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MAKING SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIC, EFFECTIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE

Leadership Types in Social Movements: Lessons Learned from the Tobacco Control Movement

By Mike Pertschuk

Drawn from an Advocacy Institute study of the 1997-1998 tobacco control settlement negotiations.

"A leader is best when the people barely know that he exists," the Taoist sage Lao-Tze tells us. "Not so good when the people obey and acclaim him. Worst, when they despise him. Of a good leader, when his work is done, his aims fulfilled, they will all say, 'We did this ourselves.'" Maybe. Sometimes.

At the Advocacy Institute, we have two decades searching out the secrets of successful social change movement leadership. In books and case studies and in our daily interaction with stunningly diverse movement leaders, we've struggled to find guidance to help strengthen the leadership capacity of emerging community leaders. Based on what we've learned from the advocates with whom we've worked, we've developed an evolving "taxonomy" of the leadership archetypes or roles that seem essential to the success of a citizen movement. This taxonomy is rather loose, its categories shade into one another, a single leader may well embody a handful of the leadership roles, and we keep constantly revising it as we learn more about the movements we work with and observe.

Each "archetype" of this taxonomy brings its own special skill set:

- ***Visionaries*** raise our view of the possible.
- ***Strategists*** chart our road maps to victory.
- ***Statespersons*** elevate the cause in the minds of both the public and decision-makers.
- ***Outside Sparkplugs*** goad and energize, fiercely holding those in power to account.
- ***Experts*** wield knowledge to back up our positions.
- ***Inside Advocates*** understand how to turn power structures and established rules and procedures to advantage.
- ***Strategic Communicators*** deploy the rhetoric to inflame and direct public passion toward the movement's objectives.
- ***Movement Builders*** are generators of optimism and good will, with the ability to infect others with dedication to the common good.

The happy confluence of each of these leadership roles is the hallmark of a successful movement. Ideally, a movement must have a plurality of leaders, filling a cabinet of distinct, yet complementary, leadership roles. By utilizing a diverse cabinet of leaders, a movement develops a powerful dynamic that strengthens and emboldens, bringing the movement closer to optimum gains and successes.

No movement has contributed more to the shaping of this taxonomy than the tobacco control movement. This has been true not only because we have done much work in and with this movement, but because it has been blessed with an abundance of exemplary leaders. Using real leaders from the tobacco control movement of the 1990s as examples, you can see each leadership role in action.

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Visionaries. Movements take flight through Visionaries. Visionaries lift the horizons of others, setting goals that have never before been imagined or seen as realistic. Visionaries challenge the conventional view of the possible, aim high, take risks, and rethink priorities.

For much of my own life's work, Ralph Nader has been the Visionary. He came to visit me, while I was serving as a staff member for consumer legislation on the Senate Commerce Committee, and proceeded to draw for me what had been unthinkable before – a vision of the sovereign, then politically impregnable, US auto industry brought to heel under a strong regulatory regime.

Thus also did David Kessler for all of us working with blinders in tobacco control, envision, as none of his 10 predecessor FDA Commissioners had, FDA challenging the conventional reading of FDA's mandate and boldly asserting regulatory authority over tobacco.

Vision often comes from outsiders unencumbered by habitual thinking. Thus Mike Moore and Dick Scruggs, an attorney general and a trial lawyer, certainly raised our sights in their radical vision of the public health potential for state litigation.

In a different way, John Seffrin has been a radical Visionary for the American Cancer Society in embracing public health policy advocacy as the strategic path to cancer control – not research leading to "the cure for cancer" – and embracing that vision by wresting the millions that traditionally went to research, and investing in aggressive lobbying, media advocacy, and grass roots mobilization

Strategists. Strategists sort out that part of the vision that is realistically attainable, and develop a road map to get there. Strategists anticipate obstacles, including those laid by unruly coalition members, and provide guidance to insure that the movement remains headed in the right direction.

While Mike Moore and Dick Scruggs conceived the attorneys general litigation, it was Dick Daynard, a tobacco control activist, who originally saw the viability of pursuing the tobacco industry through the courts and provided trial lawyers with the resources to be successful.

