

THE FUTURE OF THE CIRCUIT

I want to tell some stories about forcing yourself beyond the beachhead after you have discovered that you have been sitting on the beach too long and the forces are getting tired. I will use the categories of network forces, circuit design and coordinator catalysis.

First, a word from Victory the cat. Some of you don't know about Victory the cat. A year ago my daughter found a cat in a bush outside the back door of the house. She snuck it in the house and took it upstairs and hid it for weeks until it was grown enough to do damage every place it appeared. She made sure that there was consensus that we keep the cat. That is, consensus by everyone but me. Then she announced that there was a cat in the house. The way she got me, was this, "I've found the right name for it. His name is Victory." So every quarter we have a report on how Victory is doing. He is a year old, this month and still alive. When my daughter left for camp, she said, "Dad, you take care of the cat." I said, "Certainly."

Victory is strong, lean. A cat of strategic prowess and tactical moxie. I know that by watching. For example, he knows that if he wants to sustain himself in his catness, early in the morning he goes out after birds. He knows where all the little berry trees are and so he places himself near those berry trees early in the morning. If he wants a mouse or a medium size rat he goes out in the early evening. He knows the three or four places you go to stake yourself out to get a little supper. That way he doesn't have to race around the neighborhood looking for food. He just goes out those two times a day to the places he knows where he can get fed.

He also knows that you have to have discontinuity to take care of yourself so about 3 o'clock every day he goes on a rampage for a whole hour. He races through the house and knocks things off tables and then he goes to sleep. He also has his own procreative scheme. I am certain that his vision is that there be a gray and white cat on every corner. He knows that he can't take care of the whole neighborhood every night and so some nights when he leaves he turns north and goes down to Franklin Street. The next night he will turn south. There really are a lot of gray cats in the neighborhood.

To be a cat means you get your food - if he has decided to take on a pigeon he knows that you have to approach from the back and subdue the pigeon because if you just grasp a pigeon he will take off with you. So he pounces on the whole pigeon and pins him to the ground and then makes a fatal blow to the neck. But if he is after a wren, he sits in the tree. He knows he only needs one paw to get a wren. He has tactful moxie about sustaining himself. He is an incredible presence around the house and it was there, I think, I got my first clue about what to do about circuits this spring.

This was the situation: we had scattered troops, Australia had absconded with one, Academy had one. We were to the point where there was one person available to be on the road. All the house was on teams doing enablement, the youth and children alike. The five and six year olds were setting and clearing for the whole house and the youth were taking care of materials - there weren't a lot of troops.

We knew also, as we looked at the three quarter timeline, that we were going to have ten, eleven, twelve, fifteen Town Meetings every quarter - it was just going straight across - no acceleration. We knew we had authorization both local and statewide. We had networks that we had talked with who were willing to be supportive. We had movement forces who were at that point unengaged but were still willing to move.

Management Centrum had shown up for a couple of weeks to track down some paper and printing. One of my Chicago colleagues had come and camped on our door for those two weeks. He always has these chats about who do we know in this paper company or that paper company.

Now, with that, my question was, how do you catalyze another force or power at the local level to begin to accelerate set up? We were just dissipated all over the metro and nothing was happening.

First thing I knew was that if I didn't get to the rural areas quickly, I would not be able to get to them until late fall because it is very hard to pull together five people for a meeting when all of them are riding the tractor until 11:00 at night. I know that because I had tried one for three days. Tracking down people that are out on the back forty planting corn is just too time consuming. And so I decided to go out into those rural areas where I've got a lot of passive yeses. My colleague says, "Why don't I go with you, we might talk with my paper company there and drop in on some other companies." So that is what we did and we ended up in Lancaster, Ohio one day to talk with a guardian about his wisdom on how we could approach corporations. The guardian we met with is vice-president of a corporation in Lancaster and we had a great conversation on corporation. Finally, he said, "I'm interested in getting a Town Meeting started here."

