

The Advocacy Game

How to develop and implement a day to organize and empower advocacy

Game and Manual developed by
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INTRODUCTION

Folly is a more dangerous enemy to the good than malice. You can protest against malice, you can unmask it or prevent it by force. Malice always contains the seeds of its own destruction, for it always makes people uncomfortable, if nothing worse. There is no defense against folly. Neither protests nor force are of any avail against it, and it is never amenable to reason. If facts contradict personal prejudices, there is no need to believe them, and if they are undeniable, they can simply be pushed aside as exceptions. The fool, as compared to the scoundrel, is invariably self-complacent . . . one is confronted with a series of slogans, watchwords, and the like, which have acquired power over him. Once he has surrendered his will and become a mere tool, there are no lengths of evil to which the fool will not go, yet all the time he is unable to see that it is evil. Here lies the danger of a diabolical exploitation of humanity, which can do irreparable damage to the human character. -Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York, Macmillan, 1953, p.23f)

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12 (NRSV)

Letters and Papers from Prison and Ephesians were written during extraordinary times, toward the end of the Nazi era and the beginning of the Roman persecution of Christians, respectively. These insights grew from depths of struggles many of us cannot fathom — especially those of us who consider us living in more ordinary times. Yet these passages guide us toward basic truths important to our integrity and faithfulness:

The struggle between good and evil plays out in everyday life

- we cannot be on the sidelines
- we need to stay alert
- allowing ourselves to become passive means we risk becoming tools of evil
- ministry *is* how we encounter daily life.

This manual and this process assume you know all this. I assume you also know that the power of God works through ordinary people, even in extraordinary times. Ephesians 6:12 tells a rather ordinary congregation about “our” struggle. Their struggle was not the Governor’s, nor the angels’ struggle, it was *theirs*. Advocacy is not a ministry simply for “experts.” God creates us all in the divine image. We all have dignity. Our stories are important. We are all “experts” on our own lives.

Once people see the need, they can become experts very quickly.

One sunny spring morning, I walked out my front door and noticed something odd about the brick pillar at the foot of my driveway. It was neither a pillar nor at the foot of my driveway any longer. It had become a heap of bricks scattered on the road. The privet hedge which lined the driveway had a newly cleared drive-through path. The mailbox was knocked over. Tire tracks ran up the lawn, parallel to the privet hedge, ending where my son’s 1973 fixer-upper pickup truck had some large new dents to be fixed up. The truck had been shoved into my car, which sported significant new dents of its own.

We had been visited. Near the pickup truck were bits and pieces of enamel and trim from what appeared to be a black, probably full sized American car. I put the evidence in a plastic bag and called the police.

Debbie, to whom I am married, was not amused when the police officer pointed out, in a more polished manner than I am about to summarize it, that tracking down the driver based on the bits and pieces s/he left behind probably wasn’t worth their time and effort. Our problem was, how do we advocate effectively for police attention to this case?

Debbie got an inspiration.

She called local television stations and pitched our situation to the news divisions: “I know it’s not much of a crime, but here we are in a quiet neighborhood where in the middle of the night someone can come along and do this to

us, or anyone for that matter!" After a couple rejections, one reporter did show interest and showed up with a camera person. We, our mess, and an animated neighbor who had been awakened by our visitor showed up on the noon, six o'clock and eleven o'clock news that day.

Lots of people saw our story because people recognized me in the supermarket for weeks. Better yet, the reporter followed up with the police, asking "how their investigation was going." A detective was assigned, who within two weeks found our visitor, a woman who insisted she had merely fallen asleep at the wheel. Regardless, her insurance covered everything.

The point of this story is that necessity inspired Debbie, a folk artist by trade, to function as a sophisticated advocate. She did several very smart things:

- she persisted despite initial rejections
- she assessed her position of weakness and overcame it by recruiting an ally (that is, the television reporter)
- she placed our event in a larger societal context (it could happen to anyone!)
- she chose an ally who related positively to the needs of the people she wanted to influence (police want good press relations so they were likely to act when a reporter asked for a progress report)

Although this seems more a tale of folly than of good and evil, Debbie practiced active alertness. A passive person might have called the police, handed over the bag, listened to them talk about how busy they were, and then complained about how "you can't fight city hall." Who knows what accounted for our visitor's style of driving so early in the morning? Had Debbie not advocated, would she have felt she had gotten away with something? Would her style of driving in the wee hours of that morning be repeated, perhaps with tragic results? Maybe this is a story of good and evil after all. In any case, the moral of the story is "Heads up! Stay alert! You can do good!"

This manual describes a process for generating active alertness in your community. I have been a public policy advocate full time for fifteen years. I have seen plenty of awareness of the good and the evil, if not alertness. But *active* advocates are hard to find. Many people just don't feel comfortable advocating; it's like an alien activity. Yodeling on the Swiss Alps might feel more at home. Yet advocate we must if we are to combat that self-complacency against which Bonhoeffer railed (and largely because of which he lost his life). Our struggle against the powers is active, or it isn't happening.

Some ten years ago, I recognized how uncomfortable advocacy was for many of us in the church. Advocacy doesn't feel like church work. To make matters worse, plenty of people treat advocates dismissively, throwing out slogans such as "don't play politics" while self-complacently going about their church work. Not only was doing advocacy awkward, it was risky. I figured the least I could do was make it less awkward, so I invented the simulation game around which this manual is built. I've included some role-player sheets from that original module, based on the perennial quest to increase the minimum wage, in the appendix.

