

January 2, 2010
Updated June 6, 2015

National Organization for Women
1100 H Street NW, 3rd floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Hello,

I made a documentary that revealed the ingredients for spectacular success. I am revising a book to include chapters about spectacular success and setting standards for effectiveness. NOW will be an example of an organization that is ineffective at creating spectacular success. Since abortion services are mostly unavailable, it does not matter that abortion is legal to women who cannot get abortions. Minnesota Concerned Citizens for Life (MCCL) will be an example of an organization that is effective at creating spectacular success. MCCL helped to severely limit abortion services around the country.

Spectacular success is success that other people intentionally create for you because you intentionally create success for them. Spectacular success is achieved through working with others and satisfying others. See the enclosed list of ingredients for spectacular success.

One criterion proving that MCCL is more effective than NOW is size. As a national organization, NOW is small. National membership of over 500,000 translates into an average of more than 10,000 members per state. Minnesota has four NOW chapters. I emailed Minnesota NOW, asking for the state membership total. Within hours I received a form email response with information about joining NOW. My state of Wisconsin has five NOW chapters. I emailed Wisconsin NOW, asking for the state membership total. Within hours I received a form email response with information about joining NOW.

According to the history page at its website, Minnesota Concerned Citizens for Life has "more than 70,000 member families and 240 chapters located in every corner of the state." Obviously, being an ordinary member of MCCL is far more satisfying than being an ordinary member of NOW. MCCL is effective as an organization because it is effective at attracting ordinary people to join as members and effective at keeping them satisfied as members. In turn, those members intentionally create success for MCCL. NOW, on the other hand, has been so ineffective that Washington Post columnist Ruth Marcus wrote in the December 7, 2009 issue of Newsweek that she takes NOW's "hyperbole with a bowl of salt."

You do not provide an email address on NOW's website. You provide only an electronic mail link. Every time I emailed NOW, I had to fill out a form and click a yes or no button to say whether or not I was a member. The email would not go through without choosing yes or no. Your refusal to take a question without knowing whether or not you were getting money from me left me feeling marginalized. A week after I emailed Minnesota NOW

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1

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(which included Thanksgiving), the state office coordinator for Minnesota NOW responded to my question, "What is the total membership for Minnesota?" with:

The regular annual membership is \$35 and includes your dues for National, MN and a local chapter IF you choose one. Any one can choose to pay "limited income dues" which requires a minimum of \$15. The dues paid are split between these 2 (or 3, if local chapter chosen) entities.

Perhaps I needed to write my question more clearly. Or, if you would allow people to ask questions without first categorizing us as open wallets or closed wallets, perhaps the state office coordinator for Minnesota NOW would have understood my question. I replied with, "Total membership as in how many people belong to NOW in Minnesota." I received no response. I felt marginalized and ignored.

I tried calling NOW's national office several times on several different days. After listening to a series of messages about what NOW does and does not do, I heard, "You may dial zero at any time to talk to the receptionist." I pressed zero and heard, "I'll transfer you now." Then I heard, "Hi, you've reached the general voice mailbox." I felt misled with each failed attempt to talk to a person.

MCCL provides an email address on its website. I emailed MCCL to ask a question about their newsletter. I did not have to fill out an electronic form just to ask a question. I merely typed my question and sent my email. Within hours I received a personal response that answered the question I asked. I felt satisfied.

I called MCCL to ask a question about their fall tour (see below). A woman answered the phone after three rings and we talked for a few minutes. Because I think people from bordering states attend MCCL's fall tour sessions, I asked the woman if she knew any numbers. She did not. I suggested that the speaker at each session near state borders ask how many participants were from out of state, and that the total number be publicized on the MCCL website. The woman said she would pass my suggestion on. I felt pleased.

I was barely able to get any response at all from NOW, and the one response I did receive was unsatisfying. I received immediate responses from MCCL, and the responses I received were satisfying. I was especially pleased that I could make a suggestion to the woman who answered the phone and hear her say she would pass my suggestion on.