We had been in Lancaster about fourteen times and were under the impression that everyone thought it was a good idea, but we couldn't get anyone to initiate the Sponsor Committee. The vice-president broke in and said, "Let me call the mayor and see if he has got 5 or 10 minutes," and so he called the mayor. The mayor's response was: "Certainly, come over in a half an hour and we'll talk." Then we did some preparation. The guardian was convinced that we should be in there 15 minutes and then out.

We planned it that way and walked into the office. We were there for an hour and a half. Not that the mayor was talking a long time with me although there was some good conversation there. About 15 minutes into the conversation I noticed that the guardian and the mayor were beginning to talk about the concerns they had for the future of that particular community. They had an hours dialogue about the future of that community. As I listened I knew that that kind of dialogue had never gone on before. That corporation employs something like 20% of the people of that community.

As we left the mayor said, "It sounds like we ought to have a Town Meeting." During that conversation the guardian said something that was very interesting. He said, "You know that we are committed to taking care of our employees but it seems to us of late that we need a way to direct their attention back into the community. They are expecting the company to take on all the services that are already existing in the community, like family services and counselling. Wouldn't it be more helpful

if the employees were concentrating their concerns and passion in doing something about the care structures of this community?"

Something began to light up in terms of how we could talk with corporations about Town Meeting. And the guardian said another interesting thing. In the post-Watergate atmosphere corporations had no place to carry on dialogue with political leaders in an authentic way. All the overt lobbying had vanished and was absent both at the national and the local level. It had also blocked communication where the political leaders could get to the corporations with local concerns. There was no place for authentic dialogue to go on or any other kind of conversations. That began to tell us something.

Our plan in Lancaster was to visit the Chamber of Commerce. We met with the president and it was the same kind of experience. Then I went and saw the Jaycee president, Kiwanis president and the League of Women Voter's president. After that a meeting was set up and we gathered all those people in the room and within 45 minutes it was clear that everyone had said, "Yes, let us move." The mayor said to me, "Now what do we do in order to get this Town Meeting on board?" We all went through the tasks of the seven week timeline, when we left it was all covered, for example, the mayor simply called up the Superintendent of Schools and got a facility in three minutes.

Then they said, "How can we get the whole community involved." So they sent out 57 invitations to 57 organizations through an incredible letter. They brainstormed among themselves what should go into that letter. The mayor was to write it on behalf of the whole group inviting all these organizations to join with those who had already said yes to having the event so that we could have a broad base of representation in the sponsoring of that event. The letter went something like this: "If you believe in apple pie and the American flag . . . you will be there, if you are not there I will know that you do not believe." The letter was sent out and 47 people representing 42 organizations showed up at the meeting two weeks later. In 45 minutes we had 42 people we knew that would help on the sponsorship committee; it was, in fact, the first sponsorship committee meeting.

That told me something, but I was not convinced and thought, "Maybe it is because this guardian is just an incredible human being," so I travelled down the road 40 miles to Chillicothe where we had the same kind of situation. We had been there many times but no sponsor committee had come from the "yes." The same thing happened. We were re-introduced, through a guardian, to the mayor who had, 9 months before, said he wanted to have a Town Meeting and nothing had happened. That told me something was going on there that we had better keep track of.

It raised the question for me of: What kinds of networks are needed to be readily available in a local community where we can walk in and catalyze that kind of initiating care a hundred or a thousand times? The mayors in those two situations had done two things. One, they had given us permission to be in the community. For example, they would call up a community leader and say, "You and Mr. Blue are coming and I am interested in the program because of A, B, and C but I want you to hear the particulars, then I want us together to consider it seriously." Secondly, it told me we wanted Kiwanis, Jaycees, and AAUW in terms of people who were just concerned with the problems of their community. People that showed up caring, time and time again. Thereby we needed something like a C.A.P., Community Action Program, to deal with the whole poverty arena of a local community. Somehow the initiating care

needed to be present to the whole community. We needed people with passion who had energy to get things moving.

