

MAKING INITIAL VISITS

My choice is to tell stories about victories on the battlefield and what it took to win them. I'd like to tell the stories, because you can cover a lot of details and cover up a lot of diverse sins. Maybe we ought to take the debris off the top of the stories and tell you the victories. I was tempted to take out the old Foray 21/6 models, polish them up and say what we should have done in those calls if we had done them right, but instead, I've tried to track the basic pattern in what we've been doing in our initial visits.

But first, I want to tell you a story, one that illustrates for me what profound catalysis is. It happened in Washington. We've had seven Town Meetings, plus one, in the District of Columbia. Centrum doesn't believe we've got the plus one. And there's good reason for it; we never did collect the check, nor did we really assign a faculty. But we had a Town Meeting, at the Roosevelt Hotel. It's a high rise elders home on U Street. We had about 25 of those elders at the U Street Town Meeting, including the Director of Roosevelt Senior Citizens Retirement Center, which has about 500 residents. Anyway, Mrs. Rogers, the Director of that project, came to the Town Meeting, and since she was there for the whole day I thought she was profoundly addressed by what we were doing.

This fall, when we got back to Washington and started calling again, we decided to visit her. I was saying to myself 'why not have a Town Meeting there at Roosevelt for the senior citizens? They're already gathered, they have lots of facilities and fine everything right there, a total environment situation dropped in the middle of the ghetto. They're mostly Caucasian and most of them are between 65 and 70 years of age. And we're concerned for the senior citizens.' So we went, and in about 45 minutes I had set up a Town Meeting, just like that! I had set the date, got the steering committee named, the whole shebang. Fantastic. I went back home and told the story, and was saying how it only takes 45 minutes to set up a Town Meeting. Very simple.

Anyway, in a couple of weeks, we had our first steering committee meeting. Fifty people showed up for the meeting. Mrs. Rogers, Nelson Franklin, and Ida Bowles, and lots of the old folks who had been over at U Street helping out and all that. All of them knew what a Town Meeting was like, certainly. So, Mrs. Rogers began by talking to them, and then I talked. We laid out the twelve tasks, and she sort of went around the table and made assignments. "Nelson, you do this, and Ida, you do that." We instantly had our task forces assigned and timed. About a month later we were supposed to have a Town Meeting. We had a five week timeline. Fantastic.

Three or four weeks later I called up and said "How is it going?" "Oh, fine, so fine I can't believe it. We're all ready for the Town Meeting. Can you get some posters over here?" So we got together some posters, all we could get our hands on, and brochures, and those little short things. We delivered them and Mrs. Rogers put them all over the building.

About a week later I called again to ask how things were going. "Oh, fantastic, we've already got the speakers invited and we've already got our manual ready." "Who are your speakers?" "Well, we've got the chief of police, the local assemblyman, and we've also invited our pastor, Duke Lundeen, and David Greenwald." She'd selected her faculty, printed up our workshop procedures (edited, of course), and had her own manual ready to go. As a matter of fact, they'd already written their songs. Seven of them. They had had a contest in the hotel, and seven songs had been turned in. She said 'we cut down on these workshops and it saves a lot of time'. I thought there wasn't much point in raising the question of having a continental faculty assigned, or trying to get the \$600. But I did, sort of tangentially, and she replied, "We've got things...what do we need to pay any money for? We've got our speakers, we've got our workbooks, and we've got everything all organized, so what do we need to pay any money for."

We had a great Town Meeting, as a matter of fact. They did write a document, sort of, they did publish their songs, they did have all the right posters up, and had a fine interlude with a chorus, and David was there, and Duke and the chief of police, all of them. We had a regular schedule, with a little interlude in the middle, about two hours in fact; they all took a nap and came back. Anyway, it was fine, and we've had eight Town Meetings in Washington. Now, I want to talk about how to keep control of your initial visit. And about how not to lie to yourself when you get back home. The Lord knows we've had eight Town Meetings in Washington.

This last quarter I decided I had had enough of Washington, D.C. It has taken us all fall quarter to get over what happened last spring. We've been in profound shock over doing six of those Town Meetings in about three weeks time. We decided that a sponsors committee was unique. You could stack all those sponsors' committees on your back and run right toward the goal, and although you might tear down the goal posts when you go through, you will have a Town Meeting. And we did have a fine bunch of Town Meetings to get things rolling. But this fall we decided we needed to do something other than the District, so we split our forces up and started moving out into the metro. There are about two and a half million other people outside the boundaries of the District, and another three or four million down along the pike, down the Shenandoah Valley, and in the rest of Virginia. So I will be talking really out of the rural, small town context

I've got twelve points, things you need to do in your initial visit or relative to an initial visit. There are three major categories or components to that, each of which has four subpoints. The first category is an imaginal one: prepare for the victory. Second is winning the battle. That's the call itself. The third category is establishing the victory.

