

Organizing Notes

Relationships

Week 4

Leadership in organizing is based on relationships. This is a key difference between mobilizing and organizing. When we mobilize we access and deploy a person's resources, for example, their time to show up at a rally, their ability to "click" to sign a petition (or their signature), of their money. But when we organize we are actually building new relationships which, in turn, can become a source not only of a particular resource, but of leadership, commitment, imagination, and, of course, more relationships. In mobilizing, the "moment of truth" is when we ask, can I count on you to be there, give me \$5.00, and sign the petition. In organizing the "moment of truth" is when two people have learned enough about each other's interests, resources, and values not only to make an "exchange" but also to commit to working together on behalf of a common purpose. Those commitments, in turn, can generate new teams, new networks, and new organizations that, in turn, can mobilize resources over and over and over again.

Relationship building is thus the key to organizing because it is the association of people with each other, not simply the aggregation of individual resources that can create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. And a de Tocqueville observed it is through association with each other that we can learn to reinterpret individual self-interests as a common interest on behalf of which we can combine resources. Relationship building goes far beyond delivering a message, getting a contribution, or soliciting a vote. Paid canvassers, telemarketers, or most email driven operations miss the fact that it is these "lateral" connections that create the "glue" – or social capital – to sustain the engagement, create organizational structure, enable strategizing, incubate new narrative, and develop the diversified leadership to conduct and ongoing struggle for change..¹

The basic skill required for relationship building is the one on one meeting. Using one on ones an organizer can create a foundation of local organization, rooted in commitments people make to each other, not simply to an idea, task, or issue. One and one meetings can create new

working relationships, not simply mobilize signature, a donation, or a pledge of support.² One on one meetings can lead to house meetings – in which the “host” invites a network of his or her acquaintances to attend – some of whom will commit to holding their own meetings, activating social networks that weave their way through every community. The house meeting approach that was so successful in the 2004 Howard Dean New Hampshire campaign became the model for the best organizing in the Obama effort. One advantage of this approach for an “insurgent” effort is that it is a way to identify leaders – successful house meeting hosts – and avoid depending on established organizations that may resist change. In preparing for the 2008 South Carolina primary, for example, by October 2007, organizers had held 400 house meetings, attended by 4000 people, the foundation for a mobilization that would deploy 15,000 Election Day volunteers, most of them active politically for the first time.³

Relationship building in a campaign can, indeed, have very dramatic results. But it usually begins long before a campaign is launched and is key building a foundation for a campaign. Organizers may conduct hundreds of these meetings to learn how people really do understand their problems, to learn where the sources of those problems lie, to figure out who holds power in the community, who would like to hold power in the community, who may have an interest in change, and who may fear change. Sometime this kind of work is structured as a “listening campaign”, the goal of which is conduct a certain number of meetings with members of a community by a particular date, at the end of which an emergent leadership group may have been identified who can bring others together to begin deciding what kind of campaign to do, focused on what objective, and with what theory of change.

A key question, then, is where does an organizer begin? Where might you find potential leadership? You may want to begin with recognized community leaders, but it can be hard to know who is “real” and who just hold a title, without also talking with other members of the community whom you can meet at community events, at parents meetings, or going door to door until you find a “hot lead”. Community leaders can be very important, especially if you hope to build an organization of organizations – religious leaders, labor leaders, parent leaders – and even if they are too busy, they may be able to refer to people within their group with leadership potential. This is how Fred Ross found Cesar Chavez in San Jose, based on a referral from the

local priest. Of course one danger is that a leader whom you meet may not want any competition. This is an example of the Mexican saying, “entre menos burros, mas elotes”, the fewer the donkeys the more the corn. A challenge is to try to find good “leads” so you don’t use all your time in random contacts. You might want to make an announcement at a parents meeting and find leads that way. You might ask about earlier efforts to do something about education of some of the teachers. In building political organizations in campaigns we started with people who had already volunteered but we have also gone door to door in a neighborhood we need to organize until we find people willing to have a one on one and, perhaps using house meetings, go from there.

What Are Relationships?

