

Occupy Wall Street: Will The Strategy Work?

Whatever you think about the Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS), it's instructive to take a look at the strategy. Today, anyone who needs to engage the larger culture to share an important message needs to think seriously about issues like perception, platforms, competition, timing, passion and more. That's why churches, ministries and nonprofit organizations could learn from what's working and not working with Occupy Wall Street.

At our company, Cooke Pictures, our first job is to help our clients get noticed in a crowded, cluttered marketplace of ideas. Then, it's to get that target audience to embrace or act on those ideas. From that perspective, here's a few strategy related thoughts about Occupy Wall Street:

1. Having no clear leader undercuts their message. Grass-roots movements can be powerful, but in a media-driven culture someone needs to speak for the tribe. Preferably someone articulate and admirable, who can express the goals and mission of the movement. (Think Nelson Mandela.) That leader also needs to take responsibility and absorb the hits if things go wrong. People want to know where the buck stops.

2. Protest is not enough. A few years ago the Tea Party marched on Washington, D.C., with a clear list of demands: Stop raising taxes, reduce the size of government, cut spending. Across the movement people voiced the same vision. But OWS? Everyone you ask has a different demand, and as a result, the crazies get as much press coverage as those with serious concerns. Protest is a good start, but that alone simply annoys the general public.

3. Solutions matter. If all you do is complain, you'll get

tagged as “the people who are against everything.” Many Christians are guilty of that in their over-eager boycotts of Hollywood, the gay community or companies who say “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas.” Complain long enough without providing an alternative solution and people begin to tune you out.

4. Be Careful What You Leave Behind. After the Tea Party marched on Washington, network news organizations showed aerial photographs after the march. The main mall was as clean as a dining room table. But when OWS at Zuccotti Park was finally cleared recently, there was human excrement left in piles, garbage everywhere and hypodermic needles that had to be cleaned up. Plus, the scattered robberies, assaults and rapes that happened in some of the camps didn't help the public's perception.

5. The worst calamity is when the other side co-opts your cause. While OWS has a legitimate critique of the growing income gap in America, its lack of an articulate solution gives free-enterprise advocates the chance to make a more persuasive argument on behalf of their cause.

For instance, they've shown real statistics that while the top 1 percent earns about 20 percent of the income today, they also pay 37 percent of federal income tax. Now, *The Wall Street Journal* reports that wealth inequality is roughly unchanged from as long as 20, 40, even 80 years ago. Those facts are adding up in the mind of the public. Your inability to state a convincing argument leaves the other side open to make it their own.

Keep in mind that it's not just a matter of whether the initial public agrees or disagrees with a protest movement. Many Americans initially fought against the Civil Rights Movement in the '60s, but Martin Luther King Jr.'s clear vision and articulate strategy of nonviolence made the public realize the rightness and inevitability of the cause.

Last week, *USA Today* reported its Gallup poll that revealed six out of 10 Americans have become indifferent to Occupy Wall Street. It also pointed out that the number of Americans who outright disagree with the movement is rising as well. Occupy Wall Street is losing ground, and losing it quickly.

Whatever your cause, a movement will fail if it can't clearly articulate its ideals. Particularly in today's media-driven culture, strategy matters.

Phil Cooke, *Ph.D. is a filmmaker, media consultant and author of Jolt! Get the Jump on a World That's Constantly Changing. You can visit his website at .*