Since I would like NOW to be effective at creating equality for women, I am writing this letter to help you understand how to be effective. Since I want the readers of my book to help other organizations become effective at whatever they do, I will include this letter in my book. I want my readers to have guidelines for writing letters that set standards for effectiveness through perspectives, information, questions, and requests for explanations. I will include your response or nonresponse to this letter in my book and on my website.

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2

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I am also sending a copy of this letter to Ms. Magazine since NOW and Ms. are linked through your membership offers. The people at Ms. claim to be working for equality, too, so they should be interested in NOW becoming more effective. Finally, this letter is a PDF download from my website.

Before I continue I will explain my background. I considered myself a feminist for about twenty years until I became disillusioned with feminist leaders, feminist organizations, and abusive feminists in my life. More than one of my books will include stories about those abusive feminists. Three of the abusive feminists are in the book I'm revising. I correct people when they describe me as a feminist. I now consider myself an equality advocate. I advocate for equality between men, between women, and between women and men. I have a B.A. in Women's Studies/Writing and an M.A. in Communication. I have researched women's issues for decades. I wrote my M.A. thesis about women as television talk show hosts. My book is the second edition of a book about shaping groups to succeed. The first edition is out of print. I wrote the first version of the book as an independent study project in grad school. I have both the knowledge and the experience necessary to understand women's issues and group effectiveness.

My background aside, I have the right to investigate NOW's effectiveness because your website proclaims that NOW has been taking actions for my equality since 1966. Every woman in the country has the right to investigate NOW's effectiveness.

In the fall of 2009, I signed up to receive emails from NOW. After repeatedly reading about your "dedicated network of grassroots activists," I tried to find information at your website about how one becomes an activist. I found nothing. I filled out the electronic mail link to your organization, asking how one becomes an activist. I received only a form email response with information about joining NOW. I sent a reply repeating my request for information about activists. I received no response. I felt marginalized and ignored.

After about the fifth email from NOW President Terry O'Neill asking me to contribute money so you could save the world for women, I replied to nowpresident@now.org, requesting information about how NOW would spend a contribution from me. I received no response. I also found no information at the website about how NOW spends contributions. I felt marginalized and ignored.

Apparently, the concerns of ordinary women like me are too unimportant for your consideration. I can see that if I joined NOW, I would have to accept having no influence on what an activist says or does in my name. I would receive no support to speak or act for equality on my own in my own life. I would be expected to send money whenever NOW's president asks for contributions without ever knowing how you spend my money.

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3

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In my life, a variety of men who stereotype women have:

- marginalized me, misled me, and ignored me
- spoken and acted for me without asking what I wanted them to say or do
- discouraged me from speaking and acting on my own in my own life
- made financial decisions affecting me without telling me the details

Why do I see similarities between my experiences with the National Organization for Women and my experiences with men who stereotype women?

On December 10, 2009, I sent the following email to NOW President Terry O’Neill.

Terry,

Just about every week you ask for a donation, but you never explain how you would use a donation. I can find no information on your website about how you use donations.

Why no explanation?

I received no response. I felt marginalized and ignored.

On December 21, 2009 I received another form email from Terry O’Neill requesting money for the NOW Foundation. Towards the end of the email O’Neill wrote:

And as always, we’ll make the most out of every dollar!

Still no details about how you would spend my money. I felt patted on the head. Would any you approve of my marriage to a man who said, “Don’t worry, honey, I’ll make the most out of every dollar you give me” instead of giving me financial details? Terry O’Neill’s email reinforced NOW’s similarity to men who stereotype women.

Then there is NOW’s use of the word “grassroots.” I looked up the meaning of “grassroots” in several dictionaries.

Microsoft Word’s dictionary:

“the ordinary people in a community or the ordinary members of an organization, as opposed to the leadership”

Answers.com:

“People or society at a local level rather than at the center of major political activity.”

thefreedictionary.com:

“of or involving the common people as constituting a fundamental political and economic group; "a grassroots movement for nuclear disarmament"

dictionary.reference.com:

“of, pertaining to, or involving the common people, esp. as contrasted with or separable from an elite”

encarta.msn.com:

“the ordinary people in a community or the ordinary members of an organization, as opposed to the leadership”

dictionary.cambridge.org:

“involving the ordinary people in a society or an organization”

worldwebonline.com:

“Of or involving the common people as constituting a fundamental political and economic group”

In contrast to all those definitions, I received an email from Terry O’Neill on October 8, 2009 with this sentence:

“We will be working with these marchers, supporting and empowering them, and giving them the skills and materials they will need to take their passion and activism back to their communities.”