Under preparing for the victory, the first thing is appropriating the common wisdom. We've found that one of the biggest problems is getting people to know what we're doing, internally, not just objectively. They need to internalize what it means to be Town Meeting. The kind of training we do in collegium, in Week II's, or whatever, is crucial to getting hold of our basic style and method in doing Town Meeting. We've had a lot of training sessions so far, preparing for Foray 21/6 and so on, that helped us to internalize what it means to be the Town Meeting dynamic in history, but we need to know the basic materials, and what the real Town Meeting happening is, so we've had our folks attend Town Meetings as much as possible, in order to get inside of what happens and so that they will have a story to tell that's their own.

Under winning the battle, the first arena is demonstrating local care. That's very simple. You honor him with your style, being very cordial, friendly, collegial, and there's nothing simplistic about that. You've got to dance between the otherness he is and at the same time win him as a friend. One of the biggest problems I've had in Staunton is dealing with how I address a particular person. The mayor of Staunton, a town of 20,000 people in the Shenandoah Valley, is named Pancake, P-A-N-C-A-K-E, you heard it. He's a retired colonel, has a Ph.D., and is the mayor of that city. He also teaches. So I say "Good evening, colonel, your honor, or Mr. Mayor, Dr. Pancake." It's hard to get hold of how you greet folks in a helpful fashion. I've found it helpful to spend a bit of time talking about their situation, their community or job, organization. You aren't out to drill them, but out to show that you care for that particular situation. It's especially appropriate to talk over a meal. And in the meantime you are building a much more accurate screen of his values, etc. It gives you a much more helpful context.

A part of demonstrating your care is to articulate to him what you are there for. "I want to talk to you about a possible Bicentennial activity for your community." If he hasn't already discovered that from your previous communication, he knows right away what you're doing there and who you are. And part of the conversation is who you are. We've recently got a good publishing set up in our house, with a plate maker and all, so I now do a lot of printing. In these conversations I say we're a volunteer outfit, none of us get salaries, and the \$600 goes for the program itself. If they ask what I do, I say my wife is employed and I do a little printing on the side to allow us to do this kind of work because we're quite concerned about this nation and its future. It helps him over the hump of thinking you're a professional, or that you've got money salted away and can afford to be a full-time affluent visitor, etc. It's got to get grounded for him that you're grappling with the same things he is; most people in such positions are non-salaried. They're in the same situation you are in, struggling with how to significantly care for that local community.

The second point in winning the battle is spinning the global story. That's a difficult one because you must judge how much globality he can handle at the moment. I come down hard on loving this nation, local man, and the community, and enabling the nation to make the turn. I talk about the transition we're in, about how in the 70's it's up to us to really demonstrate that we can build at the local level. We've "had it" with government, bureaucracy, and the problems we've got in the community. With this turn we've seen that if we don't do it, it's not going to get done. There's lots that can't be done by anybody else but us, and it's only on the other side of that decision that we have a revitalized community. I spin about the nation and about releasing local man to create the solutions to his problems. This is my story about the Town Meeting. About that time I pull out the Town Meeting brochure itself, and talk about how it is the manifestation of that concern. I mention how it helps the nation deal with the turn to the third century, and local people to turn to deal with their local situation in order to build a revitalized local community.

Secondly, you need to build a sociological context relative to the visit you're going to make. None of this is new to you, it's just a different way of putting these things together. I've spent most of my time, four, five days a week, in Roanoke Metro. I've been in Staunton, Roanoke, Charlottesville, Blacksburg, Appomattox, Lynchburg, Danville, Chatham, Gretna and Wythville, and a few others along the way. In that circuit, most of the communities range from Gretna's 700 to 150,000 or 200,000 in the Roanoke Valley. You've got to find a way to frame those communities, to get a picture of what their story is, what their present operating image of society and its future is, of their practical vision as they grasp it, and where they're going. You've obviously got to analyze their context, and create an appropriate entre. If at all possible get a letter off, or make a phone call to honor the folks out there. Because if they get a phone call or receive a letter from ICA in Washington, D.C. out there in Appomattox, it helps. They know someone is coming to town and they get ready for it.