Julia Carol has been among the most insightful movement Strategists. Along with the American Lung Association's Fran Dumelle, it was Julia who early outed the tobacco industry's "preemption strategy" – its effort to undermine tobacco control policy at its weakest link in the political chain, the state legislatures. And it was Julia, with her organization Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, who developed and guided a coordinated national effort to challenge and overturn state preemption laws.

Statespersons. Statespersons carry the movement flag. They are the "larger than life" public figures that embody authority and trust. Statespersons radiate credibility for the movement far beyond its core supporters.

Dr. Koop has been the tobacco control movement's emissary to the world. There is a delicious irony involved in his emergence on the national scene. When tobacco warning label legislation was shaped by Congress in the late 1960's, the tobacco lobby, which virtually dictated its terms, insisted that the proposed new warning,

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"Cigarette Smoking is Dangerous to Your Health," be modified by the prefix, "Surgeon General's Warning:". Why? Because their lawyers believed that, by limiting the finding to that of one individual, the Surgeon General, rather than an edict of the Congress, the industry would escape the threat that the civil courts, in product liability cases, would adopt the health verdict against cigarettes as a matter of law.

But this artful dodge had unintended consequences. Until the passage of the cigarette labeling law, few people in the US *knew* that the US had a Surgeon General. Indeed, it doesn't. The post is actually the Surgeon General of the US Public Health Service, but the result of the legislation was that millions of packages of cigarettes highlighted the existence and authority of a now mythic "US Surgeon General."

Then, by a doubly ironic historic accident, North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms sought from Ronald Reagan the appointment of a passionate anti-abortion advocate. Dr. Koop was his ideal candidate. Dr. Koop became the US Surgeon General, promptly turned his passion, and newly acquired mythic image, towards combating tobacco use.

The Surgeon General has no regulatory authority, only the responsibility of publishing annual reports on smoking and health. Dr. Koop seized on that responsibility, and his access to the media, to broadcast the dangers of tobacco use.

"If God is not a woman," one of our colleagues remarked in awe, "then His closest proxy on earth must be C. Everett Koop."

Close behind Koop, Dr. David Kessler has arisen as a statesman. As he pronounces moral sentence upon the tobacco industry, his rabbinical *gravitas* reaches out through the media. "How did such a nerd," asks a *60 Minutes* producer in awe, "become such a national hero?!"

Experts. There is a latter day tendency to disdain credentialed expertise as "elitist," but the tobacco control movement has been built on a solid foundation of science, whose banner is held aloft by authoritative Experts. With Experts as part of the tobacco control leadership team, ensuring that all new discoveries and public policy positions are grounded in facts and well reasoned, it becomes much easier to convince the public that the tobacco industry is wrong when they call us "unthinking zealots."

Dr. Koop and Dr. Kessler each ground their authority as public health leaders on their medical credentials: Dr. Koop as a leading surgeon and Dr. Kessler as a pediatrician – hence, his credentialed authority in proclaiming tobacco use "a pediatric disease." Over four decades, hundreds of research scientists have established the scientific verdict against tobacco as surely as any scientific case ever made. As the battleground expanded beyond health science to include regulation, superb economists like Ken Warner and Jeff Harris nicely balanced the advocate's soul with the scientist's care and discipline to make a compelling case even to the skeptical.

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Outside Sparkplugs. Sparkplugs are agitators: unabashed tellers of truth to power. They operate outside of conventional, political (or other) establishments, free of the ties that bind “inside” players, and capable of holding our governments and other established organizations up to their own rhetoric of mission and commitment. Sparkplugs can kick-start a movement, coalition, or organization, and keep energy flowing through it. A community may be concerned, even outraged, but it may not be moved to action without a fiery goad. In their more exalted incarnations, Sparkplugs echo the Old Testament prophets – lone, difficult, impossible – voices, churning up our collective conscience, annoying us into action.

As much a Sparkplug as a Visionary, Ralph Nader has served this nation as such for more than three decades, challenging America to live up to its own rhetoric of social justice, and challenging the leaders of our consumer and public health movements to rouse themselves, not least the tobacco control movement.