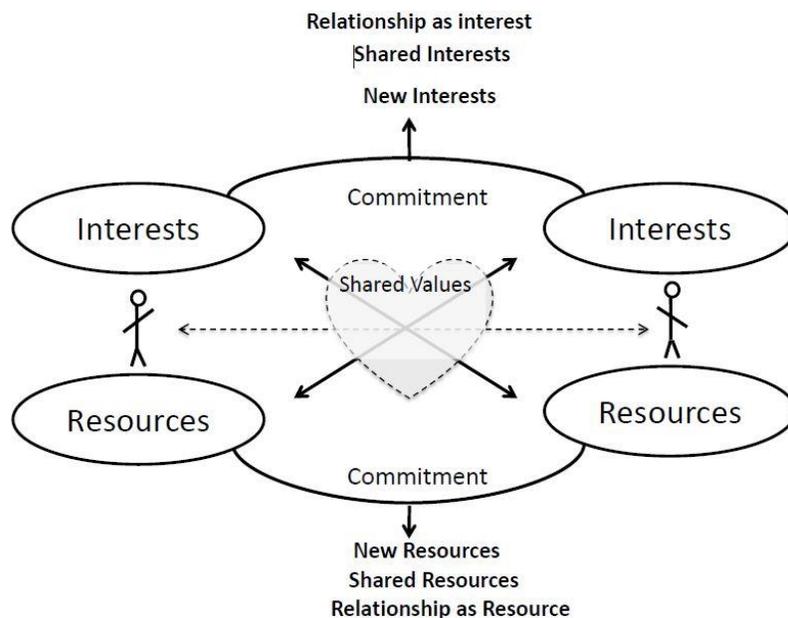
How many of you have ever had a relationship? The fact is that relationship building is a part of our daily lives, something we are all “experts” on. While true, this fact points to a challenge in learning organizing. Because organizing is about working with people, we revisit many of our day to day activities, such as meeting new people, but from an analytic perspective: what’s really going on here, why does this work better than that, how can we become more strategically intentional about the relationships we form and can how we best go about forming them? As illustrated in Relationship Chart #1, relationships grow out shared values, beneficial exchanges, and mutual commitments.

On the one hand, they may be rooted in shared values. One way we can locate shared values, as we saw during our work on public narrative, is by sharing stories of self. And organizer might begin with a “lite” version of their story of self, just enough to give the other person some sense of who you are and why you want to talk with them, and then show your interest in them by probing for their story of self. Most people will not find this offensive, but rather quite interesting. We all are interested in people, it seems, who are interested in us. Then you can share more about your own story, noting points of convergent value, where you may find them. But this is only the beginning.

Another way to look at relationships is as exchanges. We each have certain interests and resources. Since most us cannot realize our goals by depending entirely on our own individual resources we need other people in our lives with whom we can create productive exchanges. I may be good at planning trips, but get stuck figuring out where to go. You may be good figuring out where to go, but get stuck making a plan to get there. So exchanging resources may be one way to address each other’s interests.⁴

But a relationship is more than an exchange. If relationships were only exchanges they would all be “transactional.” But relationships have the potential to be “transformational” – to enable us to see ourselves, the world, and what we can expect of our world through new eyes. A relationship implies a future and assumes a past. A conversation over coffee contributes to a relationship only if there are to be more conversations. This commitment to a shared future - and the consequences of a shared past - transforms an exchange into a relationship. Gladwell’s account from the New Yorker of Lois Weisberg, a Chicagoan people-connector, highlights the role of relationships, even in the absence of formal authority, in “getting things done.”⁵

