

## Organizing Notes

**Strategizing**

## Week 6

***Introduction***

In the third week of the class we introduced organizing strategy by asking three questions: Who are my people (constituency)? What change do they need (goal? How could they use their resources to build the power they need to achieve that change (theory of change)?

Although the answers to these questions, especially the second and third, are developed in dialogue with your constituency, and much of it may change, unless you develop an initial road map of where you want to go and how you hope to get there, a hypothesis, your journey cannot begin.

The challenge now – about half way thru the class - is to revisit these questions, examine your hypothesis in light of your experience, and adapt your strategy to achieve your goals. You have new information: you've probed sources of your own values and those of your constituents with your work on story; you've learned about resources and interests from relationship building you are doing; and you reexamined the question of shared purpose in forming a leadership team.

- Are you clear about who the *people* you are organizing are, your *constituency*, other actors?
- What about the change that is needed? What problem is you're trying to solve? How would the world look different? What is your strategic goal?
- What about your *theory of change*? Have you figured out how to turn your constituency's resources into the power it needs to achieve its goals?
- What about your *tactics*? What are your principal tactics? Are you adapting them as need be to changing realities, while remaining focused on your goal?
- What about your *campaign time line*? Are you working toward peaks? Do you need to redefine them?

We explore these questions this week as we approach mid-point of the semester, a critical time, as Gersick's research shows, to evaluate, learn, and adapt.

Strategizing, like story telling, is a way we exercise agency, making purposeful choices in the face of uncertainty. While story telling is a way we can articulate our purpose, strategizing is how we find a pathway to achieving that purpose. Both are natural capabilities. We begin telling stories almost as soon as we begin to speak and we begin to strategize as soon as we can conceive purposes, find that purpose frustrated, and have to figure out how to achieve it. The challenge in learning organizing is to step back a moment from this everyday activity, reflect on it more deeply, and bring greater intentionality to it so that it can become an element of the craft of leadership.

Strategy is how to turn what you have" into "what you need" to get "what you want" - how to turn resources into power, as shown in strategy chart #1. If we think of power as the influence one actor can exercise over another because of an imbalance in interests and resources, as shown in Strategy Chart #2, one way to correct the imbalance is to aggregate more resources. That's why people form unions, advocacy organizations, or nations. But another way to correct the imbalance is to move the fulcrum on which the balance rests to get more leverage out of the same resources. Good strategists learn to get more leverage from resources that ARE available. Power is thus a matter of resources and resourcefulness. Because organizers try to create change, they often have to rely on resourcefulness to compensate for a lack of access to resources. Why do you think David was a good strategist? What role did motivation play? What role did resources play? What was the role of imagination?

*Chart #1*



***Strategy and Tactics***

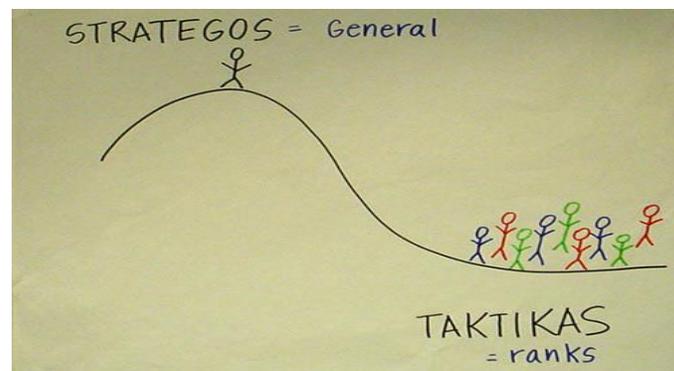
Strategizing in a way of imagining, theorizing or hypothesizing. It is the conceptual link we make among the places, the times and the activities with which we mobilize and deploy resources and goals we hope to achieve. It is how we can frame specific choices within a broader framework of purpose.