Perhaps the first tobacco control Sparkplug was the maddeningly self-righteous John Banzhaf who, an impoverished law student in 1966 at The First World Conference on Tobacco and Health, meekly asked to borrow a typewriter from the host Cancer Society, on which he proceeded to type out a stinging press release excoriating the Society for its lackluster timidity in challenging the tobacco industry. A decade later, when I was serving as Chair of the Federal Trade Commission, I was slow in meeting a self-imposed deadline to take action on tobacco advertising abuses. Banzhaf accused me of softening my commitment to tobacco control. It was untrue, it was unfair, but it caused me to whip the FTC staff into faster action.

But, as we have seen in ample abundance, Stan Glantz has long since surpassed Banzhaf as the tobacco control movement’s Sparkplug nonpareil, with his rhetorical skill and instinct of cattle prod voltage.

Tobacco control is full of Sparkplugs. While SAVE LIVES and ENACT were struggling with each other, Charyn Sutton and Jeanette Noltenius were simultaneously calling both coalitions equally to account for their failures to respond to the separate but compelling tobacco control needs of minority communities. Gaining only limited success with these distracted mainstream groups, Noltenius and Sutton proceeded to challenge each of Congress’ ethnic caucuses – caucuses that had earlier welcomed tobacco industry largess – to join together for the first time to press for a series of minority-sensitive provisions that were subsequently incorporated in the McCain bill.

Inside Advocates. Inside Advocates are wise in the ways of the political process; they are skilled negotiators, and positioned to influence key policy makers. Inside Advocates occupy seats of power or establish an open door to them, intuit the approaches and arguments that resonate with policy makers, and press them in ways that are not easily dismissed.

Almost by definition, US Representative Henry Waxman and US Senator Ted Kennedy have been public health’s Inside Advocates. They occupy seats of power. They are skilled negotiators with unlikely allies – Waxman, for example, negotiating a surprisingly strong pesticide regulation law with Thomas Bliley, the conservative Republican Commerce Committee Chair; Kennedy making common cause with equally conservative Orrin Hatch to raise cigarette taxes to extend Medicaid coverage to uninsured youth.

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In 1995, FDA Commissioner David Kessler was the consummate Inside Advocate with the Clinton Administration, quietly earning the White House staff's respect and trust – and never overtly threatening to resign – as he patiently gained Clinton's support for his bold but politically sensitive regulatory initiative.

After the June 20, 1997 Global Settlement, Dr. Kessler and Dr. Koop both served in the heady, dual roles of Outside Sparkplug and Inside Advocate. When they weren't criticizing Congress in the press or stirring up the grassroots, they were negotiating the public health provisions of Harkin/Chafee bill and convincing McCain to take the lead and set his horizons high. And it was Dr. Kessler's later willingness to sit down and negotiate with McCain and McCain's staff – over Waxman's objections – that helped move the McCain bill towards the objectives of the Kessler-Koop Committee.

Strategic Communicators. Strategic Communicators are public teachers, masters of the "sound bite" as the concentrated encapsulation of potent messages. They translate complex scientific data, complex public policy, and basic concepts of truth and justice into accurate, powerful metaphorical messages, the significance of which can be instantly grasped by the broad public.

No one is more creative and forceful as a Strategic Communicator than Stan Glantz, who is the rare combination of credentialed scientist and Strategic Communicator. Stan can transform the tedious chemistry of tobacco smoke into a parade of images graphic enough to give a 5-year-old nightmares, and make dry statistics march in rhetorical parade.

Movement Builders (community organizers plus). The quiet heroes of any successful movement, Movement Builders reach out to draw in new allies; they recruit new leaders and make them feel welcome, valued, and heeded. They do the same for longtime movement members as well. They know that a movement is weakest when it shuns diversity and seeks only a narrow, homogeneous base. Builders bridge generations, link local with national, even international advocacy, create space for the knowledge gained through experience to be passed on, and initiate new approaches to participation so diverse voices are heard and their demands heeded.

Builders also heal. They circumvent organizational turf hurdles, they convene and facilitate, seek to explore differences through civil discourse and debate, and eschew rancorous division.

The tobacco control movement has been blessed with Movement Builders too numerous to list here. But representative of the best is Indiana advocate Karla Sneegas. Warm and welcoming equally to the fiery and the mild, the ethnically diverse, the collaborative and the curmudgeonly, she does not have a detractor throughout the length and breadth of the movement. Her voice is the voice of reason. Her mode of discourse is to raise hard questions, not to proclaim. She is highly strategic, but unthreatening. She makes collaboration a joy.