Chart #1



Building Relationships: Creating Social Capital

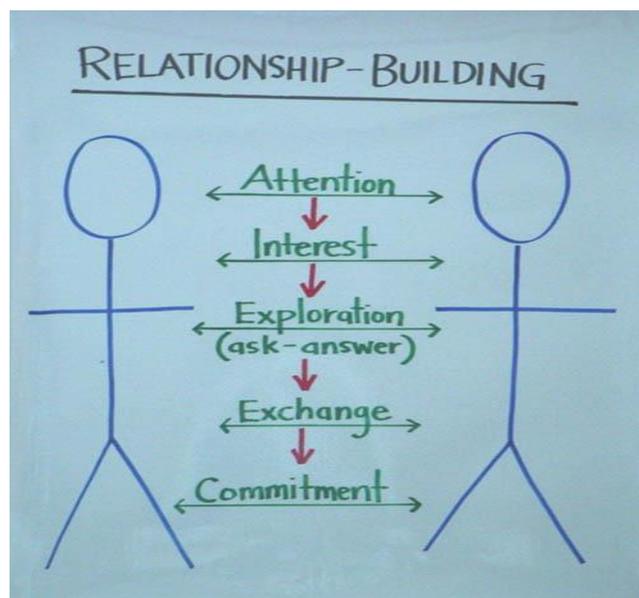
Relationships are beginnings, not endings. Unlike contracts, intended to protect our interests, relationships are open-ended, creating the opportunity for our interests to grow, change, and develop. Our interests may change as our interaction with others reveals new interests of which we had not been aware. For example, "Hmm...Before we talked I didn't realize I really wanted to be a doctor, but now..." We also may discover common interests of which we were unaware. As you remember from the skills workshop, we may find shared interests in music, in movies, or in doing something about the dining hall service. Most importantly, we begin to

develop an interest in the relationship itself. To the extent we hope to preserve the relationship we must do lots of work to sustain it.

Just as the relationship becomes a source of new "interests," it can also become a new source of resources. We may discover new exchanges for our individual interests and resources. "I'll help you with your problem sets if you help me with my literature essay." Relationships may facilitate development of common resources. "Why don't we pool our funds to hire a tutor to work with both of us?" Most importantly the relationship itself can become a resource on which we both can draw.

New relationships construct new interests and new resources making them what Robert Putnam calls "social capital" - a source of "power to" which simply didn't exist before. This capacity or "social capital" explains why strongly "relational" communities are capable of collaborative action of all kinds. This emphasis on relationships, especially relationships among members, is the key building block of a civic association, a "voice" organization, distinguishing it from groups focused on providing services to the clients instead of relationship building.

Chart #2



How We Create Relationships

How do we create a relationship? Relationship Chart #2 offers one way to look at this.

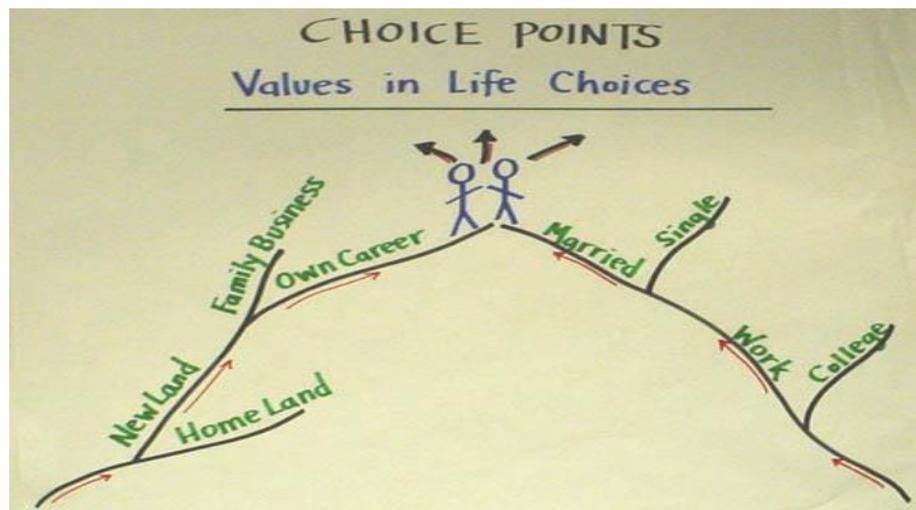
- First, we must catch each other's attention. If I call up a minister to set up a meeting, it will help "get his attention" if I tell him someone he knows referred me. If I'm calling a potential volunteer on the phone, it will be important for me to use their name and explain how I got it. We may also be related to a common institution. Or, across a room full of people, we may just make eye contact.

- Once we have gotten each other's attention, we need to establish an interest in having a conversation. I may mention to the minister, for example, how I was told he was interested in doing something about domestic violence in his parish and that's what I'd like his advice on. Or, I was told he is the key person from whom to get advice about what is really going on in the parish. Or, since we both happen to be taking the same class, maybe we should talk about how we can help each other.