For ten years large groups and I would have a lot of fun at conference workshops playing this game. We'd laugh, we'd get intense, we'd get the feel for how the process works. Other professional advocates confirmed the game's realism. I felt good about this game, especially when participants routinely asked me when I planned to "package" this game so that they can use it. That turned out to be easier said than done.

In one sense, you already have a partial "package" in the appendix. But what if the minimum wage weren't a current issue when you'd plan to run the game? Would you have to send away for a more current issue? In fact that is what happened over the years. As issues changed, I'd come up with a variable cast of characters to go with current issues. Also, facilitating the game takes some (although not overly much) facilitation skill. So packaging a game-in-a-box was a complicated proposition.

A deeper problem is that a prepackaged game doesn't do as much for "active alertness" as it should. How actively alert do we become when we open a box which tells us what to care about and who to pretend to be for the next couple hours? In fact, the exclusive use of a "prepackaged" game creates tension between grass-roots empowerment and the hierarchical implications of an "expert" deciding what and who should matter. My experience convinces me that we are empowered to the extent that we can define and take responsibility for our own reality. This especially applies to the reality in which we advocate for or against change.

Well, if getting empowered means taking responsibility for your reality, this format, a manual for developing, running, and debriefing your own simulated reality, offers you just that. If you go through the full-day process offered in this manual, you will be able to, at the very least,

- identify the strengths and weakness of your issue as perceived by a variety of interested parties
- identify the probable motives and possible behaviors of allies, opponents, decision makers and commentators
- test several action strategies for effectiveness

This happens during the three stages of preparation, action, and debriefing.

During the preparation stage, you will have done some policy history assessment as pre-work before the event. At the event, you will decide what matters and who matters. "What matters" is a process where you'll define your issue with focus and clarity. "Who matters" designates and defines the groups which relate to the issue, either as advocates for or against, politicians, or the media. Preparation will take about three hours.

The action stage is the game itself, which takes two or more hours to play, depending on how many rounds you want to play (I recommend at least three). This is the time of jumping up and down, laughing, and screaming.

The debriefing stage moves from playfulness to planfulness. For at least forty-five minutes (and a subsequent meeting should be devoted to fully accomplish this), participants report on what they experienced, and what everyone can learn from the experiences.

The manual also includes some handy tips I've picked up along the way for facilitating the event. In many ways, the game plays itself, but there is a balance between control and chaos this event requires. In fact, I've found it useful to err slightly on the side of control during the playing of the game, especially where time limits are concerned. In their enthusiasm, participants often like to stretch their time limits a bit, but real world time waits for no one, and we advocates all live with the frustration that comes with wishing, "if I only had a little more time."

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

PREPARING PARTICIPANTS

A musician I know told of a classmate at the conservatory who used to walk into class, plop passively in his chair, and announce to the professor: “so educate me.” Many times I’ve felt that groups I’ve led were filled with that student’s soul mates. But I myself have been a group member far more often than a leader, and as a member, I have appeared to be such a soul mate myself, more often than not — at least as the meeting began.

The reason I’d sit there thinking “so educate me” is that my only responsibility prior to the meeting was to show up. I was taking a wait-and-see posture. So do most people when there are no expectations beforehand. Usually, wait-and-see is O.K. However, I do not recommend bringing a group into *this* full day process with any expectations beforehand other than setting alarm clocks in order to arrive in a timely manner.

The purpose of this manual is empowering groups. The keystone of empowerment is responsibility. Energy goes up as we feel a stake in the process, share responsibility for what is happening. This manual offers a day with a full agenda for developing skills to deal with matters of great importance for the lives of these participants and their community. Everybody should come with energy and some knowledge. It helps to have a pre-meeting which outlines what the advocacy game event will involve and assigning pre-work. This meeting should be held ideally at least one week before the Advocacy Game event itself.

The meeting would have two parts: discussing the needs, and assigning tasks to prepare for the day.

The first part begins to focus the group. The time involved in this step depends upon how clear and present the issue is. For example, if your community is planning on placing an incinerator in your neighborhood (and you don’t want it), you have a concrete, specific, easily identified issue. The focus time will be short. Many issues are more complex. Say a multinational corporation, whose headquarters are in some other state, is slowly downsizing your small city to death. You face a host of problems and it’s hard to know where to begin. Plan to spend more time clarifying.

The agenda for this step is first to agree on the general domain of your concern (examples: children’s well-being; access to health care; wages; pollution). When the whole group is clear on where to focus their attention, break into groups of no more than seven per small group. Each small group has forty five minutes to answer the questions below as they relate to the well being of people in your community. Groups should think of causes and solutions not only locally, but also statewide and nationally.

The questions each group deals with are:

- *Who hurts?*
- *When did this hurt begin?*
- *What changed to cause the hurt?*
- *What needs to change to heal the hurt?*
- *Who is part of the problem; who is part of the solution?*
- *What has been tried to heal the hurt?*
- *What is being tried now to heal the hurt?*
- *What more do we need to find out to answer these questions?*

At the end of 45 minutes, the large group reconvenes. Small groups report their results, perhaps posting them on newsprint or blackboard. Do not argue points of disagreement. They are part of the dialogue. The most important question is the last: *What more do we need to find out to answer these questions?* All the answers relate to the concluding part of the meeting.

