

Organizing Conversations (Put People First! PA)

“So when we go out and talk to people about PPF-PA, what should we say?”

Talking to people about organizing is a skill. Like any other skill, you get better at it the more you do it. Strong, lasting movements don't come out of thin air. They come from people building their skills and bringing more people in. If you've been to an OC Leaders' Orientation, you'll remember we spent time training you on how to have a structured organizing conversation.

There are 5 parts to this.

1. Drawing out an issue
2. Power
3. Inoculation
4. Ask
5. Follow-up

Let's break them down, with examples.

(Intro)

When talking with strangers, we need to let them know who we are, but we can get into more details with them later on. It's important that we're clear and get to asking them questions as soon as possible. Our name alone speaks volumes to people.

- “Hello, I'm _____, with Put People First. We're a grassroots group that is trying to change the way things are done in our state. Do you have a minute to talk?”

1. Drawing out an issue.

The most important part of an organizing conversation is drawing out a person's issues. This means asking questions and listening. When we do this, we ask questions that get deep into what someone is dealing with, how it really makes them feel and what they believe. This is the foundation for everything else. Here are some example questions:

- “Are you struggling to meet any of your basic needs?”
- “Do you have decent healthcare, housing, transportation and work?”
- “Do people close with you struggle with it at all?”
- “Really?”

- “Is it something you worry about a lot?”
- “Do you think it’s right that people have to struggle with this?”
- “Do you think we have a basic right to (quality healthcare)?”

You’ll find, as you get more comfortable with these conversations, that more than 95% of people will say that the system is not right, the way it is, and that we do have a right to these things. Keep in mind that most people have never been honestly asked these questions before. Organizing is about creating the space to have these conversations.

2. Power

After drawing out issues and agitating, we want to tell them there is a solution. The solution is collective, grassroots power, and that’s what our organization is doing.

- “We are organizing.”
- “Put People First! PA is an organization for people like you, who are struggling, but believe the system needs to be changed.”
- “There are so many of us in the same boat, and we believe that if we unite, our power far outweighs the power of money and politics.”
- “To be strong, we need you.”
- If you have a pen and paper, you can run through the See-Saw exercise with people (see _____)

3. Inoculation

In medicine, inoculation means introducing a small amount of a disease so that the body can learn how to kill it. That way, when we come into contact with the real disease, our body is prepared. This is the same in organizing- talking about challenges ahead of time so we’re prepared for them. In union organizing, you need to prepare for what the boss will do. In Human Rights organizing, we’re changing the popular story of “we don’t work hard enough to deserve X, Y and Z” to “we have human rights” and “there is more than enough for everyone, yet the people at the top take way more than they need.”

- “What kind of stories are we told about why things are the way they are?”
- “What’s wrong with those stories?”

4. "The Ask": Directly asking people to take some kind of action, giving them a way to participate and further engage the OC. Make sure to frame it as a yes/no question (when people definitely say "yes", they are more likely to follow-through)

- "Will you come to a meeting next Wednesday?"
- "Can you pass on flyers to a few people?"
- "Can you set up a meeting with your neighbors?"
- "Will you sign this petition?"

5. Follow-up: Even excited people aren't all that likely to do something if we don't follow-up with them. make sure to get their contact information and set a small follow-up plan with them.

- "Can I get your number? I'll give you a call next Thursday to remind you about the meeting."

Tips:

- Do not tell people what they are struggling with. Ask. When you assume, it makes an ass out of you and me both.
- Don't feel like you have to have solutions to everyone's problems. The point is the system isn't set up to help everyone, and it's gonna talk work to change it. Invite them to be a part of that work.
- We should spend more time listening than talking.
- When we get nervous, we might start trying to answer our own anxieties, not the other persons questions. Focus on them.
- This can sometimes be uncomfortable, but only because the world we live in tells us to suck it up and not talk about what's really going on.
- Practice, practice, practice! It's the only way to get better at this!
- Don't worry if you miss a part of it. You'll get to it next time.
- Don't worry about answering *every* question.
- If someone wants to argue, just thank them for their time and move on. Argueing with people usually only makes them stronger in their own opinions.
- If things get too lofty, bring it back to the things they struggle with.