- There usually follows a period of exploration - of asking and answering each other's questions, of probing for areas of common interest, of testing whether the other has anything to contribute to us, and whether we have anything to contribute to the other. A good place to start – and to see if we can discern enough shared values to want to work together is with the story of self-work that we did during our week on public narrative. The key here is learning to ask good questions, such as why a person has made the choices that they have made. Why did you go to school here rather than there? Why did you study this rather than that? Why did you decide to emigrate rather than remain at home? But we also need to learn about each other's interests and resources. What challenges are you facing? Why? In your work life? In your family life? In your community life? And what resources do you bring? You know lots of people in the community? You're a great sign maker. You have been an active member of your faith community. And as we begin learning each other's answers to these questions, we learn more about each other, what moves us, and what we have to contribute.

- As a result of our exploration, we may begin to make exchanges - not just in the future, but then and there within the conversation. We may turn out to be a good listener for someone who needs listening. We may find we are learning a great deal from our interaction with the other person. We may find we have an opportunity to offer another person some insight, support, or recognition that they find valuable. We may find we can challenge the other person in ways that may bring them new insight. We may also discover a basis for future "exchanges" -- such as going to see a movie we both want to see, deciding to come to a meeting the other has told us about, taking responsibility to help pass out some leaflets, or just deciding to have another conversation.

Chart #3



Finally, if we've determined a basis may exist for a relationship, we make a commitment to the relationship by agreeing to meet again, have coffee, come to the meeting, send emails, etc. What turns the exchange into a relationship is the commitment we make to each other and to the relationship. People often make the mistake of trying to go right to a commitment without laying a relational basis for it first.

Relational Dimensions: Social Networks

Although we may enter into a relationship with one other person and they with us, this is only the beginning in a broader sense. When we enter into a relationship with someone, we become a new link in their social network, as they do in ours. Since social networks are the threads from which society is woven, the social networks we choose to draw upon to form an organization, or use the organization to build, is the most critical strategic choice we can make.

One very important distinction is between relationships with people "like us" and relationships with people "not like us" – what Granovetter calls "strong" and "weak" ties.⁶ By "strong" ties, he means ties with people who are "like us" -- homogeneous. By "weak" ties, he means ties with people who are "unlike us" -- heterogeneous. His insight is that strong ties may actually inhibit our capacity to organize. This is because they quickly create a closed-in, limited circle of people and resources. Lots of "weak" ties, on the other hand, may enhance our organizing capacity. This is because they open into broader networks of resources by opening the circle outward - an important way people find jobs. He shows how the fragmentation of residents

of Boston's West End into intense ethnically, religiously, familially, or culturally bounded networks inhibited their ability to combine and mobilize resources to resist urban renewal. Communities with "weak" ties found it easier to collaborate with each other and to find outside sources of support. For some purposes, strong ties may be very important - especially purposes we share with people "like us." But for purposes that are more inclusive than those suited to people "like us," weak ties are the keys to success. Granovetter isn't arguing "strong" ties are bad and "weak" ties are good -- just that they are very different and contribute to common efforts in different ways. Which kind of ties does your organization rely on? Does this work?

Roles

Another way of thinking about relationships is as "roles" in which we perform our parts, as in social "scenarios." As Shakespeare wrote,

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players...
And one man in his time plays many parts...⁷

Sociologist Erving Goffman developed a powerful dramaturgical metaphor to help us understand the roles we play.⁸ He argues we could view our interactions as "performances," all of which have a somewhat strategic component to them. We both "play" our parts, and at some level, are conscious of the part we are "playing." He showed the "facework" we do when interacting with others to maintain each other's "face" and prevent distressing embarrassment if we drop "out of role." When relationships persist over time, we often think of the patterns of relational interaction we learn as "roles" we play in social "scenarios."