Third, we have to rehearse the practical strategy. When you get on the road, ready to move into a particular call, and have about five or six visits scheduled in a day, you have to rehearse your story. Who are we going to visit? Is he the mayor, or in the Chamber of Commerce, the Jaycees, or Kiwanis? Just rehearse the practical strategy and then assign roles. Most of our trips are done solo. We have a couple of colleagues who can go along for a day or two, and when there are two of you, you've got to decide who is going to do what.

The fourth part of preparing for the visit is creating a self-conscious stance. I don't know how you do that, but you might stand before a full length mirror and look at yourself. Are your shoes polished? Do you have spaghetti in your teeth? Is your hair combed? You need to walk in with some kind of presence, demonstrate that you have decided you are going to be there, and that you care for them by having prepared yourself. But more than that, self-consciously reflect on who we are now. You know, you do rituals, whether you are in a team or by yourself. We're a revolutionary outfit, we're here in history not by our own choice, but because the Lord has sent us. We've chosen that 'sentness', and thereby the victory is ours. We need to have ways of getting the sense of destiny, of rebuilding the earth by revitalizing local communities. And of course the image that Joe Mathews has been using is helpful, of being at the right place at the right time with the right program. This is a great story for telling yourself who you are and for reestablishing the ontological foundation of your being, to help you not get caught in the winds of attack and negation through some kind of immediacy, but stand on the solid rock on which the movement stands. Out of my anxiety I tell myself and my colleagues we're not out to be slick. The last thing that anybody out there in rural America is impressed with is the slickness of anybody. You've got to be authentic. You've got to speak to their life, in the moment, out of their context, and deal with their situation; you can't just flip on your tape recorder and begin your five or twenty-minute context, but must get in their human struggle. Nor are you to be abstract. One of my biggest dangers is to spin stories and never get down to the point. I talk about all the things going on in the globe, and the latest crisis, and never get around to their situation. And I'm not out to be radical, to spin stories that jolt their consciousness about what's happened in other Town Meetings, or what our revolutionary strategy is, or start blowing their context beyond what they can handle at that moment. One of the biggest tests of chastity is keeping your mind on that human being, not on somebody else. You're not trying to impress him. Of course, the framing you've done helps.

Next is grounding the local indicative, that is, getting clear to him that he is now going to have to make a decision. You don't have to be mean, but help him explore in his own mind that the questions that are popping in his mind are his possibilities, and explore the price with him, what it's going to take. Don't lay the whole task out there. We say 'we request of you, sir, that you send a letter to a group of people asking them to come to a meeting to talk about putting together a Town Meeting.' Make a simple demand, and make the next step clear. Don't ask him to take on Town Meeting and win with it, get 200 people, money, food, the whole thing. Just ask for the next step. Ask him to do what he sees is important and what he wants to do. Honor his questions, help him to think through what it would mean to the community. Get him reflecting, but don't let him get off the hook. Just request the next step. You know that down the road is a Town Meeting.

Fourth in winning the battle is mapping out a practical strategy with him. Look at how he takes the next step and what it is, who he needs to call, groups, individuals, when to send the letter, when to have the meeting, how to get a calendar out and mark the time, when we'll get together again, when we'll be back. Suggest a time for the next meeting. Help him, hopefully, to adjust to your schedule. Supply the necessary materials, letters, brochures, whatever he needs. At that point, say it's been great to be with him, and give him your card so he can reach you if he has questions. He's clear then that you've got an engagement in the future.

My third major category is establishing the victory. This is crucial to me, for it can go by very quickly. First, step back for just a moment, and discern what the victory has been. Track what took place, and try to determine in your own mind what the journey of that visit was. Jot down notes, name the happening. Where were they excited, etc. What was key for getting them to consider talking about a Town Meeting there, if that happens? If it didn't happen, what did I do? Get a clue to yourself. It's great to have a colleague along with you so you can do that debriefing together, especially if you failed there. It's easy to lie to yourself, as you know. You are always tempted to say 'he was a cynic, or a stoic'. That's not helpful. There's no reason everyone shouldn't have the opportunity to participate in this event. Sure, the Lord has hardened the hearts of some, and we understand our clarity about that sort of person. It will take a while with that kind. But it doesn't change the fact that you stand accountable to history for helping them come to terms with their cynicism, etc. The other day in Roanoke, we'd seen the Jaycees who had said they were in the midst of a campaign, so it would be three weeks before they could decide about Town Meeting. It took 8 weeks, and they failed, lost about \$3,000 on the project. We got a letter saying they couldn't participate. We then saw the Kiwanis; they said great, we'll get all the clubs across the whole valley together. And about a week before I was scheduled to go down there again, they wrote saying it was a great idea, but they had too many things already in the fire and just couldn't pick it up. So I decided to go back anyway. Every group I had seen there had said the Jaycees and the Kiwanis were the key sponsors. Well, in the meantime, the mayor had had a heart attack and died. They'd appointed a black man, the first in their history, to take his place from the City Council. I saw him, he got excited.