The word strategy comes from Greek for general - *strategos*. When armies were about to clash on the plane, the general (Strategy Chart #2) went up to the top of the hill and, with the goal of winning the battle, evaluated resources on both sides, reflected on opportunities and constraints imposed by the battle field, and how to deploy troops in ways most likely to achieve his goal. A good *strategos* not only had a good overview of the field. He also had intimate knowledge of the capacities of his men and those of his opponent, details of streams and bridges, and mastery of both the forest and the trees. Once the battle was underway, however, the best *strategos* was often back on the battlefield where he could adjust the plan as conditions changed.

The *taktikas* were the individual ranks of soldiers with specific competencies whom the *strategos* deployed to take specific actions at specific times and places. Tactics are specific actions through which strategy is implemented. Tactics are no less important than strategy, but they are different. A *strategos* with an excellent overview, but who misjudges the competence of his *taktikas* would be lost. Getting results, taking initiative successfully, requires developing the capacity for good strategy and good tactics.

Strategy is not something “big” and tactics, something “small”. In any setting – whether it is national, state or local or long term, medium term, or short term – in which we commit to a goal, consider our context, and figure how to turn our resources into activities (tactics) through which we can achieve our goal, we are strategizing.

Chart #2



### ***Strategy is Motivated: What's the Problem***

We are natural strategists. Although strategy is natural, however, we have to be motivated to strategize by a problem. How many times have you strategized today? We conceive purposes, meet obstacles in achieving those purposes, and we figure out how to overcome those obstacles. But because we are creatures of habit, we only strategize when we have to: when we have a problem, something goes wrong, something forces a change in our plans. That's when we pay attention, take a look around, and decide what we have to do. And just as our emotional understanding inhabits the stories we tell, our cognitive understanding inhabits the strategy we devise.

This means we may have to step out of habitual routines, what we are “comfortable” doing, what we know how to do and consider novel pathways. This can be very frightening, even as it can be exhilarating. When we don't strategize, it is often not because we don't know how to, but because it can be very hard. When we strategize we give a voice to the future, enabling it to make claims on the present. This requires the courage to say no to current demands to commit to an uncertain future. When we must make choices about how to invest scarce resources, voices of present constituencies speak loudly, even though they were created by choices in the past. The voices of future constituencies are silent.

Our choices may turn out as we wish, but then again, they may not. Trying to shape the future may require choices that could involve substantial risk in the present. The first step in shaping the future, however, is to imagine it... and then to find the courage to act on our imagination.

### ***Strategy is Creative: How Can We Solve the Problem?***

Strategy requires that we develop our understanding of why the problem hasn't been solved, as well as a theory of what we could do to solve the problem, a theory of change. And because those who resist change (and who don't have the problem) often have access to greater amounts of resources, those who seek change (and do have the problem) have to be more resourceful. And we have to use our resourcefulness to create the capacity – the power – to get the problem solved. It's not so much about getting “more” resources as it is about using one's resources Strategy is creative, linking resources to outcomes through intentional choice of tactics.

### ***Strategy is a Verb***

Strategy is about turning “what you have” into “what you need” to get “what you want” – how to use resources you have to achieve your goals, given constraints and opportunities. It is an ongoing activity, not making a “strategic plan” at the beginning of a campaign that others will implement. Planning (getting an overview of the plan) can help those responsible for a campaign arrive at a common vision of where they want to go, how they hope to get there, and clarify the choices that must be made to begin. But the real action in strategy is, as Alinsky put it, in the reaction – by other actors, the opposition, and the challenges and opportunities that emerge along the way. What makes it “strategy” and not “reaction” is the mindfulness we can bring to bear on our choices relative to what we want to achieve, like a potter interacting with the clay on the wheel, as Mintzberg describes it.<sup>1</sup> Although our goal remains clear, strategy requires constant adaptation to new information. Something worked better than we expected it to? Something did not work for unforeseen reasons. Things changed. Some people are opposing our efforts so we have to respond to their action. The launching of a strategic campaign is only the beginning of the work of strategizing. This is one reason it is so important to have a leadership team that reflects the full diversity of skills, information and interested needed to achieve your goal. We call this “strategic capacity.” (2) So strategizing is not a single event, but a process or a loop continuing throughout the life of a project (Strategy Chart #3). We plan, we act, we evaluate the results of our action, we plan some more, we act further, etc. We strategize, as we implement, not prior to it.