To end the meeting, take fifteen minutes to one half hour to decide the final question of the pre-meeting: *Who is going to do what by when to find out what more we need to know to answer these questions?* Make the assignments.

During the time between the pre-meeting and the event itself, it may be helpful for you as facilitator to make a gentle reminder call upon those who had assignments. Ask simply how it's been going. Have they found out anything? A courteous call will remind everyone that this is a serious process.

PREPARING LOGISTICS

The devil, the saying of the Clinton years goes, is in the details. As a facilitator, you want everyone's attention on the event. Details, unattended to, draw attention to themselves, and can undermine the best events. Once I hosted a small retreat where some of the attendees were vegetarian. The retreat center person assured me that the center could accommodate them. So when we gathered for lunch at the retreat we were greeted with — beef stew. I went to the retreat person who unblinkingly assured me "Well, there are vegetables in it. Can't they pick them out?" Oy! I should have gone over a *menu* beforehand. Details!

As far as details go, Murphy's Law, "if anything can go wrong, it will," is only superceded by the insight that "Murphy was an optimist." The bottom-line defense: make a checklist and use it.

Here are a few logistical details that make a difference with The Advocacy Game:

- Have plenty of newsprint and tape or tacks to hang newsprint on walls.
- Make sure you have an easel for the newsprint pad and that your markers work also.
- Have plenty of paper and pencils handy
- Make the Advocacy Game's visit request cards made up in advance.
- Be sure to have at least a dozen participants, although more is merrier.

- Make sure your meeting space has plenty of room for people to move around among tables.
- Make sure your space has at least eight to twelve tables from which groups will play out their roles in the game.
- Make sure you have a working public address system.

DEVELOPING THE GAME: PRELIMINARIES

THE AGENDA

I am describing The Advocacy Game event as a full day process in the sense of there being two sessions totaling seven to eight hours. To be sure, the two sessions can be offered in any convenient sequencing, such as afternoon/evening, or evening/morning the next day. I use the morning/afternoon format for the sake of simplicity. With that in mind, an agenda for the day might look like this:

9:00 Welcome and orientation

9:15 Introductions

Even if everyone knows each other, it's important to indicate what people expect to gain from the day

9:30 Defining what matters

A process to focus on the specific issue around which to build today's game

10:45 Break

11:00 Defining who matters

A 3-part process to define today's players

12:30 Break for lunch

1:00 Play The Advocacy Game

2:45 Break

3:00 Debrief important points learned by group

3:45 Develop action plan for next steps

Who does what by when?

4:30 Recess

(the work goes on)

ORIENTATION

It's important here to make sure everyone knows what to expect during the day, what the ground rules are, where bathrooms are located, anything logistically important. For one example, I once attended an event where we had to move cars throughout the day to avoid being ticketed. It was a pain, but we managed it with good humor.

I have found it useful, during orientation, to hand out a one page "event map." The event map includes the agenda, the objectives and/or goals for the event, and ground rules.

Agenda

The world is divided into all kinds of two-kinds-of-people. Myers and Briggs came up with an interesting duality: those who like matters organized and those who like matters open-ended. Neil Simon came along (independently, no doubt) and gave these people names — Felix Unger and Oscar Madison — the Odd Couple! If you recall the play, movie, or television series, you'll remember Felix as the tidy, persnickety one, and Oscar as the easy-going, sloppy one. They were extremes. We all are a little more of one than the other, though. Just ask anyone who knows you well! That being said, the agenda is important especially for people who like matters organized. If you don't present an agenda at the beginning, these people dismiss you as unreliable, even unsafe. They tend to shut down if they don't know what to expect and when. For this reason also, do not change the agenda unless there is a compelling reason or a group consensus to do so.

Objectives

Listing objectives saved a two-day seminar for me once. It was a workshop focusing on personality type and communication effectiveness and one objective had subgroups "identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their own preference and celebrating the strengths of other types." Well, wouldn't you know that one subgroup broke ranks and felt it would be more productive if they helpfully pointed out every other types' weaknesses for them — just to be constructive, of course. The other subgroups thought poorly of this innovation, to say the least, and the whole event could have disintegrated into a zero-sum outcome of winners and losers. Instead, I was able to point to the objective on the event map, and gently remind the "innovators" that their idea was out of order. They acknowledged that fair's fair, they had agreed to the map, so the workshop continued successfully. When an event is longer than two hours (that is, more than a "sampler" event), I always include objectives.

You may make up your own objectives. I find it helpful to follow the rule that an objective is something concrete, behavioral, and is an expression of a change the event brought about. The appropriate wording for an objective (as opposed to a general goal) begins "*at the end of this event participants will be able to . . .*" Notice the wording makes us struggle. As my fourth grade teacher said, "good." It's one thing to take the easy path and list "will

understand how to advocate” as an objective. But how do you know anybody understood anything? But stating it as a behavior gives us criteria to tell what happened: “at the end of the event participants will be able to identify key media and will be able to generate a list of do’s and don’t’s regarding how to get our story featured.”