The more conscious we become of the "roles" we play in different social settings the more we can reflect on the extent to which our performance of these "roles" meets our own interests and those of others with whom we interact. Fear of "losing face" if we are rejected can make it very hard for us to ask for the kind of help we need -- as Cesar Chavez writes about when discussing his difficulty learning to ask for food.⁹ We also learn to play roles of deference and domination, reinforcing inequities of power through every personal interaction. An extreme example of this was in the interaction conventions of blacks and whites in the Deep South before the civil rights movement. Gendering of our public interactions can be viewed in this way as well.

One way we connect the roles we play, giving meaning to them, and making them accessible to others, is through our “stories” – our narrative of where we have been, the challenges we face (and have faced), and where we hope to go. When we enter into a relationship with another, we become “actors” in each other’s stories, not only exchanging resources and making commitments, but influencing how we think of ourselves and who we want to become. Learning each other’s “stories” is a critical step in forming, maintaining, and developing relationships.

Public and Private

Another important distinction is between “public” and “private” roles and relationships. We maintain many “private” relationships with friends, acquaintances, etc. But when we form organizations to pursue common goals, we formalize our relationships to make our roles within the organization explicit. When our friends become officers of an organization to which we belong, there is often a tension due to the introduction of “formality” – or “publicness” - into what had been a private informal relationship. New teachers are often tense about balancing the “private” ways they relate to their friends, colleagues, and family members and the “public” way they should relate to their students, including the authority they are expected to exercise. As a result, they have to negotiate a way to interact with their students that is true both to their own way of interacting with others and to the formal public role for which they have assumed responsibility. Similar issues arise for lawyers, doctors, social workers, ministers, and organizers. They arise any time we accept formal leadership roles. They require that we distinguish between the kinds of social interactions appropriate in our “private” relationships from those appropriate in our “public” relationships. Failure to make these distinctions can result in great personal cost to ourselves and to those with whom we work. This underscores how important it is that each of us has a place to go where we are not "on stage".

By understanding this distinction we can be more mindful when constructing our roles in relationships. In *Roots for Radicals*, community organizer Ed Chambers makes the useful distinction between being liked in our private lives and being respected in our public lives:

By acting publicly in order to be liked, people invariably violate their group or organization’s self-interest, usually by failing to hold public power brokers accountable at critical moments... What people need in public life is to be respected, which is similar to, but different from, being liked. That is why it is crucial to learn to act for respect in public, to be disinterested in being liked there, to look for liking in the private realm... The most recent in the continuing series of public figures who got liking and respect mixed up inappropriately was Bill Clinton, who thought he could mix public and private with impunity, be President and just plain Bill.... Prophets, visionaries, and ordinary people who value justice

and democracy can't be too concerned about being liked in the public realm, but they must insist on being respected there.¹⁰

Relational Strategies and Tactics

Relationship building is central to the craft of organizing because it is within relationships that we develop new understanding of our interests and new resources to act on those interests. Within relationships we can create new direct experiences that may challenge each other's existing "roles" and open up the possibility of new roles. We may show respect to those with little experience of being respected; we may challenge those with little experience of being challenged.

Relational Strategies

Most organizations employ some combination of a few basic relational recruiting strategies: recruiting individuals, networks, and organizations. Sometimes an organization is built in one way, but continues recruiting in another. Think about the advantages and disadvantages of each of these approaches in terms of your project.

- One approach is to **recruit individuals** for an organization out of new relationships. Organizers develop relationships with each individual they hope to bring into the organization. Initial recruiting may be done at tables, street corners, sign-ups at rallies, etc. Kris Rondeau combined this approach with the network approach described below.

- A second approach is to **recruit networks** for an organization out of old relationships. The organization is built by drawing people in through relational networks of which they are already part. New relationships are formed mainly between the organizer and the recruit, but the basic approach is to find people who can bring people in through their own pre-existing relationships. This is the approach Cesar Chavez used in building the Farm Workers. Sometimes networks are recruited from old organizations which act as incubators for a new effort. This was the role of many of the southern black churches and colleges in the civil rights movement.