He made an appointment for me with the chairman, appointed by the previous mayor, of the Bicentennial Commission, who was forty-five years old, and a crack lawyer. We met in a conference room at the end of his business day. He asked what he could do for me. I gave him materials to read, and after about five minutes he threw them over in the corner. "I've seen these programs by the dozen, who are you guys anyway, coming in here like this?" I played the role of the innocent, not being a skilled trial lawyer myself; I told the story about the turn of the nation, local man, etc. He said "I see one of the talks is supposed to be about the new world. That sounds fairly abstract to me. What are you really out to accomplish with this meeting? You guys have some kind of political bias? What's the thing you're trying to sell?" I said I don't know how to answer, because we do have a bias, but it's not political. Our bias is that we're convinced that local is where it is. I played it straight. I went on, and in about ten minutes he went over to the corner and picked up all the materials. He said, all right, I want to talk with the rest of my commission (all of whom I had seen at least once, and who sat looking interested, but none was ready to make any decision). Let me take it to them - if I recommend it, there'll be no problem. So I asked him is this the kind of thing that needs to happen here in Roanoke. He responded, "As a matter of fact, yes, I think so. I think we can get a good turnout."

Next, you honor the practical requirements. It's crucial to write a letter thanking him, including materials he requested. And if he wants you to call back, call back. This is key to our credibility; so many outfits that go through these little towns show up once, and never come back again. And being dependable has been crucial. We've been there every two weeks regularly. It makes them clear we're serious about this business. We're there to stay, and will come back. The first time they didn't believe me. It makes a difference after they see you'll come back.

Then eleven, you have to stand before the corporate accountability of your colleagues. I don't know how to emphasize this enough. As an arrogant, prideful man, I depend on accountability an incredible lot to keep me in reality. I can lie to myself and not even know it. Having the weekly accountability in that house is that without which we would not have a metro core. We meet every week for an hour and a half. We debrief one another, talk about what's happened. As I've told you before, we have three teams in the house, and each team has a piece of geography they're totally responsible for - widely scattered. This kind of session gives you a chance to reforge your interior, and it gives you an objective structure for rebuilding your battleplan. Without this sort of thing, you won't make it. And it needs to be done with the whole house. Otherwise you just perpetuate the failures, and are paralyzed internally. It's easy to forget that, especially when you're away so much of the time.

The final point is recording the data. That's hard. It's hard to give yourself the time to write down what's happened. But you're building the next 5000 with the data you get down on that paper. You pick up thirty or fifty names a day - the awakened core of this whole planet, and we're getting to it by the spinoff of visiting key people. It's the start of your network, it's the cream of this nation's local leadership. Put it in your sponsors book, on warboards, on wall charts, in circular files, whatever. Don't lose track of it.

And the Centrum report; I'm as bad at that as you are, but what we've broken through this week is going to be the phenomenon of doing this nation. And the Centrum report is a key link in interchange, interchange, interchange. We've got to have ways that I can know what you know. And we must not waste information we've got. It's a way of getting that structural trust we've talked about established. The block I experience is thinking the data I've got isn't important. That is saying no to your colleagues' need for data. To know what's happened could mean sponsors for you, or money. It's not adequate these days to tell someone you're calling on that you'll send him the data, or that you have it in a file, or it's out in the car. That's to lose an opportunity. You've got to have data at your fingertips. That's part of your preparation.

Well, I don't know how you talk about these things, but as I said the other day, our power is our style. Nothing less than that, and probably nothing more than that, if you grasp yourself as being the presence of hope. I've been greatly relieved this quarter, or perhaps it's better to say greatly released. Released to be my lucidity, my engagement, my hope, to be the hope of God. We've worked with that comprehensiveness screen this quarter in the house. We use it in weekend conversations and I find it's incredible to have a chance to objectify the burden that we're carrying, day after day, and order my relationship to all that. It has become that without which I could not handle the complexity that is mine, and I would guess, yours. Not only that, it's knowing that you and I are the hope of this nation. That's not a story we tell, not an illusion that we've created to fend off the chaos of the future. It's the truth, a fact. And though what we're doing may not be grasped now, there is no other way this nation, or any other nation, will make it in the next ten years. They need awakening and methods that intensify and don't frustrate, destroy, paralyze. And I know I'm a radically different human being because of this engagement, day by day engagement with history. We're in a great time.

Donald Cramer

