

July/August/September 1993 (Rev. 2001)

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR, Fellow PRSA Chairman

RE: Understanding Grassroots Tactics: Alinsky's Rules for Radicals*

Saul D. Alinsky (1909 - 1967) is the father of modern American radicalism. He developed strategies and tactics that convert the enormous emotional energy of grassroots groups into effective anti-government, anti-institutional, and anti-corporate activism. His ideas are widely taught today as a set of model behaviors and actions, and used with an emotional commitment to victory that goes well beyond those who become his targets.

Grassroots pressure on large organizations will grow. Studying Alinsky's rules and developing empathetic counteractive strategies can level the playing field, especially during high-profile public debate and decision making.

Here are eight of Alinsky's 13 Rules for Radicals. They take advantage of the patterns of weakness, arrogance, repeated mistakes, and miscalculations large organizations and their leadership make:

1. Power is not only what you have, but what the target thinks you have.
2. Never go outside the expertise of your people. Feeling secure stiffens the backbone.
3. Whenever possible, go outside the expertise of the target. Look for ways to increase insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty.
4. Make the target live up to its own book of rules. If the rule is that every letter or E-mail gets a reply, send thousands.
5. Ridicule, especially against organizational leaders, is a potent weapon. There's no defense. It's irrational. It's infuriating. It also works as a key pressure point to force concessions.
6. A good tactic is one your people enjoy. They'll keep doing it without urging and come back to do more. They'll even suggest better ones.
7. Keep the pressure on. Never let up. Keep trying new tactics to keep the opposition off balance. As the target masters one approach, hit them with something new.
8. Pick the target. Target an individual, personalize the attack, polarize and demoralize his/her supporters. Go after people, not institutions. Hurting, harassing, and humiliating individuals, especially leaders, causes more rapid organizational change.

This sampling of Alinsky's rules illustrates why opposition groups enjoy opposing and why corporations and institutions fail to win. Simply put, large organizations are never as committed to victory as their opposition is committed to defeating them. There are few surprises here, just unprepared organizations.

* Adapted from Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals by Saul D. Alinsky, copyright 1971, revised edition 1989, Vintage Books, New York

The Lukaszewski Group Inc. ■ Ten Bank Street, Suite 530, White Plains, NY 10606-1952
Telephone 914.681.0000 ■ Facsimile: 914.681.0047 ■ tlg@e911.com ■ www.e911.com