

## *Rhizome guide to*

# **Face-to-face campaigning**

Many of us will spend some of our time on the streets or at events talking to the public face-to-face. Whether we're behind a stall, or leafleting passers-by, there are many things we can do to make those interactions more effective and get our message across.

### **So what is your message?**

First things first be clear on your message. If you're not clear there's no way that you'll communicate with clarity. Practice on friends and colleagues until you can speak about the issue *clearly* and *briefly* -

*Boil down the message to the key points.* You've read the 10 page campaign briefing, but you're not going to get anyone to stand still long enough for you to regurgitate it all, so boil it down. General wisdom says that we should use *3 or less* key points when we communicate if we want people to retain them. It may help to have one or two pithy facts, examples or anecdotes handy to illustrate the key points.

*Are the messages relevant to your audience?* If you're speaking to staff on their way to work for the company you're targeting you might want to choose different messages than if you're talking to the public on the streets. You'll almost certainly want to choose different language or examples. For instance you might reasonably expect staff to understand acronyms or technical terms that relate to their work, but using the same acronyms or terms might confuse the general public.

### **What's in it for them?**

As well as choosing relevant messages, pause and look at the situation from the side of the people you want to talk to.

What's in it for them? Why should they stop and listen to you? Try to meet people where they're at rather than expecting them to meet you on your terms. Because it all seems so obvious to you doesn't mean it is to them.



**Mind your (body) language!** Think about interactions you've had. You'll almost certainly have experienced well-meaning people with interesting messages to share who have put you off with their tone of voice or body language. Maybe they crowded you? Maybe their tone of voice was over-earnest and came across as hectoring or aggressive? Learn from that and stay calm and open.

Your interaction with someone may start at a considerable distance – when they first see you and you see them. They'll be deciding at that moment whether they want to talk to you or avoid you, so help them make the decision. Make eye contact and smile, but then leave them alone until they're much nearer before picking up the contact again. You've essentially said "hello, I'm friendly and I'm open to communicating with you". Staring at them, or manoeuvring into position to 'block' their way past, or just looking cold and miserable, send less positive signals.

Things you might want to consider:

- busy shoppers, commuters or staff will appreciate brevity, especially if they've got a couple of kids in tow, the money's running out on the parking meter any minute now, or they're late for work.
- people are more likely to stop if they think they'll enjoy the interaction – so smile, make sure you have relaxed and open body language. Avoid getting into heated, tense debates – they're almost certainly a waste of your time, and will put other people off.
- good communication is two-way. You might want to start by asking questions rather than bombarding them with statistics and arguments. Having a conversation is effective in drawing people in. It also allows you to find out a little about them so you can use the most appropriate messages.
- don't box people in – forcing people to run the gauntlet of strategically placed campaigners takes away the element of choice in interacting with you. Are people really predisposed to listen favourably when they feel compelled? So don't block their way and don't thrust materials at them.

- don't say "can I talk to you for just a minute" and then launch into a 10 minute tirade. Unless you're a particularly fascinating speaker many people will resent that lack of honesty and that impacts on how they feel about your message. Better to talk to them for 30 seconds and have a positive interaction.
- at a stall, give people the chance to browse before pouncing on them. Let them engage on their terms. Perhaps they just want to take some information? Maybe they want to ask a question – so be attentive but don't smother them! Also think about coming out from behind the stall so you can meet them as equals.
- intriguing, attractive and interesting images, banners or leaflets may pique their curiosity. Make any visuals you have relevant to the type of people you want to attract. Beware that visuals may also put people off. This might include aggressive messages or 'hard-hitting' photographs. Remember that your appearance counts as a visual message, so think about how you look. Is that slogan on your T-shirt appropriate? A "Merchants of Death" T-shirt is hardly likely to encourage staff at an arms manufacturer to stop and talk to you.

**Mind their (body) language!** Look for the clues that people are giving you. If they're avoiding eye contact, starting to pick up their pace, or glowering at you, they're telling you to leave them alone. That doesn't mean that you need to do so, but you do need to approach them with an awareness that you have to change their mind in the first few seconds of the interaction.

Similarly, watch for people that want to speak to you, or ask a question, but are hesitant or shy. Approach them sensitively and give them the opportunity to talk to you.

## Don't waste your time

We're campaigners. Of course we want to get the message out there to as many people as possible, but we need to be strategic.

- You could engage in an in-depth and interesting conversation

with one person, but that might cost you five other conversations with people who walked on by because there was no-one available to talk to. Why not say “this is a fascinating conversation, can we continue it another time?”. Invite them to an event or your next meeting, take their contact details and move on.

- Intense arguments with sceptics and nay-sayers may also be a waste of your time. Step back and think whether you’d be better served talking to more receptive people. Leave them with some sources of further information, and move on.
- Just as bad can be conversations with those who support the campaign. Is it worth taking time to preach to the converted? Maybe they want to take 10 minutes to tell you all about the letters they’ve written and the actions they’ve been on. Again, step back and think. If they’re genuine, rope them in and get them talking to people, get contact details and so on.

### **Talking to the ‘enemy’**

*Sometimes we’re engaged in talking directly to the staff of the very organisations that we’re opposed to. This is the moment when we’re most likely to go into full-scale haranguing mode. But all of the above applies here to. They’re people and will respond like any others. Make them defensive and they’re likely to stop listening. We may go home feeling righteous, but have we made an impact?*

*Think it through from their perspective. Ask them questions to find out what they know, where their sympathy lies, what issues they might have with their employers, and make your messages relate to them. Empathise with their need for a job. If you show no interest in their side of the story they’ll very soon lose interest in yours.*



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