The Advocacy Game offers a wealth of potential objectives. Some others might be: At the end of the event participants will be able to:

- describe why one issue should take precedence over another
- identify key players among those who decide the issue, influence the issue, and frame the issue.
- identify persuasion strategies based upon audience self-concept, bottom line, hopes, and fears
- assess the likelihood of success or failure of several advocacy strategies

Already this is a lot! You’ll do well by generating more!

Ground Rules

Ground rules are important for all the reasons agenda and objectives are important. Few things are more disconcerting than a made-up-as-you-go set of rules. *“Oh did I mention no smoking in the building? And I think people would prefer we not bring food and drinks into the session. Oh . . . you need to eat for medical reasons? Oh, I’m sorry . . .”* You get the idea. No need to be Captain Bligh of the Bounty, though. A few rules make the space feel safe, so participants feel free to concentrate on the task at hand.

Here are ground rules I typically use:

Maintain confidentiality.

Be prompt.

Breaks every \pm 2 hours.

There is no requirement to participate in everything. We will respect your need to not participate . . . and you'll respect others' need to participate.

Signal time out when & if you need to question the process.

Everybody needs a chance to share: watch your own air time.

Avoid confrontation. We do not grow by grabbing hair & pulling. Take full ownership of your own process and let others do the same.

Add to or subtract from these to fit your own group.

INTRODUCTIONS

The way we introduce ourselves can set the tone for the whole day. When we simply go around the circle, offering little more than our name (rank, and serial number), we signal that this is a meeting focused heavily on task and lightly on the individuals involved. The tacit assumption in such introductions is that individuality — emotions, spontaneity, openness — is not welcome in overt form. Although such “formality” may be functional for short-

term, targeted task discussions, such formality will subvert this process. The Advocacy Game requires us to learn via the “childlike” activity of playacting. We need plenty of room for emotions, spontaneity, and openness in the afternoon. On the other hand, The Advocacy Game is basically a task-oriented event which relies on emotions, spontaneity, and openness, so the tone should balance task and individuality.

Our emotions, spontaneity, and openness should be welcomed once the “safety” of the event is assured by sharing the event map. Introductions are the means of welcoming.

There are many ways to accomplish balanced introductions. One of the more succinct and helpful sources is *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution: A Handbook of Skills & Tools for Social Change Activists*, by Virginia Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser, and Christopher Moore (New Society Publishers, 4527 Springfield Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19143; 1977, 1978, 1981, 1985.) They describe three methods for introductions designed to “help people get acquainted; set positive, human tone for the meeting. Give people some personal knowledge of other group members on which to build a level of trust necessary for efficient and satisfying group functioning.”

*Method 1 — **Personal introductions:** Each person gives name, where s/he is from, and one other fact about him/herself. Facilitator should suggest what this third fact might be: something positive, like recent accomplishment or excitement; something relevant to the theme of a workshop, like a vision for a new society; etc. Avoid using questions that could be answered by a long list of accomplishments or organizations that a person belongs to.*

*Method 2 — **Pair introductions:***

1. Ask people to pair up with people they do not know or know less well than others in the group.

Person A listens to or “interviews” person B, and then B listens to A, for five minutes each way.

3. Drawing on what was heard in the five minute periods, A and B then introduce each other to the group. The facilitator can make specific suggestions for things to include in the introductions. (Example: Each person takes three minutes to share things that s/he likes about him/herself.)

*Method 3 — **“Hello A, I’m B:”** Purpose: Helps participants remember the name of everyone in the group. Acts as an icebreaker (Not practical in groups over about 15 people.)*

Description:

1. Participants sit in a circle, and one person begins by saying “Hello, I’m A_____.”

2. The next person in the circle says "Hello, A _____, I'm B _____."

3. The third person says, "Hello, A _____ and B _____, I'm C _____."

4. Each person, in turn, greets all the preceding participants, and the last person greets everyone else in the circle. By the end of the exercise, almost everyone can remember the names of all the participants.

5. The group may help anyone who had difficulty recalling names. These are not meant to be competitive games.

Variation: "I'm so-and-so, the Whatever."

1. With the group sitting in a circle one person says, "I'm _____, the _____," giving his/her name and an imaginary occupation, or at least an occupation or job that the person doesn't do. When the occupation or whatever is stated, it can be accompanied by a small dramatic gesture or action describing the job, which of course everyone following repeats. Example: "I'm Mari, the lion-tamer."

2. The next person in the circle says, "S/he is _____ the _____ (Mari, the lion-tamer) and I'm _____ the _____," giving his/her name and another occupation.

3. Each person says the names and jobs of everyone before him/her in the circle; the last person in the circle says them all.

DEVELOPING THE GAME: ISSUE AND PLAYERS

DEFINING WHAT MATTERS

Advocacy always takes a direct object. We advocate for someone, to change or preserve something. That may seem obvious. For some, it is not.

Many years ago, a member of my denomination whose son suffered from a mental illness asked me to attend a meeting where concerned people were planning a “prayer walk” to the State Capitol. This prayer walk would involve clergy from various denominations. It would highlight the importance of dealing with mental illness as a public policy priority. I was happy to attend.

I was less happy with the meeting itself. The Chairperson described at length the route of the walk, and the range of the walkers, and the coverage of the walk by the media, but seemed very vague about the reason all these walkers were walking. I asked,

“What do we want to accomplish?” I was told,

“We want the Governor and legislature to make mental illness a higher priority.” I tried again,

“But what specifically do we want them to do?” I was told,

“As I said, we want the Governor and legislature to make mental illness a higher priority.” I tried a different tack,

“No, no, no . . . let me try to say this clearly. Are we asking the governor and Legislature to put more money in the State Budget? Are there specific bills we want to see passed?”

