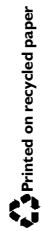




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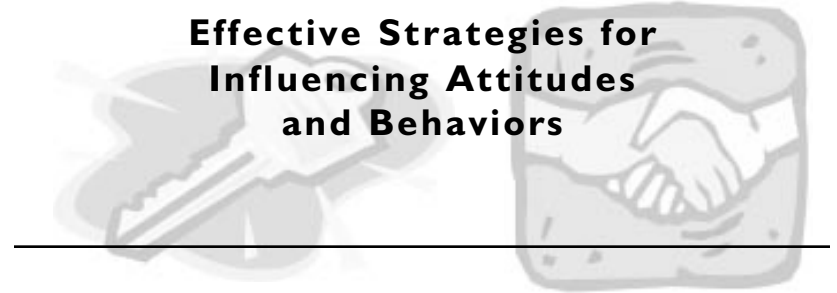


**PRINCIPLES FOR**

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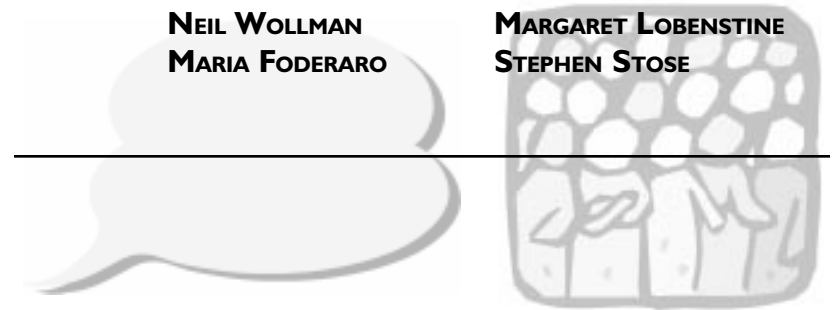
**SOCIAL CHANGE**

**Effective Strategies for  
Influencing Attitudes  
and Behaviors**

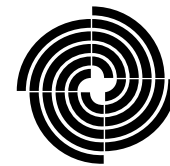


**NEIL WOLLMAN  
MARIA FODERARO**

**MARGARET LOBENSTINE  
STEPHEN STOSE**



**THE SOCIETY FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL  
STUDY OF SOCIAL ISSUES**



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## PRINCIPLES FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE

Effective Strategies for Influencing  
Attitudes and Behaviors

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First Edition, 1998



### Ordering multiple copies of this booklet:

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# INTRODUCTION

Clearly there are many wrongs in the world that need to be righted, and it will take more than today's number of active and concerned people to accomplish that goal. In order to bring about particular change, effective strategies for influencing the attitudes and behaviors of others are necessary. Fortunately, this work does not need to be done in a vacuum as psychologists and others at work in the field have identified key principles that influence such change.

The general principles outlined in this booklet have been established from research and experience in laboratory and real life settings, involving diverse areas such as education, business, environmental behavior, and public health, as well as direct application to political change. This does not automatically ensure success in their application, as people are different and situations vary. However, if you apply ideas prudently, creatively, and in combination, they will indeed help you move closer to your goals.

In fact, activists in many areas and over many years have been creatively and successfully applying many of these principles intuitively, though not always as extensively or as systematically as they might. This booklet will introduce many of these ideas and, in order to help make them more useful, each will be illustrated with concrete and actual examples of their application.

Choose and apply the following ideas that best suit your particular situation (viz., the cause you represent, your audience, the dynamics of your group, etc.). There is no need to apply all the ideas in any given situation. Utilizing the most appropriate and fitting ideas will require time, brainstorming, practice, setting objectives and strategies to get there, and regularly evaluating your progress. Your objectives and strategies should be determined by a) the nature and the causes of the particular political situation you are trying to address, b) who or what you must influence to make the needed changes (do some research), and c) the resources or allies you already possess.



