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-Not 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.

Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers union.

An injury to one is an injury to all