Let’s consider the potential effectiveness of these activists. Searching now.org for “activist network” and “activist training” brought up the same article as the first hit: “Activist Training Weekend in D.C. Galvanizes Grassroots Network,” in National NOW Times Spring 2005. According to the article, eleven “new state presidents, coordinators and executive directors” attended three days of training. The article was not clear about how many activists from how many states actually attended the training. But, “33 activists from 14 states braved the chill of an extended Washington, D.C., winter” to attend the training

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5

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along with the eleven mentioned above. Adding together the numbers provided, forty-four people attended the activist training. Because the article is unclear about how many states the activists represented, it's possible that the forty-four activists came from twenty-five states. According to O'Neill's email, those activists took their passion and activism back to their own communities, not mine. And they probably went back to fewer than forty-four communities in fourteen to twenty-five states since the eleven state presidents, coordinators, and executive directors "brought other activists and leaders from their states."

Upon reflection, it seems likely that tens of thousands of MCCL volunteers routinely brave Minnesota winters that are far harsher than any Washington D.C. winter.

Please explain in detail how forty-four NOW activists are effective nationally when their community reach is limited to their own communities?

Using the dictionary definitions above, please explain in detail how empowerment, skills, and materials delivered by national grassroots of NOW to state grassroots of NOW (state presidents, coordinators, and executive directors) create grassroots activism.

Your organizational words and actions suggest one of two things, or possibly both:

- That you do not trust ordinary women to speak and act for women's equality on their own
- That you need to control ordinary women to satisfy your own feelings of superiority

I have researched behavior styles and guiding values since 1998. I am writing a book about behavior styles and guiding values as success and relationship keys. I have done workshops about behavior styles and guiding values. I have consulted with individuals and helped them improve their relationships. I have both the knowledge and experience necessary to recognize feelings of superiority.

MCCL's staff does not exhibit any feelings of superiority. It is difficult to find any staff names at the MCCL website. No staff names appear on MCCL's home page. The name of MCCL's president does appear on a few pages and in a short video. When the name of MCCL's president is included twice on its fall tour page, the phrase "MCCL President" is attached to it once. A couple of other names appear on different pages, but finding any name requires hunting.

You do exhibit feelings of superiority. NOW's home page and other pages display "NOW President Terry O'Neill" several times. I've seen staff other names more than once on the same page. I assume that all of you display your names on the NOW website, more than

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6

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once on the same page whenever you can manage it. When I started visiting now.org while Kim Gandy was president, it looked like NOW existed to promote Kim Gandy. I was astonished at how often I saw the phrase “NOW President Kim Gandy” just on the home page. I am not interested in reading about NOW President Kim Gandy or about NOW President Terry O’Neill or about any of the rest of you. I am interested in reading about ordinary women who take real grassroots actions.

MCCL is effective without displaying the names of its staff all over its website. Please explain why repeatedly displaying your names all over the NOW website is essential for achieving women’s equality.

I’ve talked to people about feminist organizations and found shared frustrations. My friend Kathleen Reck and I exchanged several emails on the topic recently. Below are excerpts from two of her emails:

“I cannot tell you how many times I think of and talk about your comparisons of the "left" vs. the "right" on activism. It is not only going on with NOW as you describe, but I think with health care reform as well. The tea-partiers have lots of things "to do." The rest of us are consigned to writing to our congressman (and our congress-people and Senators are FOR reform - where does that leave us?).”

“That said, I think it's important to tell them that asking for money isn't the only thing they can - or should - do. There are lots of people across the country who would give time in these economic hard times (sorry for the double use of time). I can't write a check and I'm employed. But, if an organization I truly care about needed me to do something specific: knock on doors, stuff envelopes, be present at speakers with specific questions, I could do that. There's the opportunity for the groundswell part of grassroots.”