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**COMMUNITY CONT.**

- Have a table/booth in public places (malls, flea markets, street corners) to distribute literature
- Arrange a political parade or make a float for a parade
- Set up political fairs
- Hold regular vigils
- List events in community calendars
- Get textbook publishers and local libraries to cover a progressive political agenda
- Hold a house meeting and a meal to discuss issues with others
- Get a cereal manufacturer to use the back of a box for a political concern
- Distribute videos of talks, workshops and conferences
- Get popular personalities to speak out

Having taken the above into account, you will then be able to apply the four steps outlined in this pamphlet to determine an effective strategy. They are:

1. **Open the door:** establish a favorable climate for discussion and lay a foundation for further communication
2. **Meet one another:** show others who you are and learn about their concerns.
3. **Talk to each other:** influence opinions with an effective, concise message.
4. **Work together for change:** lead others to actual involvement by encouraging, reinforcing, and supporting their active political participation.

Before delineating the method in detail, it would be helpful to give a little more background. The following summarizes the suggested organization of the four step model and the various principles discussed.

Before personal interaction can occur, you first need an open door—a foundation for potential discussion and a contact that will provide an opportunity to promote support for your cause. With this “foot in the door,” it is much more likely that a discussion of pertinent issues will commence. If in your meeting you can then learn about the concerns of those you hope to sway and if they can learn some things about you, you will be more likely to have an influence.

After getting to know something about each other, you can focus more specifically on the delivery of your message in hopes of gaining their support. Framing an effective message is an essential part of this process. Additionally, to help you achieve this, the appendix lists numerous vehicles for getting out your ideas.

If you are able to arouse sympathy and understanding for your concern, the last step is to get others to become active in promoting your cause. In other words, your hope is that they will walk the walk and commit themselves to behaving in ways that will promote social change.

## THE FOUR-STEP METHOD

### I

#### OPEN THE DOOR:

ESTABLISH A FAVORABLE CLIMATE FOR DISCUSSION AND LAY A FOUNDATION FOR FURTHER COMMUNICATION

**Accessibility.** It is essential that your audience has access to your message. This means making it visible, be it in the form of catalogs, speakers, road trips, or otherwise. For example, the *Pueblo to People* catalog illustrates the life of rural women in Central America. In the *Central American Speak-Out Week* Campaign, the plight of Nicaragua was addressed in an action-packed week accompanied by dense media coverage. Speakers were brought to conservative states and into as many towns, hamlets and cities as possible to express their concerns about the situation. Breast cancer was brought to the forefront in hundreds of cities, towns and hamlets when two women bicycled from Massachusetts to California as an educational and fund-raising tool. The complexities of peace and the nightmares of war were highlighted for people in many parts of the world by the Auschwitz to Hiroshima Peace Walkers, who traversed Bosnia and the Middle East as a chapter in their walking story.

Entice your audience to come to you when you cannot go to them. Good music draws an audience as does food. Outdoor fairs are a place to get attention from people who had not intended to come your way, and free movies can bring out a point as well as a crowd.

Facilitate their journey with a clear set of instructions and place signs in strategic locations to assist people in finding a building or a room. Providing wheel-chair accessibility and child care is also an added incentive in attracting and keeping an audience.

- Prepare a political public service announcement
- Hold press conference with public figures
- Present programs on public access TV

#### CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, AND OTHER SOCIAL GROUPS

- Conduct a regular Sunday school class
- Have speakers give talks or show videos/films at service clubs, churches, schools, etc.
- Give materials to schools and churches
- Establish a church political library
- Get a church to become involved a particular political concerns
- Prepare pictorial or other displays for libraries, schools, museums, etc.
- Set up political literature boxes at schools and churches

#### COMMUNITY

- Get local libraries to have a progressive political display or book collection
- Get a skywriter to do a political message at a big event
- Seek the window/floor space of a business for displays
- Walk around a busy street with a political poster on your chest and back
- Stage unusual events
- Sponsor teams
- Regularly send progressive political materials and ideas to local media
- Start a political essay or poetry contest
- Contact community or government officials
- Stage community forums or debates
- Have neighborhood potlucks and informal discussions
- Perform guerrilla theater
- Stage a political play
- Canvass a neighborhood

Continued on the next page.

## APPENDIX

## 48 WAYS TO GET OUT YOUR MESSAGE

## POSTERS, SIGNS, OR FLIERS

- Distribute or post fliers
- Distribute fact-based postal sized cards in public places or on windshields
- Put up political signs on lawns and in home windows
- Paint murals on walls
- Do a billboard or bus shelter display—place political messages on cards, mugs, calendars, scratchpads, stationary, order forms/invoices, business cards, matchbooks, etc.

