

# WHAT MAKES EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS SUCCEED ?

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

# WHAT MAKES EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS SUCCEED?

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Educational campaigns are the trademark of our modern American way of living. Our personal freedom allows countless types of firms, groups and organizations to try to persuade us to accept their products, ideas or methods. So great is the number and scope of these campaigns and so keen is the competition among the sponsors that success requires the use of certain principles and methods.

In 1960, \$627 million were spent on television advertising in the United States. This was only a small portion of the vast number of campaign activities waged that year through various media including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and meetings.

Most business firms, educational agencies, and individuals have great faith in the campaign procedures as a means to gain acceptance of their products or ideas. Analysis of campaigns, however, indicates that most campaigns do not gain significant numbers of new adopters of ideas. Rather, most campaigns reach only those who already have favorable attitudes toward the new product or idea. For example, an analysis of fertilizer demonstration programs in Ohio, in 1958, shows that farmers reported few changes in either

their attitudes toward the use of fertilizer or their knowledge about fertilizer.

Nevertheless, some campaigns succeeded in attracting new adopters. On Sept. 21, 1943, Kate Smith sold \$39 million of war bonds during 18 hours of radio broadcasting, even though prior campaigns of a similar nature had generally failed. And in 1960, soil fertility campaigns in Guernsey and Licking Counties, Ohio, under the leadership of the Cooperative Extension Service, resulted in a 141 per cent gain in the number of soil tests taken by farmers.

What factors make some campaigns succeed in reaching their goals, while others fail? What principles, if followed, will enhance the chances of a campaign to be successful? What do educational campaign planners need to consider in setting up such a campaign?

Campaign, as used here, means any organized promotional effort beyond usual educative procedures, usually conducted during a short and definite time period, to bring about a more thorough adoption, action or use of some commodity, idea, method or facility.

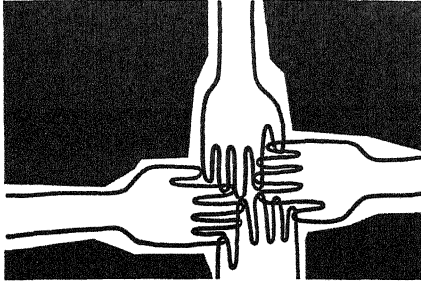
The following pages contain a discussion of principles which have been found vital in successful campaigns.

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## PRINCIPLES OF CAMPAIGN PLANNING

In a recent analysis of campaign studies, five principles of social leadership stood out. These principles for conducting

successful campaigns are explained briefly here to show their application to adult education programs.



### 1. DETERMINE AND LEGITIMIZE NEEDS

The goals of a successful campaign must be designed to help solve needs felt by the majority of opinion leaders and their followers in the community in which the campaign is to be held.

Many large-scale campaigns fail because they are designed to meet the needs of only one or two interest groups. In such cases, campaign sponsors have not determined the needs of a large enough segment of the community people.

Research has shown that we, as individuals, strive toward consistency in our attitudes and behavior; when any part of our lives becomes inconsistent with our way of living, we feel a need. When we feel such a need, we often take action to satisfy it; however, we seldom take this action until we, ourselves, are aware of our need.

In the Ohio soil fertility campaigns, appropriate sets of colored slides were used to make people aware of the need of their communities for better agronomical practices.

Alert laymen or professional workers can recognize the needs of a community or an institution. Frequently, homemakers

have been instrumental in starting large-scale community improvement projects. Still, professional educators and Extension workers often can point out to a community a need that local people would not otherwise see. The Ohio fertility campaigns in 1960 were initiated by a state Extension agronomy specialist and local county Extension agents as they presented the current situation and future production potential to the leading agronomy committees of the respective counties. People who recognize needs and start action to meet those needs are called initiators.

A careful look at existing conditions in a particular community can provide the necessary facts to point out its needs. Publishing these facts will help to make the public aware of the problems, and to arouse concern for solving them.

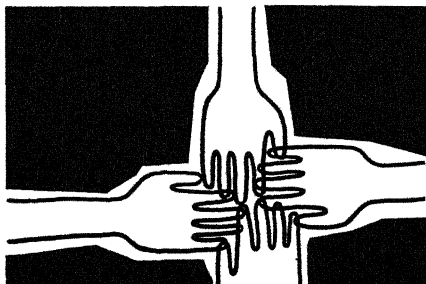
For example, when farmers in Guernsey and Licking Counties were made aware of the dollars they were losing through improper use of lime and fertilizer, and were told that proper soil testing could provide information for improved lime and fertilizer usage, they

were eager to try the "new" method. Their use of soil testing increased 141 per cent in one year.

Once a need has been recognized, and the initiators have begun to plan for campaign action to satisfy this need, it is important to have both the need and the plan for action sanctioned—or legitimized—by certain power holders, or opinion leaders, within the community. Every community has its legitimizers. They are the leaders to whom other people look for advice on various subjects.

Early contact with legitimizers can smooth the campaign process. Their approval or disapproval of campaign goals and methods is often the key to a successful outcome. Their ideas and suggestions can be invaluable to campaign planners and should be gathered before the general public becomes aware of the campaign.