### ***Strategy is Situated:***

#### *Connecting the View from the Valley with the View from the Mountain*

Strategy unfolds within a specific context, the particularities of which really matter. One of the most challenging aspects of strategizing is that it requires mastery of the details of the “arena” within which it is enacted as well as the ability to go up on the mountain and see things with a view of the whole. The imaginative power of strategizing can be realized only when rooted within an understanding of the trees AND the forest.

One way to create the “arena of action” is by mapping the “actors” are that populate that arena as we did in Week Three. It may be time to revisit that picture. Who is your constituency? Where will your leadership come from? What other actors have an interest in the action as opponents, allies, supporters, and neutrals? In organizing, strategy is about how to influence the choices of other actors so creating a map of these actors, their interests, resources, and relationships can help you imagine the arena of play. But resources are also not always obvious

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and good strategy often involves discovering resources in unexpected places. You make judgments about constraints and opportunities within your "arena" of action.

Chart #3



### *Five Strategic Questions*

#### 1. Who are my people?

It's time to go back and review the questions we asked in week three: Who really is my constituency - the people with the problem who must be organized to use their resources in new ways to solve the problem. The organizers job is to turn a *community* – people who share common values or interests – into a *constituency* – people who can act on behalf of those values or interests.

Who really is the leadership? Do you have a real leadership team? Were they recruited from the constituency itself – people who, like you, are also able to “accept responsibility for enabling others to achieve purpose in the face of uncertainty?” Are you enabling them to learn the five organizing practices you are learning: relationship building, storytelling, structuring, strategizing, and action?

Are there supporters? People whose interests are not directly or obviously affected may find it to be in their interest to back your work financially, politically, voluntarily, etc. Have you run into any competitors or discovered any collaborators? These are individuals or organizations with which we may share some interests, but not others. They may target the same constituency, the same sources of support, or face the same opposition. Two community groups trying to serve the same constituency may compete or collaborate in their fundraising. And is there any opposition? In pursuing your goals you may find yourself to be in conflict with interests of other individuals or organizations. At times, however, opposition may not be immediately obvious, emerging clearly only in the course of a campaign. (2.5)

2. What is the change they need? What is the problem you're trying to solve? What would a solution look like? What is your strategic goal?

Now it's time to reexamine the goal you committed to achieving by the end of the semester. To begin putting your resources to work solving your problems you have to decide where to focus: what goal can we work toward that may not solve the whole problem, but that will get us well on the way to solving the problem. No one strategic goal can solve everything, but unless we choose "a" goal to focus on we'll risk wasting our precious resources in ways that just won't add up.

Focus really matters. The Montgomery leadership team, recognizing they had a power problem, decided to focus on desegregating the buses in their community. They could have focused on any one of many challenges: public accommodations, schools, voting, housing, employment, etc. So why did they choose buses? The Federal Government has an interest in transportation which persuaded them that they could use the Federal Courts to order desegregation, as had occurred in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The goal was not only very visible, but it was a site of daily abuse, as Blacks had to pass between rows of Whites to their "place" at the back of the bus, give up their seat to any White who asked for it, and be subject to the authority of an armed bus driver – a microcosm of the whole system. And, as it turned out, they could leverage the resources of their constituency – in the form of feet and bus fare – in a way that not only brought economic pressure to bear on the bus company, but which strengthened the capacity of the constituency to act together. They might have been able to develop similar leverage with another goal, but this was the one they chose, and they stuck with

it. Nor did they try to take on everything at once, realizing that winning this victory could create the foundation for many more, as it turned out that it did.