## NEWSPAPERS AND LETTERS

- Write letters to the editor or “op eds” for newspapers or “speakout editorials” on local TV/radio
- Have passers-by write letters
- Insert cartoons, newsclippings, brief articles in correspondence
- Place notices, articles, ads, inserts, classifieds, in church, club, or school newspapers, newsletters, or “trading post” publications
- Call/write elected officials
- Get a newspaper to have a progressive political column

## RADIO, TV, AND COMPUTERS

- Utilize electronic mail/bulletin boards/home pages to organize, and to get word out to activists
- Get local radio stations to sponsor music-related political events (concerts, dances, festivals)
- Call radio talk shows

**Listening and Learning.** Once you have obtained the attention of your audience, you must listen to the people to whom you are speaking and acknowledge what they have to say. When you empathetically listen to their view on a topic and the rationale behind it, their need for rigid defense decreases. In that way, they are apt to feel free to explore your stance as well as their own. This is also your opportunity to learn what they really feel and why—information that is relevant to framing your own message during and after the discussion.

For example, when pacifists Randy Kehler and Betsy Corner of Colrain, Massachusetts, refused to pay federal war taxes, the IRS attempted to take their home. Their supporters, however, made a real point of listening carefully to passers-by. As a result, they discovered a misunderstanding that could have potentially caused a hostile situation. Many thought Randy and Betsy were personally benefiting by keeping the unpaid taxes. Learning about the misinformation helped the organizers underscore more sharply the fact that these tax resisters had, in reality, donated all the taxes they owed to charitable causes.

## II

## MEET EACH OTHER:

SHOW OTHERS WHO YOU ARE AND LEARN ABOUT THEIR CONCERNS

**Traits.** The personal qualities you possess will influence the reception of your message by those in your audience. For example, a church elder once spoke about her lesbian granddaughter. The elder was able to evoke a positive response in the audience by virtue of her positive reputation amongst the members. Oftentimes this is not the case and the person delivering the message may not be well-known by the people whose attitudes s/he is trying to influence. There is much that can be done, however, to increase the chances that even a total stranger can have a positive influence on the message.

One effective means is by eye-witness testimony or the testimony of personal experience. For instance, individual reports from the People-to-People visits to Russia or the Witness for Peace missions evokes higher audience credibility and

receptiveness to the message. This method may be able to change deeply-held prejudices more than statements based exclusively on academic research or a personal moral philosophy.

**Commonality With Your Audience.** New ideas are more likely to be heard when delivered by people who seem similar to the listening audience. Is the speaker on hazardous waste another union person like themselves? Does the Mothers Against Drunk Driving representative dress like the other women in the church group?

Also, people listen more openly to a speaker who can clearly and positively connect with them. When you are setting up your Bosnia slide show, do you verbally express appreciation for people's willingness to come out on a work night or in the cold weather? Do you commiserate about the traffic detour everyone had to come through that evening? Do you show your appreciation to the person who finds the electrical outlet for you? All of these little touches can make a big difference in winning trust for your message.

**Actions Speak Louder than Words.** Your actions and behavior must correspond with your message in order for people to take you and your message seriously. Saying "we're alike" or "we're all in this together" while dressing in a way that marks you as distinctly different from your audience, weakens your message. Defining yourself as 'non-violent' but losing your temper uncontrollably in a debate lessens your credibility. Preaching multi-culturalism and respect for diversity while drawing all your literary and musical references from Western-European "classics" can not help but raise question marks. Your actions also need to match your words to keep your organization strong and growing. During the civil rights movement, many groups that claimed to be for "justice for all" lost a key source of support when female members in the group found themselves being treated like second class citizens. Similarly, many "democratic" unions lost membership when rank-and-file members felt ignored by "union machines."

Finally, be sure participants are morally comfortable with the means your group has chosen to fulfill an end. If volunteers see people fudging figures to make a more dramatic leaflet or making deals to gain electoral allies, they may begin to

## CONCLUSION

This covers the four-step model for influencing attitudes and behaviors. The principles discussed can be a powerful tool to help promote your cause, be it the guiding ideas for a letter to the editor or an entire campaign effort. The cause you support is worthy of the public's attention, but gaining that attention, let alone eliciting active participation, is not always a smooth task. It is an *important* task, however, and this booklet provides a guide to help make that task easier. Following the four-step method and using the principles discussed can be effective in influencing social change and making the world a better place to live.