“Oh! We’re not about the budget and bills. We’re about priorities. And we want the Governor and legislature to make mental illness a higher priority.”

The prayer walk did take place, although God apparently intervened and spared me from attending. The day before the walk, an unseasonable ice storm felled tree limbs and knocked out power throughout the region, and I was repairing damage to my property that morning. I did see the television coverage of the prayer walk, probably along with the Governor and many legislators. We were all probably wondering who these people were, marching around in vestments with nothing of substance to say.

Moral of the story: if advocacy always takes a direct object, then have your direct objects fleshed out before you advocate.

Had the prayer walk delivered a concrete message, such as “restore funding to the State Office of Mental Health,” it would have been highly credible, and possibly effective. All the careful cultivation of press, all the recruitment of clergy, all the time and creativity would not have been wasted.

The Chairperson, it must be said, had good motives, and some awareness. She was aware that policy makers did not appreciate the human costs of putting a low priority on mental illness issues as she did. She was also aware of the fact that undervaluing human costs is a spiritual and moral deficit. Her motive was to increase awareness in these matters.

Her mistake was in confusing primary and secondary priorities. In our spiritual lives, awareness may become an end in itself. To be enlightened with greater faith is certainly an expression of that. However, Governors and legislators are in the business of *doing* things. Greater awareness may inform what or how things are done, but it does not in itself call out for attention. Everyone in a position of creating public policy asks one question of advocates, in one way or another:

So what do you want me to do about it?

That is a fair question. Be ready to answer, or don't waste their time.

Defining the Issue

You may have come today with an issue already defined, in which case this section will have been completed. Perhaps a living wage bill, or environmental initiative, or human rights legislation has brought you together. What you want from today is to prepare yourselves to work on the issue. If so, move on to “Defining who matters.” Otherwise, you'll need to take these 75 minutes to define a specific bill to use in the game. It needn't be a bill that's actually out there (especially if it isn't but should be.)

If you did the pre-work exercise on defining the hurts, you may be nearly ready to define your issue. You may have done research into what has been tried, and/or what is pending. Eventually, your bill will have to connect with the realities of your world. For example, it would be silly to work on a “bill” which sets aside, say, \$5 million to fund soup kitchens if your state already sets aside \$10 million for that purpose.

(If you haven't done the pre-work exercise outlined on page 2, then small groups of no more than seven people per group will spend the next 30 minutes answering them. Then spend 30 minutes on reports per directions on page 2. Then proceed to the agenda, skipping "assignment reports.")

Step one: report on Assignments for 25 minutes

People were assigned research assignments at the pre-meeting. At this time assignees report their findings to the group. Findings are posted on newsprint.

Step two: brainstorm for 20 minutes

The whole group is invited to offer suggestions, based on the reports, answering the question: "What needs to be done and who needs to do it?" Note that this is a compound question. It helps if brainstormers answer both parts of the question because "who needs to do it" directs your entire effort. A few contrasts should illustrate. Suppose people are dying because physicians aren't treating certain medical conditions when told by managed care administrators to seek cheaper alternatives. You all agree on "what needs to be done": "administrators shouldn't tell physicians how to do their job." But "who needs to do it" makes a huge difference:

- *Administrators shouldn't tell physicians how to do their job and the legislature ought to pass a law banning this.*
- *Administrators shouldn't tell physicians how to do their job and physicians ought to form a union and write it into their contract or strike.*
- *Administrators shouldn't tell physicians how to do their job and the market in the long run will reward the efficient and effective providers who don't do this.*
- As the group brainstorms, the facilitator writes suggestions on newsprint. A few brainstorming ground rules are helpful:
- No one passes any judgment on any idea whatsoever during the brainstorming session. No "that's good," no "my problem with that is . . ."
- Each participant may make a limited number of contributions.

Step three: refine your issue for 30 minutes

Having suspended judgment for 20 minutes, some will be ready to burst forth with their critical comments. The creativity of the brainstorming is fragile. Gentle structure can protect. A few comments regarding the tentative nature of all campaigns for change may be a helpful way to begin the refining process. Some insights I've found helpful are:

- Don't let the perfect become the enemy of the good — 80% right is better than nothing at all.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. warned against “analysis paralysis.” Keep in mind that we're here to do something .
- Most wars are won because of the loser's mistakes, not the winning general's “brilliance.”

The gentle structure I recommend for evaluating is the SMAC test. SMAC is an acronym, of course. It stands for

Specific: does this proposal offer specific changes?

Measurable: can we identify specific outcomes?

Achievable: can this realistically be accomplished?

Compatible with goals: is this consistent with our mission and values?

In our physicians example, a law defining what administrators could and could not demand of physicians on their staffs, and assessing penalties for violations, is specific. A vague “bill of rights” resolution saying “the needs of the patient are primary” says nothing to specific change. Notice that legislation allows for measurable outcomes in terms of more prosecutions, fewer complaints, fewer deaths, etc. Relying on “market forces” does not, because no one can assign effects to specific causes. “Political reality” (an oxymoron, some would say) oftentimes, if not always, dictates achievability. Perhaps we could insist on HMO administrators not dictating medical procedures; not so achievable would be abolishing HMO's altogether. Note that the “oxymoronic” character of political reality is that yesterday's impossibility can become tomorrow's necessity. Revolutions happen. Berlin Walls fall. Finally, and importantly, is the issue of whether the proposal meets our goals and values. It's easy to be tempted into expediency, but when we do, we give away the game to our opponents. You know how it feels to be “sold out.” Everyone who ever betrayed you probably believed they were only doing what was “necessary.”