Specifics matter too. The more concrete, imaginable, and specific the goal, the more clearly you -- and others whom you hope to engage -- can focus your creativity on achieving it. So this requires committing to specific outcomes as the only way to bring real focus while, at the same time, remaining flexible as to means.

A laundry list of "what we are going to try" is not a strategy but a list of possible tactics. Three or four pathways, such as fund raising, outreach, and research is not strategy unless anchored to a specific goal to which you have committed. In the Bus Boycott mass meetings, car pools, and walking to work were tactics, not a strategy. The goal was clear, specific, and sustained – desegregating the buses. The tactics were constantly adapted. As Cesar Chavez used to say strategy is not so much about making the *right* decision as it is about making the decision that you made the right decision. How do we know when we need to adapt, or when we need to "stay the course?" One of the primary responsibilities of strategic leadership is to manage this tension between commitment and adaptation.

And so does motivation. In narrative terms, our strategic goal becomes a critical part of our "story of now": we are faced with an urgent challenge, we look for hope we can meet the challenge, and we commit to a course of action, our strategic goal. Hope inspires not only in terms of the values in which it is rooted, but also suggests pathways of possibility. The vision of American democracy that Dr. King articulates in his Holt Street Baptist Church talk is a powerful one, as are the values of the faith he evokes, but he also identifies a source of hope for dealing with the problem at hand – the U.S. Supreme Court decision desegregating schools. The hope that is expressed in a story of now is not a picture of "flowers in May", but of a way forward. A motivating vision, then, articulates a concrete, urgent need for change in moral (Injustice) and strategic (segregated busses) terms. It contrasts this challenge with a source of hope, also articulated in moral (justice) and strategic (desegregated buses) terms.

So in determining your own strategic goal, create a list of the criteria it needs to meet – solve the problem at hand, creative use of constituency resources, visible, develops leadership, etc. You then may want to brainstorm as many possible goals as you can, reflect on them, synthesize them, do it again. Then you must choose. Commit to a goal that you believe most likely to enable

you to mobilize your resources (what you have) in as powerful a way as possible (what you need) to achieve that goal (what you want). There is no perfect choice. This is why strategy is hard. As Cesar Chavez used to say, “it’s not so much making the right decision, as it is making the decision you make the right decision.

In light of your analysis, consider the criteria that make for a good strategic goal:

- Focuses resources on a single outcome that may enable you to achieve greater outcomes.
- Enables your constituency to translate its resources into power, greater capacity.
- Leverages your constituency’s strength and the weakness of the opposition.
- Be visible, significant, and important enough to motivate engagement.
- Be contagious and can be emulated.

Check your goal against these criteria. Consider other options. Don’t be afraid to brainstorm, come up with crazy ideas, or change course. Evaluate your goals against these criteria – or others you consider important.

### 3. What is your theory of change?

You may have begun with one theory of change, but, as you got into working on your project, realized that things worked differently than you had expected. So what is your current theory of change? How can your constituency solve the problem? How does your initial theory of change stack up against your experience? Community organizers focus on ways in which the community itself can develop the capacity to solve its problems is because otherwise it is not very likely to remain solved, at least for very long. Unless the community – and the individuals who make up the community – begin to experience agency that they hadn’t experienced before, little is likely to change. The power we are focused on building doesn’t begin somewhere on high, but with the people themselves. It grows out of the ways we can influence on another. If your interest in my resources is greater than my interest in your resources, that gives me power *over* you – and I can use your resources for *my purposes*. On the other hand, if we have an equal interest in each other’s resources we can collaborate to create more power *with* each other to achieve *our purposes* than we can alone. So recall the four questions we asked in week three:

- 1) What change do WE want?
- 2) Who has the RESOURCES to create that change?

3) What do **THEY** want?

4) What resources do **WE** have that **THEY** want or need?