Emphasizing the connection between your work, the desired action you wish people to engage in, and the life concerns of those people (if you know that) can also increase active commitment. Coca-Cola boycott organizers, for example, helped college students in America identify with the educational conditions faced by young people in apartheid South Africa. The organizers then increased boycott participation by connecting those conditions to the investment practices of multinational corporations like Coca-Cola. People's level of participation depends on the belief that their actions, in conjunction with others, will collectively lead to a change. The more effective people feel, the more likely they will participate. During the time of the civil rights bus boycott, the Black bus riders of Montgomery, Alabama, may not individually have had the power to attract the bus company, but when asked to collectively come together and support each other, they became a mighty force.

Similarly, people are more likely to become involved if they can contribute with the skills they already possess or tasks they enjoy doing, be it speaking, number crunching, cooking, painting, or stuffing envelopes.

**Active Participation.** Most importantly, people actively putting themselves and all of their energy “out there” for an issue has a marked effect on them: the large amount of energy expended requires justification; that is, they themselves become more committed to that particular cause and will consequently support it more vigorously. *Habitat for Humanity* draws people into a concern for housing inequities as it draws on their carpentry skills; peace walks deepen people's convictions about “peace as the way” as they walk the talk.

Finally, participating in another's experience can also move people effectively. Many people gave more than a passing thought to the different experiences of the deaf community after having been exposed to the signers at *Sweet Honey* in the Rock and *Holly Near* concerts. Urban Americans grasped the true experience of “illegal immigrants” from south of the border after viewing the potent movie *El Norte*.

feel ambivalent, if not indignant, to your, and any other efforts of social change. Also, if too much of your budget goes to buildings, administration, and funding appeals rather than to the people in need or the issue at hand, then volunteers may forsake your effort.

**Appeal.** Appealing to the concerns of your audience by connecting your issues with those of your listeners can be done directly or indirectly. The *National Priorities Project* is an excellent example of a direct connection. It makes a point of illustrating that any small town can obtain information on the large amount of dollars it pays into federal tax coffers for the military. Compared to this amount, however, this small town can also obtain figures on the relatively smaller amount the town receives in return for social and community services. Services that could have markedly affected the well-being of the community, like schools, the police, or hospitals, are oftentimes unsuspectingly misappropriated to other national “priorities.” The project took the process one step further and reframed the popular perception that defense taxes are needed for our security and then posed the question: “What really brings security to a community?” Emphasize, specifically, those needs your town or city has not met, but could have with finances now going towards military concerns.

Also, tying your message into community values or bringing your message “home” is a way to connect your issue to the interests of those you are trying to reach. Greenpeace, for example, knows that their audience is concerned with the neighborhood toxic waste issue and has thus connected these community concerns to efforts opposing French nuclear testing in Tahiti.

**Strategy.** Besides showing your audience the personal benefits gained by adopting your position and appealing to their needs, determine whether there are forces or factors reinforcing their current (perhaps contrary) attitudes. If there are, use what means you can to counteract them. What are the reasons for their current position? If you can devise ways to invalidate those other appeals, your position will be strengthened.

Refuse to treat an “enemy” as s/he is treating you. One of the most powerful images of the civil rights movement is the young people at the Woolworth’s department store quietly and respectfully maintaining their sit-in at the counter while hate-filled adults poured ketchup and other products on their heads. Similarly, police are often pleasantly intrigued when groups engaging in civil disobedience share all their plans in advance and show an eagerness to work with, rather than against, the officers.

### III

#### TALK TO EACH OTHER:

INFLUENCE OPINIONS WITH AN  
EFFECTIVE MESSAGE

**Presentation.** The way you present your message and the style of your person or organization will play an important role in the delivery of your message. Peripheral factors such as your credibility, appearance, personality, style, etc. may have more influence than the content of your message, when politics or the issue you are presenting are not that important to the listener. Powerful examples and vivid images also induce a greater and more dedicated response.

The *Nuclear Countdown Doomsday Clock* expressed an otherwise complex point in a shockingly simple manner. Similarly, the beautiful AIDS quilt spread out so dramatically at the foot of the Washington Monument, and elsewhere, did more to bring AIDS victims to life than did any series of statistics.