In October I did a workshop on the spirituality behind spectacular success for a small group of women. One of the participants connected two separate pieces of information from the workshop and realized that NOW would have to create equality within its own organization before it can create equality for all women. An example of the failure to create equality within feminist organizations comes from a letter in the November 2008 issue of *More Magazine*. Lydia Guy Ortiz wrote that she worked daily for feminist causes, but was “rewarded by a movement that does not value the complexity of my life experience.” She ended her letter by saying that the “traditional rhetoric doesn’t include me.”

Please explain how inequality could exist in the “largest feminist organization in the nation” which is “pressing for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that will guarantee equal rights for women.”

Since there aren't enough specially empowered activists to go to every community, when will you support ordinary members of NOW for using their own words and actions in their daily lives to create equality for women?

When will Terry O'Neill write emails about the ordinary members of NOW who take important actions for equality?

When will you fill NOW's web pages with the names of ordinary members?

My friend Kathleen thinks it's possible you do not know how to be effective. I am suspicious of that sentiment. I remember receiving letters from various feminist organizations claiming that the pro-life movement kept winning because they “outorganized us.”

Where was the in-depth study of pro-life words and actions so NOW could fight fire with fire?

It wasn't organization that created pro-life successes. It was real grassroots actions taken by ordinary people. But, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and tell you how to be effective.

First, read Marsha Vanderford Doyle's 1982 Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Minnesota, *In-House Rhetoric of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Special Interest Groups in Minnesota Motivation and Alienation*.

Second, learn about real grassroots efforts by studying Barack Obama's presidential campaign, Habitat for Humanity, the Underground Railroad, the Children's Holocaust Memorial, Solidarity, Southwest Airlines, Toyota, the USS Benfold, and the Midwest Renewable Energy Association. The Midwest Renewable Energy Association is the subject of my documentary. You have the list of ingredients for spectacular success from my documentary. Google the name and you will find more information.

Third, learn how to work with and satisfy others from MCCL and from D. Michael Abrashoff, the former Navy Commander of the USS Benfold.

MCCL works with and satisfies its members in many ways. It posts information on its website about how it uses donations, providing copies of 990 IRS forms on request. MCCL encourages whole families – including children – to take part in pro-life activities. MCCL assumes that every member would like to be a volunteer – MCCL's word for activist. To

satisfy the desire to be part of the action, MCCL hosts a yearly fall tour all around the state so it can meet with volunteers “up close and personal.” The free and open to the public meetings empower “large numbers” of volunteers with the skills and materials they need to be effectively passionate and activist in their communities. The information comes from the grassstops, but the participants use the information to take their own grassroots actions. MCCL is effective because ordinary members create small successes that together add up to big successes.

Please explain how forty-four activists in fourteen to twenty-five states are more effective than tens of thousands of volunteers in one state.

According to a Gallup poll conducted May 7th through 10th in 2009, 51% of Americans called themselves "pro-life" on the issue of abortion while 42% called themselves "pro-choice." It was the first time since 1995 that the pro-life percentage was higher than the pro-choice percentage. This poll is clear evidence that the grassroots actions of MCCL volunteers are effective while the actions of NOW's “dedicated network of grassroots activists” are ineffective. Tens of thousands of people taking action in one state are enough to make a difference. Tens of people taking action in several states are not enough to make a difference.

Something has to change.

When D. Michael Abrashoff became commander of the USS Benfold, it was the worst performing ship in the fleet. To turn the ship around, Abrashoff changed his leadership style and the culture of the ship. He decided to free the crew to fulfill their talents. He did so by telling the crew, “It’s your ship!” That’s also the title of the book Abrashoff wrote about the success of the Benfold. You should read it. Freed to fulfill their talents, the Benfold crew lived Teddy Roosevelt’s advice to:

“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”

Doing what they could, with what they had, where they were, the Benfold crew developed several processes that were adopted by the entire Navy. In 1998 the Benfold crew also achieved the highest rating ever in the Pacific Fleet for the Combat Systems Readiness Review. The USS Benfold went from the worst ship in the fleet to the best ship in the fleet in less than eighteen months because Abrashoff worked with and satisfied his crew. The success came from the grassroots efforts of the crew who took responsibility for their ship.

