Unite, Inspire, Lead
Empowering Educators for Success

Lee Hedgepeth
"Political Advocacy: Organizing for Power! It's time to Lead!"

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COMPETENCY: Effective Political Action Organizing

Competency progression levels.

• Level 1: Preparing local association infrastructure
• Level 2: Strategic planning for political action engagement
• Level 3: Mobilizing members to impact elections

Themes

• Organizes members for political action
• Builds organizational capacity before, during and after political action engagement.
Why Politics?
Politics + Organizing = Power!
Some important numbers...

- 257
- 0
- 3
- 0
Some important numbers...

• 257 = of days until the Presidential election.  
  11/8/16

• 0 = days until the The SC primary  
  2/27/16

• 3 = days until the “SEC Primary/Super Tuesday”  
  3/1/16

• 0 = of days to start building our infrastructure!
Why is organizing for politics so important...?

• Education professionals can't afford to stay silent while budgets are debated or new policies are designed. Nor can we limit our involvement to only the local level. We need to get organized and join the policy-making competition at every level – or else resign ourselves to becoming the victims of the decisions that others make, without our input.
Translation...?

• Stop whining and get in the game!!!
Words for organizers to live by...

“Don’t waste time mourning. Organize!”

Last words of IWW Organizer Joe Hill
Executed in Utah, 1915
The Organizing Iron Rule

“Never do for others what they can do for themselves!”
No means *not now*- not **never**

- Children are natural negotiators. They never take no for an answer. They keep at it until they get something.
- Keep asking until you get what you need.
- “I will hold my breath until I turn blue?”
Because the work of the people we elect affects our everyday life...

• The kids
• Our jobs
• Our work
• Our salaries and benefits
Start at the beginning...

- **What?** - Identify the issue...Education funding
- **Who?** - Members, decision-makers, voters.
- **Why?** - to bring about a change.
- **When?** - Starting today!
- **How?** - Being politically influential - identify strategy and tactics.
- **Where?** - In all parts of the state or on a targeted basis.
What is organizing?

- Collective action by a group of individuals who work as one to achieve a common goal.
“Power goes to 2 poles: To those who’ve got money...
“Power goes to 2 poles: To those who’ve got money and those who’ve got people.”
Why do we need to organize?

To move our agenda or address our issues/concerns!
Organizing to impact the process...
Organizing to impact the process...the message is simple!

Don't make me open this!
To influence...

• Decision makers
• Voters
• Allies
To strengthen our Association...
Do you have trust and confidence in teachers?

- Yes: 71%
- No: 27%
- DK: 2%
Do you hear more good stories or bad stories in the news media?

- Bad stories: 69%
- Good stories: 29%
Biggest problems public school must deal with

- Lack of funding: 36%
- Overcrowding: 6%
- Lack of Disc./control: 6%
- Drugs/violence/gangs: 5%
When is the best time to organize...

• As soon as issues are identified.
• Early in the decision-making process.
• Shortly before decisions are made.
• Immediately after decisions have been made.
• All the Time!!!
Always remember, elections and political action work in cycles...

- We recommended you!
- We gave you great support!
- We took you out... (un-elected you)!
- You messed up!
- You won!
Always remember, elections and political action work in cycles...

- We recommended you!
- We gave you great support!
- You stood up for us!
- You won!
- We will continue to support you!
Preparing for the Campaign...

- Doing our homework
- Educating our members
- Delivering our votes.
Preparing for the Campaign...

- A sense of urgency...not panic.
Preparation for the Campaign...

- A sense of urgency…not panic.
- Association involvement means more activities.
Preparing for the Campaign...

- A sense of urgency…not panic.
- Association involvement means more activities.
- Regardless of the outcome, the Association should grow from the experience.
Building Local Associations’ Capacity

• Identify threats and opportunities...
Building Local Associations’ Capacity

- Identify threats and opportunities...
- Be informed about the opponents...
Building Local Associations’ Capacity

• Identify threats and opportunities...

• Be informed about the opponents…

• Think “Outside the Box”…
Building Local Associations’ Capacity

• Identify threats and opportunities...

• Be informed about the opponents...

• Think “Outside the Box”...

• Stick to the plan...
Building Local Associations’ Capacity

• Formula: 3/4 Internal...
Building Local Associations’ Capacity

• **Formula:** 3/4 Internal...1/4 external
Examine the landscape...

• What’s happening inside?
  – Internal issues - Leadership, management, staff, controversy at the building level…

• What’s happening outside?
  – Attitudes and atmosphere around public education, potential “powder kegs” or volatile issues...
Inside…

- Member Polling
- Focus Groups - (Formal/Informal)
- Worksite Visits
- Publications
- Social Media/On-line feedback
Outside – you have to do your homework...

• What do we know about the general public’s beliefs?
• What kind of relationships do we have?
• What kind of non-association memberships?
Mobilizing/organizing – “Creating a Movement” - 3 points of contact

• Worksites
• Community Events/Gatherings
• Message Delivery/Communications
Worksites

Structure

• Building reps
  – Building Action teams (BAT)
    • Members form a team that serves as the organizing cadre in each site. Specific roles and responsibilities are identified

– Outreach to Members
– Outreach to Potential members

Action - Collecting data

• 10 minute meetings to educate members – one “ask”
• Consistent info sharing
• Building mapping
• Collecting personal emails
• Canvassing – in worksites
• Friends and family networking (FFN)
• There MUST be follow up on all contacts!!
The Community

• Structure
  • Identify person(s) who will be the lead on community outreach.
    – Community Action Team (CAT)
    – Form coalitions –
      • Usual suspects (PTA, labor groups, police, fire,)
      • Non-traditional – realtors, local chamber, administration, the clubs

• Action – collecting data
  • Be visible as educators – and educate
    – Athletic events, town hall meetings, club meetings, fairs, hearings, school board mtgs, stores
  • Petition drives for data gathering – emails, phone#s,
  • Canvassing – door to door
  • Identify neighborhood activists – volunteers
  • Work in tandem with coalition partners
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Where is the best place to collect information about our members and colleagues?
Worksites!

