

### **Alinsky's Rules for Radicals By Craig Miyamoto, APR, Fellow PRSA**

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To paraphrase some sage advice, "keep your friends close, keep your enemies closer." If your business or organization ever becomes a target of radical activists, it will be extremely helpful to know what strategies of attack will be used against you. Short of having spies infiltrate their organization - a practice that is sure to be found out and exposed to your discredit - it would help to study their methods.

Known as the "father of modern American radicalism," Saul D. Alinsky (1909-1972) developed strategies and tactics that take the enormous, unfocused emotional energy of grassroots groups and transform it into effective anti-government and anti-corporate activism. Activist organizations teach his ideas widely taught today as a set of model behaviors, and they use these principles to create an emotional commitment to victory - no matter what.

Grassroots pressure on large organizations is reality, and there is every indication that it will grow. Because the conflicts manifest in high-profile public debate and often-panicked decision-making, studying Alinsky's rules will help organizations develop counteractive strategies that can level the playing field.

Governments and corporations have inherent weaknesses. And, time and again, they repeat mistakes that other large organizations have made, even repeating their OWN mistakes. Alinsky's out-of-print book - "Rules for Radicals" - illustrates why opposition groups take on large organizations with utter glee, and why these governments and corporations fail to win.

Large organizations have learned to stonewall and not empower activists. In other words, they try to ignore radical activists and are never as committed to victory as their opposition is committed to defeating them. Result? They are unprepared for the hailstorm of brutal tactics that severely damage their reputation and send them running with their tails between their legs.

Some of these rules are ruthless, but they work. Here are the rules to be aware of:

**RULE 1:** "Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have." Power is derived from 2 main sources - money and people. "Have-Nots" must build power from flesh and blood. (These are two things of which there is a plentiful supply. Government and corporations always have a difficult time appealing to people, and usually do so almost exclusively with economic arguments.)

**RULE 2:** "Never go outside the expertise of your people." It results in confusion, fear and retreat. Feeling secure adds to the backbone of anyone. (Organizations under attack wonder why radicals don't address the "real" issues. This is why. They avoid things with which they have no knowledge.)

**RULE 3:** "Whenever possible, go outside the expertise of the enemy." Look for ways to increase insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty. (This happens all the time. Watch how many organizations under attack are blind-sided by seemingly irrelevant arguments that they are then forced to address.)

**RULE 4:** "Make the enemy live up to its own book of rules." If the rule is that every letter gets a reply, send 30,000 letters. You can kill them with this because no one can possibly obey all of their own rules. (This is a serious rule. The besieged entity's very credibility and reputation is at stake, because if activists catch it lying or not living up to its commitments, they can continue to chip away at the damage.)

**RULE 5:** "Ridicule is man's most potent weapon." There is no defense. It's irrational. It's infuriating. It also works as a key pressure point to force the enemy into concessions. (Pretty crude, rude and mean, huh? They want to create anger and fear.)

**RULE 6:** "A good tactic is one your people enjoy." They'll keep doing it without urging and come back to do more. They're doing their thing, and will even suggest better ones. (Radical activists, in this sense, are no different than any other human being. We all avoid "un-fun" activities, and but we revel at and enjoy the ones that work and bring results.)

**RULE 7:** "A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag." Don't become old news. (Even radical activists get bored. So to keep them excited and involved, organizers are constantly coming up with new tactics.)

**RULE 8:** "Keep the pressure on. Never let up." Keep trying new things to keep the opposition off balance. As the opposition masters one approach, hit them from the flank with something new. (Attack, attack, attack from all sides, never giving the reeling organization a chance to rest, regroup, recover and re-strategize.)

**RULE 9:** "The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself." Imagination and ego can dream up many more consequences than any activist. (Perception is reality. Large organizations always prepare a worst-case scenario, something that may be furthest from the activists' minds. The upshot is that the organization will expend enormous time

and energy, creating in its own collective mind the direst of conclusions. The possibilities can easily poison the mind and result in demoralization.)

RULE 10: "If you push a negative hard enough, it will push through and become a positive." Violence from the other side can win the public to your side because the public sympathizes with the underdog. (Unions used this tactic. Peaceful [albeit loud] demonstrations during the heyday of unions in the early to mid-20th Century incurred management's wrath, often in the form of violence that eventually brought public sympathy to their side.)

RULE 11: "The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative." Never let the enemy score points because you're caught without a solution to the problem. (Old saw: If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. Activist organizations have an agenda, and their strategy is to hold a place at the table, to be given a forum to wield their power. So, they have to have a compromise solution.)

RULE 12: Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it." Cut off the support network and isolate the target from sympathy. Go after people and not institutions; people hurt faster than institutions. (This is cruel, but very effective. Direct, personalized criticism and ridicule works.)