You could free NOW supporters to fulfill their talents, empowering them to do what they can, with what they have, where they are by declaring, “It’s your movement!” Being a member of NOW would then be satisfying and even exciting for ordinary women who would enjoy the thrill of creating small successes for women’s equality. I can give you an example to prove that small actions are an effective way to create equality for women.

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9

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In 1997, I read the “Who Am I?” column in the February issue of *Biography Magazine*. The magazine is now out of print. The column gave clues so readers could guess the identities of ten historical figures. Nine of the historical figures in the February issue were white men. The tenth was either black or Hispanic. My memory has faded on that. Regardless, the column was all about men.

I’ve read a lot of women’s history. Going through books in my possession, I wrote clues for thirteen historical women. I included those clues in a letter to *Biography* in which I said, “You seem to have forgotten that at least half the population is female.” *Biography* printed my letter with eight of my examples. The editor of *Biography* wrote me the enclosed letter. For the remaining years *Biography Magazine* was in print, readers of the “Who Am I?” column read about both male and female historical figures. More people of color appeared in the column as well, meaning I serendipitously created a twofer. Empowered by my own knowledge, I used my own skills and materials in a grassroots effort to create more equality for women. I did what I could, with what I had, where I was. And from where I was my activism reached a national audience, because *Biography Magazine* had a national audience of readers. I still enjoy the thrill of creating equality for women in a national magazine.

I know you wonder how you would personally benefit from giving up your control. For one thing, equality would become more likely, and you keep insisting you are working for equality. For another, you would likely receive acclaim for making NOW effective. D. Michael Abrashoff is proof. He freed his crew to fulfill their talents on “your ship!” The crew used their talents to create glory for the ship, which in turn created glory for Abrashoff. According to the Washington Speakers Bureau, Abrashoff is now one of its most requested speakers. Abrashoff shares the most requested speakers category with such influential women as Madeline Albright, Christiane Amanpour, Laura Bush, Katie Couric, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Arianna Huffington, Mary Matalin, Norah O’Donnell, Sarah Palin, Jane Bryant Quinn, Condoleezza Rice, Sally Ride, Susan Schwab, Meredith Vieira, Christine Whitman, and Judy Woodruff.

If you changed your leadership style and the culture of NOW, you could also be frequently requested speakers. If you freed ordinary members to fulfill their talents, you would be able to bask in the glory created from small actions adding up to big successes.

Through this letter, I am working with you and attempting to satisfy you. I am working with you by empowering you with skills and materials that would make you effective at achieving equality for women. I am attempting to satisfy you by showing you it is possible to attain the glory you desire by trusting ordinary women to speak and act for themselves in the movement for equality.

My book will not be finished for at least two years. I give you eighteen months to respond, until July 1, 2011. The crew of the Benfold took the ship from worst to best in less than eighteen months. Your ordinary members are capable of creating many small successes for

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10

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women's equality in eighteen months. During those eighteen months I will continue to track your words and actions. I will continue to talk about your words and actions to other people. And I will continue to do what I can, with what I have, where I am because women's equality is my movement.

cc: Minnesota NOW
Wisconsin NOW

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(NOW and MCCL emails go to
a different email address.)
(Postal delivery is erratic.)

Resources

Links

“Activist Training Weekend in D.C. Galvanizes Grassroots Network”

Barbara Hays

National Now Times

April 1, 2005

NOW no longer hosts this article on its website. It can be found at:

<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-854258141.html>

Note the use of the phrase “grassroots network”.

speakingfromtriumph.com, PDF Downloads Page, NOW_Letter

Publications

James Charlton

The Military Quotation Book

New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002

Marcus, Ruth

“Abortion’s New Battleground”

Newsweek

December 7, 2009, pages 48-50

Ortiz, Lydia Guy

Letters column under “(S)he Said, She Said”

More Magazine

November 2008, page 10