So the question is how can our constituency use its resources in new ways that will create the capacity it needs to solve its problems. Then come up with an “if-then sentence”, imagining ways your constituents could use their resources to achieve this goal. **IF** we do this, **THEN** that will likely happen.

Once you're satisfied you are ready to articulate your organizing sentence: “We are organizing **WHO** to **WHAT OUTCOME** through **HOW** by **WHEN**.”

4. What tactics will you use to achieve your strategic goal?

A tactic is a specific activity through which you implement strategy - targeted in specific ways and carried out at specific times. It's the activity through which your strategy becomes real. Strategy without tactics is just a bunch of nice ideas. Tactics without strategy is a waste of resources. So the art of organizing is in the dynamic relationship between strategy and tactics, using the strategy to inform the tactics, and learning from the tactics to adapt strategy.

As we work toward our goal we learn from our successes and failures how to adapt our tactics to become more and more effective over time. The Bus Boycotters focused on a “master tactic” of a boycott, but also used litigation, organized a car pool, used contacts with the media, organized outside support, etc. etc. In fact, strategizing involves an ongoing creative stream of tactical innovation and adaptation as circumstances change, opportunities emerge, and reverses are suffered.

One important aspect of tactical decision-making is targeting - figuring out precisely how to focus limited resources on doing what is likely to yield the greatest result. One critical choice is about what problem you want to turn into an “issue” around which to mobilize. California organizer Mike Miller distinguishes between a “topic” such as education, a “problem” such as a lousy school, and an “issue” such as replacing this principal with another one. Topics become problems when they become real within people's experience. They become “issues” when a solution to the problem has been defined. The topic of racial discrimination becomes a problem when “I have to get on the bus at the front, pay my fare, get off, get on again at the back and sit (or stand) in the back even when there are empty seats in the 'white' section.” A problem, in turn,

becomes an issue when something very specific can be done about it by specific actors; e.g., telling the bus company to integrate the buses (a solution) or face a boycott. A good issue is achievable, yet significant. Another critical choice is about which decision-makers you will hold accountable for taking action on your issue.

It can be useful to develop a set of criteria to evaluate your tactics. Here are a few ideas (there are more in the readings by Sharp, Bobo, and Alinsky).

- Make the most of your own resources, as distinct from those of your opponent.
- Operate with the experience of your constituency, outside that of your opponent.
- Choose tactics that unify your constituency while dividing your opposition.
- Choose tactics that are consistent with your values.
- Choose tactics that are fun, motivational, and simple.

5. What is your campaign plan, when are the peaks, and how are you deploying your tactics over time to build your power?

There are two ways to operate in the world—you can be reactive, as many organizations are, or you can be proactive. In order to be proactive you have to set your own campaign goals and timeline, organizing your tactics so that they build capacity and momentum over time. Timing is about sequencing your activities so as to retain the initiative, enhance your capacity as you move forward, build momentum, and take advantage of particular moments of opportunity.

For example, useful initial tactics yield resources that create greater capacity for next steps. A “peak” is a point at which you’ve created a new capacity that enables you to employ new tactics. Most campaigns have to devote an initial chunk of time to recruiting enough volunteers to create the “critical mass” that will allow them to reach out to get supporters on a large enough scale. This is what builds momentum. Like a snowball (not a snowflake), each success contributes resources, which makes the next success more achievable.

Another timing question is about when to “confront” the opposition or, in a collaborative campaign, when to confront your most difficult challenge. Alinsky also wrote that it was important never to seek a confrontation you cannot “win.” Patiently building the capacity you need to launch a credible challenge to the opposition may avoid the necessity of confrontation - if they become convinced of your power. You keep the initiative by never concluding one activity until it is clear how it will lead to the next one. You also keep the initiative by expecting

that every action you take will produce a reaction to which you have already considered how to respond. A campaign is a way to structure time.