Struggling with expediency is a test of faith. Do we believe that God supports our integrity?

Remember that those who do not walk their talk only waddle their twaddle.

Procedure:

- Introduce the SMAC test to participants and have them “grade” each proposal on a scale of 0-100 for each of the SMAC dimensions. Each proposal can therefore receive a maximum of 400 points.
- Revisit the top two or three proposals. Discuss which has the most merit for our consideration today.
- Form a consensus on which proposal will become the issue for The Advocacy Game. If no consensus can form, vote as a last resort.

DEFINING WHO MATTERS

At this point I offer a three-step process for defining who will play what roles in the actual game. Because advocacy essentially is about people affecting other people, the human element is the most important. This bears repeating especially for those many good-hearted, frustrated people, including, all too often, myself.

“Why,” I hear myself cry, “do people in power not see the merits of our case? How can they apparently believe such terrible arguments as they seem to believe? Don’t they know how much people are getting hurt?” And to repeat: *because advocacy essentially is about people affecting other people, the human element is the most important.* To my laments this says (taking them in reverse order):

- They may know about people getting hurt, but, to paraphrase an old ethics professor of mine: “the ethics of politics is about who gets hurt less.” A better question is, “do people in power feel what your people are feeling?”
- Arguments seem terrible to the extent they lack premises *we* would have included. Are your people included in the mix of the decision maker’s premises as you’d like?
- Your case may have merit, but other cases may seem to have more merit. Much depends on who seems to be getting hurt unjustly the most or least — a human priority.

Seen this way, injustice occurs when people who could have and should have been taken more seriously are not. Sometimes we go up against plain old evil injustice. My point is that our weapons of argumentation and debate are secondary; our *compassion, along with* our ability to communicate it effectively, come first.

In any campaign there are more people important to your issue than you will have present. Additionally, the game is played in small groups, each group representing a staff or committee. Any more than ten groups get unwieldy. This process of finding “who matters?” is not a final, real-world decision. You’re really going to find a represent sample of “who we think matters most at this time.” Remember that this is a simulation, not a replica. You have neither the time nor the budget Jim Cameron did in making the movie *Titanic*. This is a sketch. A sketch is good.

Step One: brainstorm a potential list of roles for fifteen minutes

This takes place with everyone present. On three separate pages of newsprint, place the following headings for role-players, one for each page:

those who decide an issue
those who influence an issue
those who frame an issue

Explain to the group that, for the sake of simplicity, all stakeholders in an issue can be gathered under one of these headings (*note: if one or more participants attempts to engage the group in an effort to re-frame the categories, gently point out that a simulation is more of a like a “police sketch” of reality than a Rembrandt portrait; but a police sketch has great practical use, as we hope this simulation will.*) Share definitions of each. Those who decide an issue are policy makers such as legislatures, mayors, governors. Those who influence an issue are advocates and lobbyists who have a personal or professional interest in the outcome of the decision. Those who frame an issue include media who decide what points of view, details, and perspectives regarding an issue, if any, will enter the public discussion.

I expect some observers will point out that lobbyists frame issues and media influence them. True enough, but I believe I’ve highlighted the primary purposes of each by designating them as such.

Next, invite the group to reflect on the issue they have chosen and brainstorm role-player groups they feel important to the issue. Examples among those who decide an issue might include your Congressional Representative, one or both of your U.S. Senators, and even a candidate for office. Examples of those who influence an issue would include your own group, unions, business councils, trade associations, citizen groups, etc. (Be sure to include both allies and opponents!) Examples of those who frame an issue would include local newspapers, radio news, and television news divisions. Work until you have plenty of potential groups under each heading.

Step Two: decide which groups to include in the game for fifteen minutes

Break into three groups so that one-half work with the sheet listing those role-players who influence an issue, one quarter work with the sheet listing those role-players who decide an issue, and one quarter work with the sheet listing those role-players who influence an issue. The groups working on those who influence an issue break into two subgroups, one for the group’s real or potential allies on the and one for the group’s real or potential opponents on the issue. Now there are four subgroup.

Each subgroup is to take the list of role-players and decide among themselves which two of those role-players shall be represented in the game. (If necessary, a third group can be chosen if A. the third role-player is essential even to this simulated reality, and/or B. a third role-player is necessary so that none of the eventual groups of role-players number more than seven people.)

Step three: flesh out what makes role-players tick for forty minutes

Form another set of subgroups, one group for each role-player group. Role-players will remain in their group for the duration of the game.