When we set out to get out networks together, we are out to create a comprehensive delivery system at the local level. We called the guardians. One of our guardians went to Columbus to the Mayor's Association Meeting and told these incredible stories on how she'd used the methods of Town Meeting to get elected and how she was using them with the city councilmen to catalyze community groups to take care of community. It was a great presentation, one that they could not say no to. One thing they want is citizen involvement; not citizens haranguing them. It became clear that they wanted to support this and so this month a two page article about Town Meeting will appear on the desk of every city manager, every council member, every mayor across the state of Ohio. That gives every political structure at the local level permission to participate in this event. In this they see us as trusted colleagues in terms of their own concern for helpful citizen involvement.

The Kiwanis were willing to do many things to be helpful in Town Meeting, but the challenge was to get to every Kiwanis president something on the relationship between Town Meeting and the concerns of the Kiwanis Club and have him aware of the 10 steps necessary to set up a Town Meeting in his local community. We did the same with the Jaycees. Their concern was leadership development and so we provided a rationale in the brief on the role the Jaycees could play in leadership development through Town Meeting. They also were given the 10 steps necessary to set up a Town Meeting so that any Jaycees Club could catalyze a core of people who were bringing into being a sponsor committee - boom - boom - boon.

We did it with the Community Action Councils - we took a CAC Director who had been a workshop leader and had set up a Town Meeting and went through the same process. We ended up with not only communication to all the agencies but on July 31, the Annual Meeting for the Ohio Community Action Councils will do a Town Meeting to determine their intent for the year. That will deal with getting us all 88 counties of the state in one day.

All of this actually is out to deal with the question of, what do I need at the local level. What kind of catalyzing force do I need at the local level in order to immediately begin initiation of the great awakening event? Perhaps it is three-fold. First, we need a network that gives us permission to be in the community and gives the community permission to take this Town Meeting seriously. This was done through the mayors. That is really the establishment nod. Secondly, we need an energy network, someone who does the initial tasks that need to be done. The Jaycees did that for us and got it ready to go. Thirdly, we need support networks, people who because of their care for a variety of problems play out the trans-establishment role in terms of their conciliatory role. They want everyone to be cared for in the community, from Boy Scouts to sickly widows.

The next question was. where do I go to initiate this strategy relative to the whole turf that I have been assigned to care for? Where do I go to initiate this so that once it is done in that one area the whole state will be done?

The situation was this. In Cincinnati we had done fourteen, fifteen, sixteen Town Meetings and every two weeks we get another date because of the snowball effect.

We had bracketed the state capitol because it was too complex. It would have taken all of our forces all year to break that loose. We had a lot of yeses around the whole turf, from one or two clubs, throughout all the circuits that we had done. We had issues to deal with like limited transportation, cars falling apart, and not much gas. Both the circuiters available full time were female and could that be a winning team? Nothing personal there, but in small towns and industrial communities the male usually makes the deals. We needed to know how to get some males released from their work in order to balance that team.

We decided to deal with the whole turf. We needed to go to a small cluster of communities with sociological similarities. In the Miami Valley we had that type of cluster. Out of a workshop we decided to move on that concentrated area, parts of three polises. For three weeks we would go boom boom on those three polises working below the micro level, but there had to be a sociological similarity. There also had to be networks available and ready at the local level in all of those communities. This gave us a method of where to do circuits first in order to get acceleration in being.

Next, we went to our colleagues and created a place, a command post to operate from. A place we could be for practical and strategic work in order to empower the circuiting. Finally, we decided to place the assembly in the middle of that area. Thus, the whole movement would begin to focus on the circuit.

The next question was, how do you practically prepare in order that when the consultant moves into the community the focus of his work is getting the core together? How do you prepare so that those things come off and you could have at least eighteen Town Meetings set up? First, we had to do the community research on at least 36 communities. We had to get basic data and had to do it for secondary and tertiary target communities of the already re-selected micro cities. We had to have networks ready and knowing we would be in town either Wednesday or Thursday of the next week. We had to have the names of all the officers of each readied network. We had to create the team, which meant releasing ten to fifteen men from the eight-to-four jobs, so some guardians got onto that. We had to have post Town Meeting referrals that were solid and were close to those areas or similar to those three polises. When asked for referrals we could say, "Check with Frank over in X town about this. He has done some reflection on this and what happened to his Town Meeting." Solid referrals have to be immediately available.