Yulee MS
Great Lakes ES
Blake HS
Raleigh MS
Tuscon Central HS
Allen ES

It’s where the members are...!
What is workplace mapping?

- A leadership team activity to create a physical depiction of the worksite that illustrates presence and physical proximity of workers by such factors as membership or activist status, age/seniority, job title, assessment status, social relationships, etc.

- Once created, a map gives us a look at selected data from a bird’s eye view and provides a starting point for a strategic discussion of political organizing.
Worksite assessments...

- A confidential rating assigned as a result of an organizing conversation to describe join quotient of a potential member (or willingness of any worker to fulfill “the ask.’)

- Based to the extent possible on behavior—not just words.

- Used to help us focus our precious time on those most “organizable” and to collect the information that enable us to make effective connection with their issues, interests, concerns, etc.
A simple membership assessment scale:

COLD:
• Does not engage constructively on value of the union.
• Expresses firm opposition to the union or unions or expresses more negative than positive opinions of the union and its achievements.
• Not willing to receive and consider in good faith information provided about the union or union membership.

WARM:
• Engages constructively on value of the union.
• Receives and considers in good faith information provided about the union/union membership.
• Expresses and/or acknowledges mostly positive opinions of the union and its achievements.
• Participates (or willing to consider participation) in union-sponsored meetings or activities upon invitation.

HOT: All of the above for WARM and . . .
• Actively engages in discussion on union membership, asks constructive questions, and seeks answers to objections.
• Concedes that the union would be stronger and more effective if more joined.
• Accepts membership form.

Move toward the HEAT! Stay out of the cold!
A simple political assessment scale:

**COLD:**
- Does not wish to engage in conversations about union political activities.
- Expresses firm opposition to the union’s political activity.
- Specifically asks **NOT** to receive political communications – including email, mail or phone calls.

**WARM:**
- Engages constructively in political conversations.
- Is willing to consider - in good faith - engaging in political action.
- Expresses and/ or acknowledges - mostly positively - the union’s engagement in political activity.
- Participates (or willing to consider participation), if asked, in union-sponsored meetings or activities that involve political action – candidate forums, school board meetings, off-site meetings about political activity.

**HOT:** *All of the above for WARM and . . .*
- Actively and positively engages in discussion on union politics, asks constructive questions, and seeks answers to objections.
- Concedes that the union would be stronger and more effective if more members were politically involved.
- Volunteers or accepts an invitation to become involved in Association political activity.
- Has a direct connection/relationship with political figures or has solid community ties that could prove helpful.

*Move toward the **HEAT**! Stay out of the **cold**!*
Mapping worksites – the keys...

- Use the roster to map your site – matching names with locations – as much as possible.
  - Start by using the assessment tool
  - Color code each staff member
  - ID Assoc. members who can help with political action.
  - Determine who, how, when members will be approached.

- Follow up on-site with map and roster.

- Centrally deposit **ALL** mapping information and data gathered for future campaign organizing purposes.
Data mining – what should we ask?

- Voter registration
- Personal email
- Cell phone#
- Social media
- Community ties
- Family activists
- Association awareness
- Political action gauge –
Just when we think we do….we don’t

Data Mining

Common Mistakes

Defining Objectives

Waiting for Perfect Data

Believing You Have ‘Perfect’ Data

No sweat. I know everything about our members.
What makes an organization effective is its level of **unity**.

We don’t have the dough!

However, together, we have proven that we can make a difference at the local, state and national level!
Strategies & Tactics

• **INDIVIDUAL**
  Come up with 5 ways that you can be influential politically.

• **ORGANIZATIONAL**
  Come up with 3 strategies that the LEA could utilize to influence elections and or decision-makers.
  
  • Always remember coalition building
Some tactics/activities

- Collective action/Mass demonstrations
  - A good show, but should be linked to a lobbying effort
- Petition drives/Letter writing campaigns
  - Can be very helpful in building your numbers, but shouldn’t be used in isolation
- Social Media - FB, Twitter, MySpace, Texting, Instagram, SKYPE
  Very good tools – should not be relied upon as the only means of communication.
- Public Hearings
  - Go to them or hold your own
- Civil disobedience
  - Should never be seen as an end itself. It will bring publicity and help build solidarity.
Checklist for Tactics…

• Can you really do it? Do you have the needed people, time and resources?
• Is it focused on either the primary or secondary target?
• Does it put real power behind a specific demand?
• Does it meet your organizational goal?
• Does it meet your organizational goals and your issue goals?
Checklist for Tactics…

• Is it within the experience of your own members and are they comfortable with it?
• Do you have leaders experienced enough to do it?
• Will people enjoy working on it or participating in it?
• Will it play positively in the media?
Establish URGENCY

- Why should “insiders” support organizing as a top priority and accept cultural change?

- Why should potential members and members take a fresh look at union membership and activism?

*Sound the “wake-up” calls!*
“This is your wake-up call—change or die.”
“No, Thursday’s out. How about never—is never good for you?”
“Now remember, when things look bad and it looks like you're not gonna make it, then you gotta get mean. I mean plumb, mad-dog mean. 'Cause if you lose your head and you give up then you neither live nor win. That's just the way it is.”
Questions???

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Session Outcomes

• The content from this session can be used in the following ways in your current position/role:
  – Preparing your LEA to engage in Effective Political action
  – Building your LEA’s capacity for membership and political organizing
  – Electing friends of public education!
Please complete the evaluation for this breakout session!