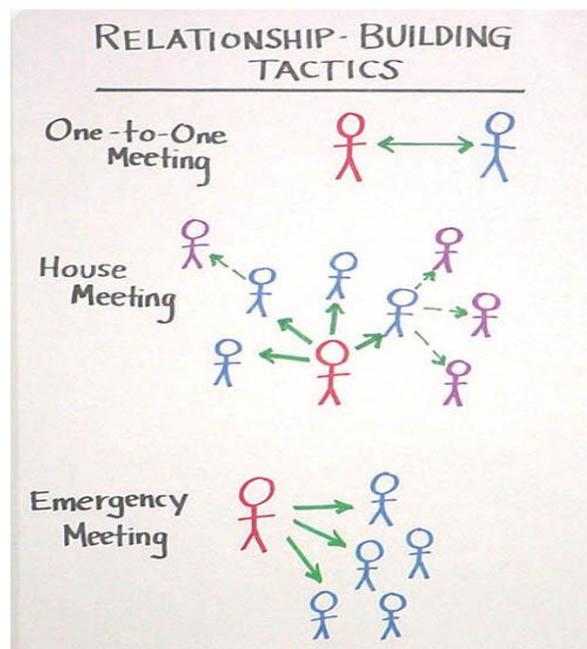
- A third approach is to **recruit organizations** for a new organization. This requires building relationships with leaders of old organizations and drawing them into a relationship with each other to make a new organization possible. There are advantages in this approach in that it makes use of organizational resources that already exist, etc. But it also requires

accommodating within the new organization to meet the interests of existing organizational leaders. This was Alinsky's approach and is that of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.

Relational Tactics

Organizations also recruit by using different relational tactics, some of which fit with certain of these strategies better than others, as shown in Relationship Chart #4. House meetings, for example, fit with the network strategy. One-on-one meetings, on the other hand, are important for all three. It is also important to distinguish between a "lead" - someone who signed a list indicating interest - and a "recruit." A person is not a "recruit" until a relationship has been established on the basis of which their continued involvement rests.

Chart #4



• One-on-one meetings are individual meeting between an organizer or leader and collaborator or potential member. The primary purpose is to build a relationship out of which further involvement in the organization may develop. The meeting is successful if it ends with a commitment to a "next step," which may just be another meeting. This tactic is very useful for building solid relationships among people who might not otherwise have them. Those of you who participated in the skills workshop at the beginning of the semester saw how one on one meeting could reveal interests we share with others that we never suspected to exist. You also found how much we can learn about each other and how well we can establish a rapport in a

relatively short time. At the beginning of the semester, we had one-on-one meetings with each of you in the form of the interviews we scheduled. Kris Rondeau also made extensive use of one-on-one meetings, as do most IAF organizers, as recounted by Simmons.¹¹

- House meetings are designed to make use of networks. For a house meeting the organizer first holds a one-on-one meeting with someone whom he or she believes may enjoy lots of relations with other members of the community. At that meeting the person is persuaded to invite a number of his or her friends over to meet the organizer and hear about the organization. If the person agrees, the organizer then coaches the person on how to be successful in getting the people there. At that meeting the organizer leads a discussion of the organizational effort or campaign and asks each of the people present to commit to holding a similar meeting in their home. In this way, one can quickly meet with a large number of people in conversational settings as well as identify among the house meeting hosts a corps of potential leaders. In the 1987 Pelosi for Congress campaign in San Francisco, our team of 6 organizers held 87 house meetings attended by 600 people in just three weeks. In addition to being asked to host another meeting, attendees were asked to volunteer on a phone bank. At the end of the house meeting drive, the 87 hosts and another 50 very active volunteers were invited to a meeting at which they were asked to become precinct leaders. In this way, four weeks into the campaign, we had recruited “proven” leaders for 110 of the 150 precincts we needed to organize to cover the entire congressional district. Each also had their own corps of volunteers with whom to work.

- Emergency meetings are well suited to political campaigns or other efforts where “urgency” is very clear. In the 1987 Cranston for Senate campaign in California, we had to organize a get out the vote campaign in 1200 precincts in the African American and Latino districts of South Central Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose and Oakland. We recruited 50 organizers responsible for recruiting 15 precinct leaders each. Since we had very little time (the whole campaign was done in 5 weeks), we got registered voter lists for each precinct that were coded as to which persons “always” voted, which one’s “occasionally” voted, and which ones “never” voted. The organizers set to work calling the “always” voters in their precincts, trying to recruit them for an “emergency” meeting the same afternoon or evening at the campaign headquarters. From among those who attended the organizers recruited precinct leaders for particular precincts who agreed to contact the “occasional” voters who lived there and to take the day off work on Election Day to help us get them out to vote. We wound up turning out 160,000 additional voters this way in an election Cranston won by only 110,000 votes.