The task of each role-player will be to create a “role-player sheet” which fleshes out

- **who you are:** In addition to your basic identity and “job description,” this identifies your status and self-image. What kind of person or institution are you? How do you strive to be seen? What would you not “be caught dead” doing?
- **your goal as it relates to the issue:** There are two levels here. First, what’s your position, if any, regarding the issue at hand? Second, you may consider what personal or institutional goals are represented by your position on the issue (for example, business groups might tend to oppose minimum wage increases because they want to keep expenses down.)
- **your power resources are as related to the issue:** Power resources for decision makers generally boil down to their position: a Chair of a key committee has far more power than a member of the minority party. Issue framers have power related to their audience size (and perhaps demographics). Influencers’ power resources generally boil down to one of the “3M’s: money (resources, for example, to contribute to elections, buy advertising), masses of people (“grass roots” support), or moral credibility (Martin Luther King Jr. built upon this, so did INFACT in leading the Nestle boycott of the 1970's.)
- **your risks around the issue:** What might threaten your self-image, goal, and/or power resources?

The appendix has samples of role-players for guidance: samples should be photocopied and available as references.

Use any process that can “prime the pump” so that you can specify self-image, goals, power resources, and risks. Keep in mind that understanding motivation is key. One process I find to be a simple and helpful pump-primer is a “self-concept inventory.”

You simply make lists of answers which finish these topics for your role-player:

things/people with which we identify
things/people we respect; disrespect
things/people we fear
what we have a hard time admitting to ourselves
our most important goals; bottom lines
why we would/would not stick our necks out

Regardless of process, finish by creating a role-player sheet in a format similar to the samples included in this manual.

When you're done with the role-player sheet, take a blank piece of paper, print the name of your group in large letters, and place it on your table where other groups will be able to see it.

This will be the placard which will help others find you during the game.

Step four: introduce your role-players to the whole group for twenty minutes

Each role-player group reads their sheet to the whole group. If time permits, others may ask one or two questions for clarification. Once role-players have introduced themselves, it's time to play!

RULES OF THE GAME

The point of the game: Depending on your role: take a position, or get other groups to agree on your position.

Players: 30 to 100, plus facilitator(s)

Equipment needed:

Summary of the game (copy these pages for each group of role-players)

Scoreboard (e.g., a blackboard or large flow chart)

Appointment cards (photocopy and cut in advance so that 150 or so are available)

Group identification placard (role-players will make these and place prominently on their table)

Play: The Advocacy Game has four time periods: deliberation, negotiation, decision, and reporting.

Deliberation: Players form role groups to study their situation sheets and, based on their sheet, deliberate what they will negotiate and with whom. To set up a negotiation, an appointment request card is filled out and delivered to another group during the deliberation period. The group receiving an appointment request card confers, and must answer it "yes," "not at this time," or "will get back to you," before the negotiation period, returning the card to the group representative requesting the appointment. Groups designate delegates to each appointment they've successfully made. Thus as some group members will go off to visits during the next round, others wait to host meetings. The deliberation period lasts 10 minutes.

Negotiation: Players follow up on appointments, attempting to implement their strategy. The negotiation period lasts 10 minutes.

Decision:

- Groups reconvene to decide how they will respond to offers made and/or opinions expressed during their visits.

- Each group with whom the reporting group interacted also gets a score. Scores are positive (+ 1 point), negative (- 1 point), or neutral (0 points). Scores are given entirely on the basis of criteria established by the reporting group.
- Groups write their decisions and scores before the reporting takes place. Decisions and scores cannot be altered once they are written. The decision round lasts five minutes.
- Reporting: Groups announce their decisions and scores in order as decided by the facilitator. As decisions are read, the facilitator marks scores, per scoring sheet, on the scoreboard. The reporting round lasts 10 to 15 minutes.

Tips on Playing:

- The first round may seem especially hectic because you have to figure out your role, your goals, and your environment via your packet. Such is life.
- It is wise to appoint a chairperson and a recording secretary immediately, and have the chairperson read through the situation sheet, goals, power resources, and risks.
- Be sure to divide your delegation, assigning each clear tasks, if there are enough of you. You want to interact with people.

Scoreboard:

Use a blackboard or arrange a couple sheets of newsprint on the wall. Make a grid such that there are as many rows as role-players, and as many columns as rounds of the game you plan to play (ideally, you'll play at least three rounds.) Make sure everyone in the room can see it clearly. An example might look like this:

Role-Player points round 1 points round 2 points round 3

Congressmember Smith			
Senator Jones			
Local Gazette			
ActionNews 8			
Chamber of Commerce			
Farm Bureau			
Union Local			
Our Church Group			

APPENDICES

1. Appointment card sheet for photocopying
2. Sample role-player sheets

APPOINTMENT CARD

FROM: _____

TO: _____

We request an appointment during the next round of negotiations. RSVP.

REPLY:

YES__ NO__ I'LL LET YOU KNOW__

APPOINTMENT CARD

FROM: _____

TO: _____

We request an appointment during the next round of negotiations. RSVP.

REPLY:

YES__ NO__ I'LL LET YOU KNOW__

APPOINTMENT CARD

FROM: _____

TO: _____

We request an appointment during the next round of negotiations. RSVP.

REPLY:

YES__ NO__ I'LL LET YOU KNOW__

APPOINTMENT CARD

FROM: _____

TO: _____

We request an appointment during the next round of negotiations. RSVP.

