

Peace Movement Potentials and Strategies

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The peace movement has more growth potential than people assume, and we could make more progress by adapting strategies and approaches that are already working. I can offer examples, resources, workshops, etc.

Those who participate in the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's weekly peace vigils experience a lot of support from people in the cars driving past. **There is much more support for peace than the government wants us to know.**

Nationwide, local peace vigils create opportunities for many thousands of passersby to honk or wave their support. For some of those people, this is their first opportunity to "come out of the closet" as peace supporters. We enjoy giving them this first nudge, and we also create more opportunities to join a growing movement.

That is precisely part of our strategy. The government and news media proclaim that all Americans support the war, but the truth is that many millions oppose it altogether and many more millions are seriously troubled by some aspects of the war abroad and/or the war against civil liberties at home. **The peace movement's strategic roles and tasks include (but are not limited to):**

- Helping people know they are not alone in opposing war
- Expressing the peace message in ways that new or undecided people can understand and appreciate
- Giving people courage and support in learning more and in deepening their convictions
- Inspiring and motivating people to actions (suitable for each individual – perhaps small steps for beginners and larger steps when appropriate)

I often wear a button that says, "When the people lead, eventually the leaders will follow." Thomas Jefferson and others founded this nation on the

premise that the people are in charge – the affirmation that we create and own the government. The American Left, the American Right, and the American Middle-of-the-Road all agree that we want more democracy and less arrogance from our federal government. We should be able to use traditional American values to mobilize people to stop the bipartisan Bush/Obama/Trump power grab that has been taking away our freedom and civil liberties.

Likewise, in almost everyone's inner core is an innate concern for fairness and human rights. (Even little kids object when something is unfair or hurting another person.) Almost everyone wants to live in a world with less violence and more security. The confusion comes when the government pursues policies that it claims will stop other people's violence and make us secure. Millions of Americans have a gut feel that violence is the problem (not the solution) and that causing turmoil and anger among people in other countries will end up making us less secure here in the U.S.

Such contradictions can be upsetting for people who are not used to "thinking outside the box." **If people find it too hard to take the leap toward a politics of peace, they retreat to the comfort of the "conventional wisdom" that militarism makes us secure and free. Therefore, the peace movement needs to help people make the transition to nonviolent consciousness. We can do that by removing barriers that the peace movement sometimes unwittingly sets up and lowering the threshold so it will be easier to cross over to our side.** Barriers can be either explicit or implicit.

Occasionally peace demonstrations are negated by angry attitudes and behaviors that implicitly contradict the explicit message. Who would want to

join a group of grumpy people? In contrast, when peace vigils, rallies, and other activities are warm, friendly and engaging, our friendly demeanor attracts support for our message welcomes people into the peace movement. Pedestrians know they are safe and welcome to stop and talk with us. Many agree, but we are friendly even with those few who disagree.

We want to give even those who disagree an interesting and pleasant experience. We don't expect to convert them to pacifism, but we do want to give them a fresh way to think about some issue, and we want them to see peace folks as human beings who are approachable, well informed, reasonable, and respectful of people with different opinions. We almost always succeed to some extent.

Especially since 9-11-2001 I have deliberately devising vigil signs with messages that will cause passersby to find themselves agreeing with us and resonating in positive ways. Certainly a sign that says "Stop the bombing" would be clear and explicit, but that message would not engage other people – indeed, it conveys a subtle vibe that is rather bossy and blaming. In contrast, our signs with positive, welcoming messages (e.g., **"Imagine nonviolent solutions"**) are open, expansive and engaging. Positive messages and our smiles invite people to be creative – to be part of the solution.

Likewise, instead of a sign denouncing the US's foreign policy as racist, we have signs saying **"All races are one human family"** and **"Make friends across races, nationalities, religions, ..."** Instead of accusing people of being racist, our signs call forth their better natures and invite them to take simple but practical steps. The result is a tremendous number of positive responses from passersby.

We challenge people in positive ways and create opportunities for people to find themselves agreeing with peace activists.

So if they find themselves agreeing with us, how could they simultaneously allow the government to persist in its violent and inhumane policies? We hope to create some internal struggling over these inconsistencies (some "cognitive dissonance" in psychological jargon), because **we have faith that if people open themselves to a peace perspective and wrestle with their consciences, they will find the truth and choose peaceful solutions instead of violent ones.**

We receive support from people of all ages, races and appearances – and in all kinds of vehicles. Some of the drivers and passengers who show their support have flags on their cars. Some of the people waving or giving a "thumbs-up" are probably doing their very first overt action for peace. **We create opportunities for people to take these first steps and then to do more.** One of our new vigilers after 9-11-2001 made a sign saying, "Speak out for justice and peace, even if your voice trembles."

Many passersby tell us they deeply appreciate our presence and our persistence. Olympia FOR's two peace vigils every week – and our explicit and implicit messages – along with the activities of other local peace groups – have been establishing peace as a perfectly legitimate and mainstream in Olympia.

We continue to meet new people, add them to our mailing list, and involve them in further activities. We are getting more and more requests for speakers for peace. **We are building a movement!**