Relationship Building

Online and Offline

What all these tactics have in common, although they vary in setting and in scale, is that they make it possible to develop direct relationships with people whom we hope to involve in the work of the organization. This is very different from relying on flyers, phone calls – or email. Relationships are about “influence” as well as “information” – while email can be very useful for sharing information; it is very limited as a means of establishing relationships.

On the other hand, one of the areas of the greatest creativity in recent years is at the intersection of online and offline organizing. We seem to be learning to distinguish between carpenters and tools. The best hammer in the world, won't build a house. It takes a skilled carpenter, with a vision of what a house can look like, command of the craft of building houses, and a readiness to put new tools to use that can get the job done better. Similarly, the idea that new media technologies can in themselves enable people to “self-organize”, doesn't work. Meet-Up, for example, one of the key platforms for organizing by the Dean campaign in 2004, facilitated thousands of meetings of people looking for others with similar interests (note the challenge of constructing “weak tie” relationships in this way), but suffered from a very high “mortality rate” because they offered no training, structure, or coaching that could enable these new groups to succeed. The craft of organizing – and leadership – is based on intuitive elements, such as story telling, strategizing, relationship building – but effective organizers are distinguished by having learned the “craft” of turning these elements into successful organization or movement. We all can sing, sort of, but artists dedicate themselves to mastering the craft. . . and the art.

Further, the extent to which the interpersonal commitments, and the knowledge, learning, and motivation associated with them, can be reproduced on line remains to be seen. In general, anonymity is the opposite of relationship building and commitment is made real by the combination of motivation and challenge when we interact face to face or with people with whom we have formed prior face-to-face relationships.

At the same time, we know that the skillful use of new media can powerfully amplify organizing in many ways. It can make it far easier for people who want to become involved to do so. In the summer of 2007, the Obama campaign had a backlog of over 100,000 potential volunteers that it didn't yet have the capacity to engage. Once this capacity was built, however, this became a very important way to grow the movement. Similarly, it can put tools in the hands of people who are motivated to use them to find others who are interested near them, to reach out to others who may be interested, and, as in the phone bank operations during the campaign, to

reach out to individuals in other states whom they could contact by phone. And the relative ease with which information can be shared greatly facilitates reporting, coordination, analysis, and, in general, transparency – as when the Obama campaign decided to share what had been closely guarded voter file information with volunteer leadership teams. Finally, the video capacity of u-tube and other video platforms turned out to be a highly significant way to share learning, motivation, and interaction that goes far beyond communications that are possible in writing or over the phone. In other words, the closer we get to face to face visual interaction, the more we can harness the power of new media to the kind of work we do through relationship building. For those interested in learning more about this, the following links will take you to a discussion of the internet and politics held shortly after the presidential election, hosted by the Berkman Center here at Harvard. You may recognize some of the participants.

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/interactive/events/2008/12/internetandpolitics/ganz>

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/interactive/events/2008/12/internetandpolitics/bird>

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/interactive/events/2008/12/internetandpolitics/ganzandbird>

Maintaining Relationships

Sustaining, maintaining and developing relationships are the “glue” to any organization - and is its ongoing work. Old relationships need to be renewed and new relationships developed. If this ongoing work is not done - and the relationships become unraveled -- it becomes harder and harder to accomplish the “tasks” that must be accomplished. We also may remain ignorant of “who” the people are who are in our organizations and what they have to contribute. And it is in the absence of solid relationships that the “political” difficulties and “factions” with which we are all familiar develop.

Marshall Ganz, Kennedy School, 2015

QUESTIONS

1. How many one on one meetings have you had? What did you learn from them?
2. What relational strategies and tactics are you using in your project?

3. What kinds of commitments are you seeking through relationships in your project? How do you go about asking for commitments? How do you know when you have on?

4. What are the differences in relationships you have built in your project and those that you build in your private life? How do you manage them?