**National Symbols.** The use of national symbols can be powerful when they are linked to your message and they can identify your cause or purpose. Organizers of the Cuba Caravan that protested the U.S. embargo used this knowledge to their advantage. They chose to challenge the Border Patrol with a battered yellow school bus from a Cuban elementary school. The U.S. government looked foolish trying to portray such a familiar vehicle as a threat to American security — and it made a great “photo op” which tempted the media into covering the story.

others have a full meal (or what it is like to be one of the rare few sitting at the table, being watched by the multitude of hungry others). The *Million Man March* of Black males on Washington gave participants an experience of united energy that mere words could not have produced.

Therefore, if you want people to participate, and continue participating, provide for their larger needs simultaneously (e.g., community, recognition, purpose, inspiration, sense of connection to something “bigger” in a historical context). One big event, such as the *Million Man March*, or other simultaneous events woven into the fabric of your ongoing project, can do much to keep activists from “burning out.”

**Structure and Support.** Volunteer action can be facilitated with some support and structure. In other words, for most people, the easier and more convenient it is to undertake an action, the more likely is their participation. Can people raise funds for you simply by using your cause’s credit card? Can they influence a legislator on your behalf by being part of 20/20’s easy letter writing campaign? Can you offer volunteers limited time involvement by recruiting many people, giving each a structured task that takes only a couple of hours a month? Starting with small commitments, which many people are able to complete, is often the first step to a larger involvement.

People feel more comfortable taking on a risk if they understand its necessity and its connection to the “bigger” picture. Work-a-thon organizers in Massachusetts had little trouble attracting volunteers when they explained how people could “feed two birds with one seed.” Their work would help a local housing structure get a new coat of paint, while their pledges would generate money for a new housing project in El Salvador!

Similarly, people are more likely to participate in an action when it speaks to their sense of responsibility. Organizers of a photo/ biological exhibit of women who had died from breast cancer received a good response because their partners/ children/friends understood the importance of sharing lessons learned from the experience of other women.

Drawing on people's past commitment to a principle increases the chance they will act in a consistent manner again. For example, appealing to the positive image of Unitarians, a young woman quietly states, "Our church has always been known for being welcoming to all, welcoming the poor, refusing to discriminate against people of color. That's why I trust that this is a safe place to come out as a lesbian." The response she received?—not only the acceptance she sought but also an answer to the question, "How can our church be sure other gay and lesbian young people know we'd welcome them as well?"

When asking for help, remember that effective help is usually mutual help; it is a two-way street. For example, the Palestinian groups that provide schools and health clinics for their people are consequently more likely to get their beneficiaries to reciprocate and support them if they call for a work stoppage.

It is important to influence the attitude of your audience toward the particular *action* you desire. For example, do not assume that a favorable attitude toward preserving the rain forest will naturally lead others to write to Congress or volunteer time on the issue. Stress the reasons why it is important to write or volunteer time.

**Positive Reinforcement.** It is important to have a system established so that people benefit materially and/or psychologically after taking actions. One reason walk-a-thons have proven so successful is that they not only have a whole schedule of prizes, t-shirts, etc., but they also offer the chance for a great day outdoors; a way to spend time with family or friends; a sharing of mutual commitment with others; a sense of participation in something bigger than oneself; and visibility in one's community—especially when the route is in a well-populated area. (It is important to remember that except for that smaller minority whose only motivation is to advance the cause, most people have personal life motivations as well that affect their participation.)

Reinforcements that encourage people to actively participate also increase the likelihood they will want to get involved with an issue. Hunger groups have effectively used this principle in designing Hunger Banquets, where by "luck-of-the-draw," they experience what it is like to eat only rice and beans while watching

Linking your cause to the claimed traditional "American values" (i.e., equality, hard work, freedom, family, fairness, etc.) or to the values of your particular audience can also make your educational job easier. When apartheid in South Africa was linked to "No taxation without representation" and "Justice for all," people were more likely to accept that the system was fundamentally flawed.

**Being Consistent.** Those who have a minority view on an issue are more likely to be influential if their arguments are coherent, they appear confident, and they are consistent over time. The non-violent civil rights protesters in the South developed considerable respect due to the persistent way they refused to stoop to the violence of their opponents.