Julia Carol has many of the same qualities, though she is more charismatic and less tolerant. But she has warmly nurtured an entire cohort of community-based activists across the country. Richard Kluger, in *Ashes to Ashes*, entitles Carol, "spiritual den

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mother” of the nonsmoker’s rights movement, “nurturing its rank and file and preaching that the struggle was not between smokers and nonsmokers but between the rest of society and the rogue vendors of cigarettes.”

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My colleague David Cohen at the Advocacy Institute has observed that movements have life cycles – from infancy to forgetful old age. He notes that each stage of a movement may call for different forms of leadership. Within the tobacco control movement, it can be argued, the whipping roles of Visionary and Sparkplug, preeminent in early stages of the movement, may need to be subordinated to the role of the Inside Advocates when the time for securing gains through compromise has come.

David’s insights on the ages of movements highlight the uncomfortable truth that diversity of leadership contains the seeds of dysfunction. When the common enemy is firmly within the sights of all the leaders – as in the earlier stages of the tobacco wars, when neither victory nor compromise was within reach – diverse leadership functions best.

But what we have glimpsed since the June 20, 1997 Global Settlement is that, when confronted with the challenges of partial victory, of timely compromise, the same leadership roles can engorge. The Statesman can become blinded by ego; the Visionary misled by illusions of omniscience; the Outside Sparkplug can come to disdain even wise compromise with a wicked adversary.

The Inside Leaders can confound their roles by getting caught up in the role and rhetoric of the Outside Sparkplug, losing sight of actually making progress, and negotiating the best possible deal possible.

The Outside Sparkplug can get and stay high on protest; let the passion of righteous outrage flash angrily at colleagues seen to be insufficiently militant; let the adrenaline of the jihad replace the pursuit of concrete policy goals and objectives; demand too much; come away with nothing.

Inside Advocates walk a very fine line – the line between the faithful representation of those they speak for and the seizing of opportunities that don’t allow for broad participation and full deliberation. The Inside Advocate can be seduced by the game of negotiation and the lure of the deal; cherish agreement for its own sake; develop entangling relationships with negotiators on the other side; accept too little; come away with next to nothing.

The Communicator can degenerate into a propagandist, a manipulator of science and rhetoric; the mirror of the cynical public relations hired guns that protect the tobacco industry. “When you’re on the side of the angels,” whined a tobacco lobbyist, “it’s tempting and easy to stretch the truth.” The price is not just descending into the mud with the tobacco industry, but losing the power of scientific credibility.

The Movement Builder can become so committed to collaboration and the avoidance of conflict that genuine differences among advocates in core values, goals, and strategic visions are suppressed in the interests of harmony and the avoidance of conflict - when open and vigorous, even sententious debate could lead to better defined goals and strategies.

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Insiders need to listen to murmurs of dissent before they erupt into destructive mutiny. Outsiders need to rest their righteous indignation and open themselves to the possibilities of limited success. All need to acknowledge their fallibility in predicting the future; their lack of perfect vision.

Perhaps the most compelling lesson to be drawn from the June 20, 1997 Global Settlement is that, while the combination of the leadership roles delineated in the taxonomy may be essential to the success of any movement, they are not automatically complementary. Visionaries can lose touch with reality and clash with Strategists; Statespersons can become blinded by ego. Unrestrained Sparkplugs can paralyze as well as energize; and Communicators can degenerate into propagandists, manipulators of science and the truth, giving Experts a bad reputation. These leadership conflicts, if not acknowledged and remedied, can arrest a movement's progress, transforming a potentially dynamic and complementary leadership taxonomy into a nightmare taxonomy of dysfunctional conflict, sending a movement on a downward spiral of distrust, frustration, and anger.

We learned, together, that internal balance and self-knowledge are needed in all of our leaders to assure that their very strengths don't morph into undermining weaknesses. And we learn that each leader needs to strive to balance advocacy and detachment. Sociologist John Lifton encapsulates these essential qualities as such: "Sufficient detachment to bring to bear one's intellectual discipline on the subject, and sufficient moral passion to motivate and humanize the work."