As we discussed in week three, the timing of a campaign is structured as an unfolding narrative or story. It begins with a foundation period (prologue), starts crisply with a kick-off (curtain goes up), builds slowly to successive peaks (act one, act two), culminates in a final peak determining the outcome (denouement), and is resolved as we celebrate the outcome (epilogue). Our efforts generate momentum not mysteriously, but as a snowball. As we accomplish each objective we generate new resources that can be applied to achieve the subsequent greater objective. Our motivation grows as each small success persuades us that the subsequent success is achievable - and our commitment grows.

A campaign timeline has clear phases, with a peak at the end of each phase—one specific day when your whole organization will test its capacity together. After each peak, your staff, volunteers and members need time to rest, learn, re-train and plan for the next phase. Often organizations say, “we don’t have time for that!” Campaigns that don’t take time to reflect, adjust and re-train end up burning through their human resources and becoming more and more reactionary over time.

### *Strategic Capacity*

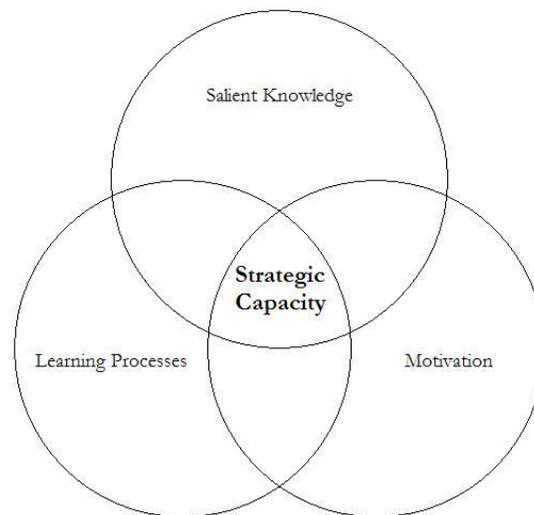
As I argue in “Why David Sometimes Wins” devising good strategy is an ongoing creative process of learning how to achieve one’s goals by adapting to constantly changing circumstances. It is the result of inputs from people with diverse experience – people who have learned the “salient knowledge”, the “nitty-gritty” detail of the situations being strategized, but who have also learned that there is more than one way to look at things. It takes people who have learned what there is to know about the trees, but can also picture the whole forest. It takes people whose life experience, networks, and understanding link them to the diversity of constituencies whose mobilization matters to the success of the enterprise.

Strategy is most dynamic when the group responsible for strategy brings diverse experience, background and resources to the table. A key element in developing good strategy is use of deliberative processes that facilitate learning by hearing different points of view, encouraging dissent, resolving things through negotiation rather than fiat or consensus, etc. Who is responsible for strategizing in your area? How can you increase the diversity (the capacity) of

this group to strategize creatively? Does the strategy team deliberate well? (*Is there clear space created for open, creative brainstorming as part of the strategy process, before decisions are made?*) Can the strategy team move quickly? (*Is there a norm for making decisions in a way that includes everyone and also responds to the urgency of time?*)

Finally, the more motivated a leadership teams, the more likely they are to come up with creative strategy. Factors encouraging motivation include viewing the work as a “vocation” or calling, participating in the decision making, enjoying the opportunity for some autonomy in acting on the decisions, etc. Although good strategy can be the fruit of a strategic genius, it is more often the result of a good strategic team that a good leader has put together.

*Chart #4*



***Story and Strategy***

Organizing is not only about changing the world, nor is it only about changing what people think about the world -- it is about the connection between the two. Organizers argue taking people on a weeklong “reframing” retreat will change very little if they return to the same “structural” setting they left behind. On the other hand, organizers also argue that changing a “structural” setting without changing the people who operate within that setting, will also change very little. Insofar as people change, they may begin to acquire the power to change their circumstances -- and as people acquire the power to change their circumstances, they begin to change. This is one reason this course is called "people, power, and change."