REPLY:

YES__ NO__ I'LL LET YOU KNOW__

SAMPLE ADVOCACY GAME ROLE-PLAYER SHEETS

Module #1: Minimum Wage

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Roles:

Congregation-based Advocates

Small Business Association

Metropolitan Times Editorial Staff

State Senator & staff

Congregation-based Advocates

You are the Social Concerns Committee of a fairly large local congregation. You have made a name in the community over the years because of your "Come 'N Git It" Food Pantry and Next-to-New Clothing Shop. You are, in addition to being the Social Ministry Committee, the pantry's Board of Directors. "Come 'N Git It" started in the mid-1970's as an emergency ministry to persons such as victims of fires in their homes. Through the 1980's, however, it developed a steady clientele from two groups. One group comprises public assistance beneficiaries whose benefits do not stretch for the whole month. They come in clusters to "Come 'N Git It" the week before the welfare checks arrive. The other group comprises low wage workers . . . their wages do not make ends meet and they come in any time.

You are aware of the fact that a proposal to increase the State minimum wage is now pending in the State Legislature. Although you have not taken stands on legislation in the past (on the philosophy that your role is to serve, not play politics), you have taken a positive vote on a proposal to advocate for the Minimum Wage Bill. The majority of the Committee reasoned that minimum wage workers are not well served if the fruit of their labor amounts to depending on charity for their daily bread. The vote was not unanimous.

GOAL: Your goal is to persuade your State Senator to support the Minimum Wage Bill. He has taken a position pro or con at this point.

POWER RESOURCES: You have an excellent reputation for providing for the needy in your community in a nonpartisan way. You have, in fact, been the subject of feature articles in both local newspapers. Although you have had "Come 'N Git It's" picture taken with both Legislators when you got that Legislative Commendation two years ago, you have never asked them for anything. You don't know whether you would be written off as political naifs. However, you may be able to put pressure on through your access to the editorial staffs of both newspapers.

RISKS: You don't want to lose your reputation for nonpartisan service, yet you also don't want to be perceived as an "establishment cop out specialist" by your clientele.

Small Business Association

Your membership of product and service providers is as diverse as the local economy. Your members do have these commonalities:

- you all have fewer than fifty employees
- you all have at least some employees working at or near the current minimum wage
- you all have small profit margins, and believe a minimum wage increase gives you two choices: lose profits or let some employees go.

Your local association has been in existence for nearly a century and has been a respectable (some would say stodgy) pillar of the community. Most members, after all, keep their noses to their business grindstones and just want a fair shake from government. Of course, the tax structure is always a source of grumbling, but your approach has always been to communicate in acceptable ways **and hope for the best.**

GOAL: Your membership believes that increasing the minimum wage would be an unmitigated disaster and wants the Minimum Wage Bill defeated.

POWER RESOURCES: First of all, your members vote. Second, your Association has always made financial contributions to the Legislator's election campaigns. Third, your members will write to their Legislators if pressed to do so. Your letters to the **Metropolitan Times** are usually duly printed.

RISKS: You seldom take risks, and therefore risk boring all concerned. On the other hand, adopting a flashier approach is risky; you might turn off some members. In addition, you can only press members so far. They'll write, but they are shy about actually visiting the powers that be.

Metropolitan Times Editorial Staff

Your newspaper is a middlebrow survivor established in 1843. Between 1968, when the **Tribune-Post-Journal** finally folded, and 1982, when the **City Screamer** thundered into town, you enjoyed the sweet leisure of being the only daily paper in the market.

The arrival that vulgar tabloid in '82 shocked you, and you've lately had to admit that your period of monopoly was the worst thing that ever happened to your paper. Bad habits set in. You took your readers for granted. The **Screamer** had an easy time picking up major chunk of your blue collar readers, and with them, a lot of advertising revenue. You won't compromise your journalistic principles to compete with the **Screamer** because you'd lose your white collar market. You have one eye on the network affiliates; you can't take your remaining readers for granted ever again. Your past approach has defined the community as a "Consolidated Polyglot company town," and you're trying to discover other ways to view this corner of the world. You are trying to shed your ho-hum image with sharper, more incisive editorial stands. You nod slightly toward the left-of-center, as would a "responsible liberal." Accordingly, you're waiting to hear all sides of the issue before you write your editorial on the Minimum Wage Bill.

GOAL: You want to retain your readers and perhaps regain some of the readers you've lost to the **City Screamer**.

POWER RESOURCES: You have a solid reputation for responsible journalism, and you still have a sizable majority of readers in the market. You are the source of information for all community leaders.

RISKS: Your circulation has declined, and although the rate of decline is beginning to level off, any more loss of readership may cause advertisers to begin to lose confidence in you.

State Senator & staff

You are in your 11th two-year term. Your career has been solid and unremarkable. You are Chair of the Senate Tourism Committee, more a tribute to your tenure than to your talent. Still, you are no slouch. You have represented your constituents' interests well, and have consistently been reelected by wide margins.

You did get a lot of heat last year for your vote against a senior citizens bill. You thought the concept was good, yet you were convinced the proposal was irresponsibly costly. For the first time since you came to the Senate, the opposing party has fielded a strong candidate. You're not worried yet, just cautious. The Minimum Wage Bill is one thing you don't need now. You don't want to alienate a group of voters in an election year. It seems that this Bill will force you to do that.

GOAL: Get reelected.

POWER RESOURCES: You have the advantage of incumbency, and a strong network of support built up over 22 years in the State Senate.

RISKS: For the first time, you appear vulnerable. If you misstep over the Minimum Wage Bill, your aggressive opponent may send you to early retirement.