It should also be noted that the organizations have been able to collaborate very closely, largely because they both value alliance and relationship and are outwardly focused; as such they refrain from the kinds of alienating rhetoric and behavior that often prevent such collaboration.

Until the War is Over,

I Will Work To End It.

My name is Bill Adams.

What will you do to end the war?

United for Peace & Justice

UnitedforPeace.org
212.868.5545

My son Brent was killed on the streets of Ramadi, Iraq while on a mission he volunteered for to give his men a break. His vehicle was hit by a rocket. My mind is a constant stream of thoughts as I reflect on my son's death. Heartache from the loss of not seeing him grow as a person and a father. Feeling incomplete at holiday family gatherings. Knowing it will be up to me and the rest of our family to tell his four year-old son about his father in the years to come.

I learned from Brent's friends that he didn't believe in this war. I also learned from his fellow soldiers that he had a deep sense of responsibility to his men, loyalty to the oath he took, and unwavering commitment to his duty and honor. The shame of all of this is how it was squandered. Good men and women, Americans and Iraqis, are dying in a war that never should have been.

Letters from his fellow soldiers have provided insight as to how my son conducted himself selflessly and have also provided some comfort to me. But in the end all the words, letters, and medals don't give me what I truly want and need and that's to have my son back, living and sharing his life with his wife, son and family.

Unfortunately, I've now become a member of a group I didn't want to join – a very large, and still growing, group of grieving families that have lost a loved one during this war. How many parents on all sides of this conflict will need to feel this loss and pain before those in power will hear and understand?

I am committed to doing my part to bring our courageous men and women home safely to their anxious and awaiting families. What will you do to end the war?

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