The soil fertility campaigns in Ohio were successful, in part, because county agronomy committees sanctioned and helped to plan the campaigns long before public awareness was created. These committees included legitimizers of agricultural practices.



**Successful campaigns are those which are linked to the majority of the important social systems within a community.**

A social system may be thought of as an organized group of people within

A person unfamiliar with a local community can find who its legitimizers are by one or more of the following methods:

(a) The **sociometric** technique of asking a random sample of people who they consult when seeking advice about the item with which the campaign is concerned. A study of the replies will indicate a small number of leaders whose opinions on the subject most people respect. They are the legitimizers.

(b) The **key informants** technique involves finding the influentials by asking public officials, business people or other leaders who have had a long acquaintance with the community to name the important decision makers of their respective communities. Those named will most likely be the legitimizers.

(c) The **self-designating** technique consists of asking a respondent a series of questions to find out the degree to which he believes himself to be a legitimizer. A minimum of two questions may be asked: (1) Have you recently tried to convince anyone of your ideas? and (2) Has anyone recently asked you for your advice on question?

## 2. LINK THE CAMPAIGN WITH SOCIAL SYSTEMS

which one person (or more persons) influences the thoughts or behavior of others.

There are many social systems within each community. They include major in-

stitutions such as the school, family, government, business and church, as well as clubs, organizations and informal cliques.

Research has shown that these social systems work together, and that each exerts reciprocal influence on others. In fact, the same people often belong to, participate in or are influenced by more than one social system at the same time.

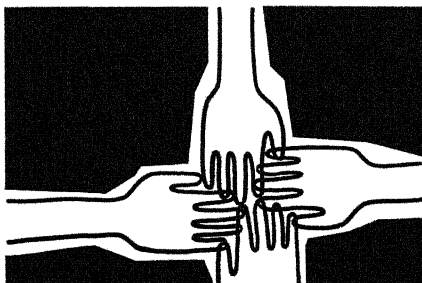
Successful campaigns are, therefore, linked to most of the important social systems within a community. In the soil fertility campaigns, bankers, businessmen, fertilizer dealers, Extension workers and others were linked by campaign planners to both the planning and execution stages. These people were convinced of the value of the campaigns to their communities and to themselves; they become willing workers in the campaign.

It is important to discover which local groups are concerned with the campaign goals. Although all communities have social systems, no two communities are exactly alike; each has different types of systems. These systems must be identified and their members interested before they can be used in the campaign. Although

some systems have little relative influence in a community and need not be given extensive attention, all systems should be considered in planning the campaign.

Linking the campaign with mass media can be vital both for advertising and in relation to news coverage, analysis, interest and support. These media include the press, radio and television. The interest and support of the operators of these systems are crucial. At specific points in the campaign, they can make or break it by the favorable or unfavorable coverage they give it at the right or wrong time.

If the majority of the local social systems, or at least those operating in a community which are concerned with the problem, support a campaign, it has a good chance for success. If certain systems are bypassed, either intentionally or unintentionally, they can create antagonism toward the campaign and may cause the campaign to fail. Without exception, the successful campaigns studied by the authors were linked very closely with most of the active social systems within a community.



**Successful campaigns are developed in terms of what is familiar and acceptable to the people.**

Social scientists have discovered that we tend to be interested in information and situations that are in accord with our present ideas, values and attitudes. This

### 3. DEVELOP IN TERMS OF THE FAMILIAR

tendency is called **selective exposure**. For example, in 1956, it was found that more non-smokers than smokers read literature about the alleged relationship between smoking and cancer. Similarly, in the Ohio soil fertility campaigns, farmers who had the most extensive knowledge

about fertilizer showed the most active interest in the campaigns.

One of the major reasons why campaigns fail to make “converts” is that the target audience for the campaign is attitudinally deaf to the problem. These people either have attitudes opposed to the idea and refuse to learn new ones, or they have no attitude toward the issue and, therefore, their attention is not attracted to it. Thus the people the campaign is seeking to influence may not hear about the campaign and are, consequently, not influenced by it. Directing a voluntary educational campaign to an unassociated or hostile audience presents many obstacles to success.

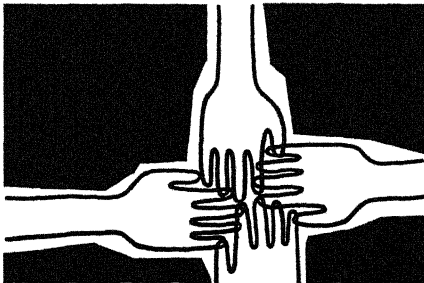
It has also been discovered that when people do come in contact with new information they tend to interpret this information to conform to their already-existing ideas, values and attitudes. This tendency is called **selective perception**. For example, in farming, one farmer considers fertilizer to be good for his crops, and another considers it is a dangerous chemical poison to his soil—each according to his prior attitudes. It is much easier for the first to accept the use of fertilizer and the second to “stay put”

than to change their opinions about using fertilizer.

