

A MAP for Social Change

by Glen Anderson

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“You don’t have to work harder – just work smarter.”

This is what skilled managers are saying these days. The same should be true for people working for peace, social and economic justice, and a healthy environment.

Social change movements proceed through certain stages. The successful movements accomplish the goals at each stage and move on to the next, until they achieve their ultimate goals.

Other movements flounder along the way. Some movements merely react to crisis after crisis without making much progress toward their goals. We need thoughtful analyses and smarter strategies.

A social movement strategy model called *The Movement Action Plan* provides brilliant insights and inspires direct practical applications.

The Movement Action Plan (MAP) was developed by Bill Moyer, an activist with the Movement for a New Society. Moyer has spent nearly thirty years organizing for civil rights, peace in Vietnam, an end to nuclear power and nuclear weapons, and many other movements. The MAP distills the experience of these and other movements into eight stages. By understanding the stages that successful movements pass through, we can analyze our own social change movements and plan more effective strategies for achieving our goals.

In May 1987 the Fellowship of Reconciliation brought Bill to the Northwest for some workshops. The Seattle workshops focused on Central America, but in Olympia we held a highly successful multi-issue workshop, and we are now holding follow-up workshops and activities.

Following in the footsteps of Thomas Jefferson, Moyer’s *Movement Action Plan* asserts that ultimately the people hold the power. The MAP’s people-power model recognizes that although we may grant some power to established power-holders, we may also withdraw our consent.

Therefore, while traditional political action tries to influence the elite power-holders at the top, social change movements using the MAP model generate enough grassroots power to produce the change. This idea finds expression in the slogan: “If the people lead, eventually the leaders will follow.”

Our strategy should be to educate, win over, and mobilize a large majority of the public. To do this, we first need to place our issues squarely on the public political agenda and keep them there. The power-holders will try to prevent us from getting our message across, or they will try to discount or discredit us. We also need to ground our movement’s message in deeply held societal values, beliefs, traditions and symbols. We need to show that our movement upholds them, and at the same time make it clear that the power-holders are violating them.

Over, please

The power-holders rely heavily on a similar strategy. The power-holders who create U.S. foreign policy create and manipulate images and symbols in order to maintain public support for their policies.

Our strategy should be to expose the power-holders as violating, rather than defending, deeply held societal values. We need to debunk the power-holders' myths and show that our position better represents society' deeply held values: The contras are not "freedom fighters," but terrorists.

These principles are the foundation upon which the rest of the ***Movement Action Plan*** is built. However, the MAP's core is its analysis of the eight stages that social change movements pass through. In Stage One, hardly anyone recognizes that the problem even exists. At Stage Eight, the goals have been achieved.

Social change movements struggle for years to progress from Stage One toward Stage Eight. However, unless a movement plans carefully, it will not likely get past Stage Five. The MAP describes what the public, the power-holders, and the opposition (that's us!) are doing at each of the eight stages. Also, for each stage the MAP describes the near-term goals and activities the movement should be working on and the pitfalls the movement may find.

Moyer developed the MAP after care fully compiling decades of experience. Unlike a merely theoretical or abstract model of social change, the MAP is rooted in real life and is easy to apply to our real-life movements. When I read the MAP for the first time, dozens of synapses sparked with examples from my own experience and inspirations of how I could apply it to issues I'm working on now.

The MAP helps movements understand their current situation, discern the way ahead, and avoid bogging down or burning out. It gives us insights into overcoming obstacles and avoiding pitfalls and helps different social change movements learn from each other. The MAP helps us anticipate what the power-holders might do next to thwart our movement. It helps us plan more creative and effective activities and use our scarce resources more efficiently and effectively.

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NOTES: Bill Moyer died in October 2002, but other activists will continue promoting the MAP through his organization, the Social Movement Empowerment Project, 721 Shrader St., San Francisco, CA 94117.

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