

Rules for Radicals

Alinsky's Rules for Power

From *Rules for Radicals*
by Saul Alinsky



Tactics mean doing what you can with what you have.

Tactics are those conscious deliberate acts by which human beings live with each other and deal with the world around them. In the world of give and take, tactics is the art of how to take and how to give. Here our concern is with the tactic of taking; how the Have-Nots can take power away from the Haves.

For an elementary illustration of tactics, take parts of your face as the point of reference; your eyes, your ears, and your nose. First the eyes; if you have organized a vast, mass-based people's organization, you can parade it visibly before the enemy and openly show your power. Second the ears; if your organization is small in numbers, then...conceal the members in the dark but raise a din and clamor that will make the listener believe that your organization numbers many more than it does. Third, the nose; if your organization is too tiny even for noise, stink up the place.

Always remember the first rule of power tactics: *Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.*

Second: *Never go outside the experience of your people.* When an action is outside the experience of the people, the result is confusion, fear, and retreat.

Wherever possible go outside of the experience of the enemy. Here you want to cause confusion, fear, and retreat.

The fourth rule is: *Make the enemy live up to their own book of rules.* You can kill them with this, for they can no more obey their own rules than the Christian church can live up to Christianity.

The fourth rule carries within it the fifth rule: *Ridicule is man's most potent weapon.* It is almost impossible to counterattack ridicule. Also it infuriates the opposition, who then react to your advantage.

Sixth rule: *A good tactic is one that your people enjoy.* If your people are not having a ball doing it, there is something

very wrong with the tactic.

A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag. Man can sustain militant interest in any issue for only a limited time, after which it becomes a ritualistic commitment.

***Power goes to two poles:
to those who've got money
and those who've got people.***

Keep the pressure on, with different tactics and actions, and utilize all events of the period for your purpose.

The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.

The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition.

If you push a negative hard and deep enough it will break through into its counterside; this is based on the principle that every positive has its negative.

The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative. you cannot risk being trapped by the enemy in his suddenly agreeing with your demand and saying "You're right – we don't know what to do about this issue. Now you tell us."

Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.

In conflict tactics there are certain rules that the organizer should always regard as universalities. One is that the

opposition must be singled out as the target and "frozen." By this I mean that in a complex, interrelated, urban society, it becomes increasingly difficult to single out who is to blame for any particular evil. There is a constant, and somewhat legitimate, passing of the buck. The target is always trying to shift responsibility to get out of being the target.

One of the criteria in picking your target is the target's vulnerability – where do you have the power to start? Furthermore, the target can always say, "Why do you center on me when there are others to blame as well?" When you "freeze the target," you disregard these arguments and, for the moment, all others to blame.

Then, as you zero in and freeze your target and carry out your attack, all of the "others" come out of the woodwork very soon. They become visible by their support of the target.

The other important point in the choosing of a target is that it must be a personification, not something general and abstract such as a community's segregated practices or a major corporation or City Hall. It is not possible to develop the necessary hostility against, say, City Hall, which after all is a concrete, physical, inanimate structure, or against a corporation, which has no soul or identity, or a public school administration, which again is an inanimate system.

Born in 1909 Saul Alinsky was a community organizer and organizer trainer in Chicago. He was a champion of confrontational tactics. Alinsky wrote two books on tactics and a biography of Mineworker president John L. Lewis.

Fred Ross, a student of Alinsky, was a major influence on Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers union.