Obviously, then, to be successful, a campaign must be originated, developed and executed in a manner that is appealing to already-existing thought and symbol patterns. This is not to suggest that the **status quo** always be maintained. It merely suggests that effective campaign planners must understand how a particular community “thinks” and build upon this understanding.

Every community has certain values and goals. A successful change agent, or campaign planner, should discover them and show how the campaign will help people attain these goals. Campaigns that attack or challenge long-standing values of a community are usually doomed to failure.

Analysis of successful campaigns shows that they appealed to the basic values and ideals of their audiences. Kate Smith, in her highly successful war bond campaign, appealed to the desire of Americans to win and end the war, so their sons could come home. The Ohio soil fertility campaigns appealed to the goals of the community citizens, including agricultural prosperity.



#### 4. CREATE AWARENESS THROUGH MASS MEDIA

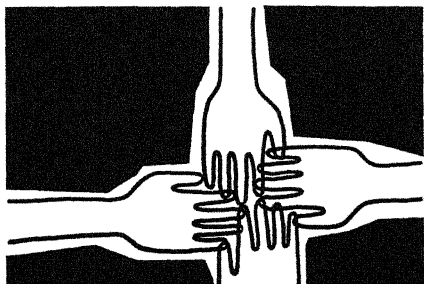
**Mass media can create awareness of new ideas.**

Some kinds of information are more effective than others at various times or

stages of the **adoption process**. The adoption process is defined as the mental process through which a person passes from first hearing about a new idea to

finally deciding to accept and use it. There are five stages in this process: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption (or rejection).

The various forms of mass media (impersonal sources of information, including the press, radio and television) have been found to be more effective than personal sources of information (including face-to-face contact) at the awareness stage of the adoption process. The awareness stage is the time when people first become aware of new ideas.



It takes opinion leaders to convert people.

After we go through the awareness and interest stages of the adoption process, we enter the evaluation stage. During this stage the personal influence of an opinion leader is of greatest importance.

The evaluation stage of the adoption process is crucial. In many respects it is the most critical stage in getting people to accept new ideas. At this point we mentally apply the new idea to our present and anticipated future situations. Then we decide whether or not to try it.

It is at this point that selective perception plays the most havoc, and when personal contact is extremely valuable. We can be selective in our reaction to any ideas presented through mass media, but when the message is put on a personal level, we have much less chance

Using available forms of mass media as extensively as possible early in the campaign will pay off in making the public aware of the plans. Newspapers and letters from county agents were listed as the most important first sources of information about the Ohio soil fertility campaigns.

The role of selective exposure is of great importance at this stage; however, resistance can be overcome if the original publicity is tied in with ideas which are familiar and acceptable to the people.

## 5. WORK THROUGH OPINION LEADERS TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE

to reject it. Personal sources of information, including face-to-face contact with persons whose opinions we respect, are the most effective in overcoming our resistance to particular ideas.

An illustration of this personal appeal was when older people increased their use of milk by 45 per cent, after visits by a nutritionist in their home, compared to an increase of only 33 per cent for those who were subjected to an intensive campaign by mail.

Also, one of the reasons given for the success of Kate Smith's war bond campaign was that the listeners could personally identify themselves with her, even though she was speaking over the radio. They felt they had something in common with her, a goal they could share.

The social status of opinion leaders and their followers is an important guide

to campaign planners. It is well known that communities have various social status layers—according to occupation, wealth, education, family name, age, sex and other factors. Persons similar to one another usually associate together most; consequently, they have the most influence on one another.

When a comparison was made between campaign promoters and respondents—on such social characteristics as age, education, farm size and value of products sold (in the Ohio soil fertility campaigns)—it was found that the campaign planners and persons who helped with the campaign were much more similar to the respondents of the campaign than to the population of the counties as a whole. Even though opinion leaders are usually of the same general social status level, they have been found to be somewhat younger in age, have a little more education, often have a little more wealth, and operate more specialized op-

erations than those who look to them for advice.

The wise campaign planner understands the social structure of the community. He gets people of one status to exert personal influence on those of the same class.

Although the flow of information about an idea from its beginning to its acceptance may have many specific steps, in the general process there is at least a two-step flow of information. The first step is from the original (often scientific) source to opinion leaders. The second step is from opinion leaders to less active and less informed persons in the community.

Because of their important role, opinion leaders deserve the concentrated effort it may take to win their support. Special training and information to make sure they understand the campaign are steps toward both campaign success and economy of campaign operation.

## CONCLUSIONS

In brief, it may be said there is no easy road to campaign success. Its chances of success are greater, however, if the following procedures are followed:

1. Develop a campaign that is designed to meet a need or needs felt by both the opinion leaders and their followers.
2. Link the campaign to the important social systems of the community in which the campaign is launched.
3. Develop the campaign goals and strategy in terms of the familiar goals and values of the community, and show the people how the campaign can help them attain those goals and values.
4. Create awareness of the problem with mass media timed to occur in the early stages.
5. Change opinions with personal sources of information and through the medium of opinion leaders.

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