Also, people may be moved when faced with an inconsistency in their thinking or behavior (cognitive dissonance). Influence is likely only if your new option for them (new attitude or behavior) is seen by them as a valid way out of their contradiction. For example, some whites feel like bad people if they do not "do something" about racism, but they also feel that there is "nothing they can do." An effective anti-racism workshop leader can help alleviate the dissonance by introducing the "white ally" approach, showing that there is something effective that white people can do.

Finally, people judge one's positions in relation to alternative ones, so present your case alongside less attractive alternatives.

**Appeal to the Emotions.** People's opinions can also be effected by using positive or negative association. For example, regarding the latter, you can create a negative association through a slogan that connects something aversive with something you oppose, as Central American activists who worked against U.S. involvement in Latin America did with their slogan "NO MORE VIETNAMS!"

Using fear to generate responses will be effective if the threat you allude to seems real and the action you suggest seems potent enough to actually alleviate the problem at hand. Local activists meet both of these criteria, for example, when they correctly identify a right-wing group "that will take over a school board unless we, and our larger numbers, pay attention and get involved."

**Integrity.** The messenger's integrity is important when your opposition is striving to paint your cause as evil, subversive, "on the fringe," "leftist," etc. Your uprightness and honesty will annul your opponents' defamation and provide your audience with a "reality check." During the Cold War, Soviet-American exchange programs opened many eyes. And during the Reagan years, Witness for Peace delegations brought back alternative views of the Nicaraguan Contras. When possible, tactfully undermining your opposition's credibility will have just the opposite effect—it will lower their integrity. During the G.E. boycott, G.E.'s slogan "we bring good things to life," came back to haunt them. The sponsors of the boycott, the Infact Project, made an effective video documenting over and over again where G.E. spokespersons had said one thing to governmental regulators or inspectors only to have the facts prove otherwise. By the time those same spokespersons were denying the dangers of G.E.'s nuclear weapons production, they were infinitely less believable.

## IV

### WORK TOGETHER FOR CHANGE:

LEAD OTHERS TO ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT BY ENCOURAGING, REINFORCING, AND SUPPORTING THEIR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

**Encouragement.** After presenting your message, it is important to encourage and support your audience for whatever level of commitment they feel able to make. This tells people that, no matter what they choose, they and their decisions will be appreciated and respected. Betsy Corner and Randy Kehler were willing to lose their home for their principles. Wally Nelson was willing to risk his life fasting in jail in their support, should that have proven necessary. But everyone is not a Betsy, Randy, or Wally. One of the reasons cited by many for their ongoing participation in the Colrain mass action was the fact that, from the very beginning, everyone was urged only to take whatever steps they felt comfortable taking; to only make whatever sacrifice they truly desired to make. There was no "Holier than thou" or "one participant is valued more than another" attitude. Consequently, people from all over the country, some of whom had paid all their taxes, along

with some who had endured years of jail themselves refusing to pay, could all join together in keeping the 24-hour vigil alive week after week, month after month.

**Proper Training.** Education and training will also encourage people to take on new roles. Pacifists may move from a theoretical stance into actual civil disobedience if effective training in non-violence is offered before a suggested action. People who have previously walked in marches may be willing to monitor and help others in peacekeeping training and orientation. This will increase the rookie's confidence to participate, as s/he will be more familiar with what to expect.

**Demonstration.** An action that is demonstrated as socially acceptable will make it more likely that others will emulate that action. During the Reagan years, for example, when Nicaragua was portrayed as an evil Communist threat to this country, many areas successfully adopted the "sister city" approach. It encouraged people to begin "respectable" activities such as collecting pencils and notebooks for school children in their "sister" town in Nicaragua.

Observing credible or familiar people doing an action also increases participation. When the war tax resisters in Colrain wanted to underscore the importance of spending federal revenues on creating homes rather than bombing them, they organized a *Swords into Plowshares* building action, along the lines of Habitat for Humanity. In addition to the powerful symbolism, they created an effective visual presentation illustrating familiar local business and individual participation in the actual building process. Sharing this at a neighborhood house meeting had a delightful "snowballing" effect!

**Public Commitment.** When many people commit to or for an action, it facilitates emulation of that action. Drawing another example from the Nicaragua-Reagan era, there was the national *Pledge of Resistance*: people committed as a group in advance in order to resist invasion in Central America through civil disobedience. In this way, it was possible for people to take part who might not have done so in isolation. Thus, you can stimulate a self-fulfilling prophecy, by appealing to an individual's or group's stated principles.