On the one hand, organizers challenge people to interpret their experience differently. This is the value of the “outsider’s” perspective. Organizers don’t just provide “information” but challenge people to reframe their understanding of themselves and their experience through relationships, new stories (frame transformation), deliberative processes, and action tactics. On the other hand, organizers must also make the world accessible in terms of the frames people have (frame amplification, frame bridging, frame extension). This is the value of the “insider’s” perspective. Outsiders don’t “frame” things as insiders do. This is why “reframing” is based not on one party doing a “snow job” on the other, but on a dialogic process between and among them. The work of turning “problems” into “issues” (reframing a problem as actionable) lies between the two. Much of the interpretive work of organizing involves finding ways to put new wine into old bottles. If people find they like it, they may decide to rebottle it.

Although story telling is primarily motivational and strategy is primarily analytic, a “credible strategy” plays an important part in a hopeful narrative. Devising a credible strategy and telling a motivational story go together. Most effective campaigns have a complementary “story” and “plan.” How we can build from resources we have, how we can take advantage of opportunities, why the constraints will not overwhelm us, how each step leads to the next - all of these are elements in a plausible strategy. Just as good strategy gives individual tactics meaning by transforming them from isolated events into steps on the road to our goal, a good story gives our actions meaning by transforming us into participants in a powerful narrative. Analytics can also help us “deconstruct” an old story, on the way to learning to tell a new one. In organizing, our strategy and story are not only how we persuade ourselves that a particular course of action is worth the risk but also how we mobilize others without whose participation there would be no action at all.

### **Power Jujitsu - Creative Tactics from the past**

It's important to remember that creative use of resources depends on the particular context we find ourselves in. We must look around and try to understand the current power relationships and develop tactics that allow us to shift those relationships of power. These examples from the past are not likely to be repeated, as today's context is very different. Rather, their creative use of resources can spark our own creative thinking, just like Frida Kahlo looked to Diego Rivera for inspiration and then went out and did her own work.

California Farm Worker Peregrinación, 1966: 51 members of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) - precursor to the United Farm Workers (UFW) – undertake a 300 mile march from Delano to Sacramento to bring statewide and national attention to their struggle against Schenley Industries, a national liquor distributor and Delano grape grower with whom the NFWA had been involved in a protracted local dispute. The march, planned to coincide with the Catholic commemoration of Lent, brought renewed energy to a hard fought campaign. The thousands of supporters who showed their support to the marchers made Schenley reconsider their resistance to negotiating with the NFWA. Three days before arriving in Sacramento, Schenley agreed to terms on the first real union contract in California farm workers history. The movement was launched.

Flood the Store (Saul Alinsky): To protest the discriminatory employment policies of a department store, organizers threatened to bus 3000 Black customers in their Sunday best to the store and fill it. The Black customers also kept the clerks busy by asking detailed questions about the merchandise, then an hour before closing, they'd buy everything in sight and ask it to be shipped C.O.D., and upon delivery, they'd refuse it. Because it was credible, the threat itself proved enough to change the store's hiring practices. An important lesson: the threat of a tactic is often more powerful than the tactic itself.

Bathroom Sit-In: Woodlawn Association (Saul Alinsky) In Chicago, to "persuade" authorities to keep their commitments to investment in the Woodlawn ghetto, they arranged for a sit-in at the airport's restrooms. Protesters planned to come with books and newspapers, occupy the stalls and crowd the urinals, and stay there for hours on end. Again, the threat of this tactic, which at the time was completely legal, forced the political establishment to re-commit to the investment in Woodlawn.

Montgomery Bus Boycott: Combination of small individual resource (bus fare) into powerful collective capacity (withholding of all bus fares). A situation in which all the power seemed to be on the side of elite whites, the African-American community found ways to turn their individual powerlessness into collective power and eventually shifted the tides in a landmark campaign for equal rights.

## QUESTIONS

1. Who are your people? Has this changed? Why?
2. What is your strategic goal? Has this changed? Why?
3. What is your theory of change? Has this changed? Why?
4. What tactics will you use? Why?
5. What is your time-line as to how you will use them? Why?