It has to do with dealing with all of the practical preparations. Two cars both needed tires so we called a colleague: "We need you to give one tire towards this campaign." One car was so badly tuned that when you stepped on the gas it stalled, so we made a call - "Frank, will you get this care tuned?" We did not have money to buy enough gas to keep the people on the road that long - so a guardian called some people saying, "Steve, Mary will arrive on Thrusday and she will need a tank of gas. Don't bother about the details, just get her a tank of gas." And they did that.

Advance notice - a Town Meeting newsletter had to cover not only that area but the whole state. We had to have a way to focus the whole movement on that circuit so we created the Thursday night round-up when the whole movement came together: a way to focus all the forces on the circuits in those three areas.

All of those happenings told us several things about how to concentrate on a particular area in order to do the whole turf. One, you had to have a focused circuit of some sort. Second, you had to have a winning symbol - for us, that was an event at the end of the circuit blitz. The Jaycees of the District Chamber agreed to sponsor a coordinator training event, provide all the funds and the food in order that the yeses could come together to prepare corporately for Town Meeting. You begin to see how you could train 100 people to be coordinators all at one time.

Third, the consultant does not need to worry over the enablement stuff. Fourth, networks need to be ready to move, not simply ready to say yes, but to move. Fifth, the whole movement force needs to be focused and the power of the guardians used to get the campaign launched. They have incredible power. "We'll do this Dayton circuit, and then we will run by Mansfield, and then we will go to Northern Kentucky to the places that are sociologically similar and then we will go west of Columbus and do a three week blitz into these areas. In the fall we will go to two major rural areas." By designing a strategic circuit in a selected peice of geography you can do the whole turf.

Now, tne particular visitation looks like this. First, we get the permission of the mayor and then get the support networks and energy networks and pull them back together with a four hour meeting. If the mayor is hesitant we get the support networks and go visit him and allow the network organizations to say, "We think this is a good idea, Mr. Mayor." You are not locked in by the mayor's hesitation.

The meeting format for those people is like this. The mayor is on stage first and gives a witness. In a couple of places the mayor has told the story that he heard at the Mayor's Conference meeting on how mayors can use these methods. So, he tells a story and then gets us on stage. Then, the mayor asks the group, after the method has been laid out, "What do you think Mr. X" How would it be if we have a Town Meeting? How would it be helpful to this community?" And then Mr. X comes on and says, "I think it would be helpful because of X, Y, Z."

We get back on stage with a question from the mayor, "Well, Mr. Blue, how do we get started?" Then we outline the five things that need to happen and within 15 minutes they can take care of those details and have invitations sent out to all the organizations within the community to set up a presentation they will sponsor. In the room are people with power, who hold the vision in the community and are ready to move within forty-five minutes.

All of what I say works when you act out the style of assuming a yes existing in the community . . . "yes, we are going to have this event." When you believe you have new colleagues made up of those who want to move on their vision, it happens. You become the trusted colleague. You act out the style of being every place at once but never any place for very long. They just keep seeing you here - here - and here - but you are never pestering ther. I don't know how to say that better except every time you show up something great happens and you are a non-looming presence. You are an awakening presence. We have people come into our team room to ask, "Well, how is it going."

We are testing this strategy and I think we will move beyond the beach but I am not sure of the holding images yet, once you decide to move beyond the beach. The new strategy that is required reminds me of a guerilla force. I hesitate to use that image but it sure speaks to me. The guerilla force is out to win village after village after village. He is not the enemy of the people of the village, he is the one-who is the presence of the liberation. He enables them to deal with that which is paralyzing them, to move on their vision. Therefore, he liberates them to be the free awakened community.