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ELEMENTS OF A SOCIAL PUBLICITY PROGRAM

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ELEMENTS OF A SOCIAL PUBLICITY PROGRAM

Outline of Topics

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The audit.

The next step.

ELEMENTS OF A SOCIAL PUBLICITY PROGRAM[1]

Four Main Elements of a Publicity Program

Charles W. Hoyt, head of a national advertising agency, in an address on planned advertising, pointed out some of the blunders that business concerns easily fall into by failing to work out in advance a marketing plan for their output. Mr. Hoyt describes some of the business men's wasteful and haphazard methods as follows:[2]

> One of the salesmen writes in and suggests that if he had a lot of good lead pencils, with the name of the firm on them, he could use them in a way that would get sales. So the manufacturer buys the pencils.
>
> Then some clever advertising man induces the manufacturer to do a little mail work. Later, a man comes along and tells him that illustrated blotters are a good proposition. So the manufacturer buys some blotters.
>
> Before the year ends, he may be induced by some advertising agent to spend a little money in one or two of the general papers.
>
> But the point is that the manufacturer has no carefully laid-out-in-advance plan and budget. When the year ends he finds that he has spent more than he expected to and accomplished nothing.

The ordinary social worker is not seriously exposed to the lure of the advertising man, for he usually has too little money to spend to be interesting to people who want to help him advertise, but he is very much exposed to the lure of new ideas that sound

[1] This paper, with one entitled "Resources of the Average Community for Publicity Work," by C. K. Matson, of Cleveland, was given under the general title of "Organizing Publicity for the Social Education of a Community," in the Division on Organization of Social Forces, National Conference of Social Work, New Orleans, April 17, 1920.

[2] "The Preparation of a Marketing Plan," an address before the Department of Business Administration, Yale University, 1917. New York: The author.

good but may have little or no relation to his present needs. Perhaps you may hear that in a nearby state an educational tour with a motion picture truck has been highly successful, and you proceed to try it out in your state or city; or the talk is in the air that paid advertising is the best way to get one's message over and you find yourself buying newspaper space.

If you start out with a plan for your publicity and educational work that is as definite and clearly laid out as your plan of social activities, you are saved many of these haphazard and unrelated publicity sprees that do not seem to get you very far ahead. If, taking into account your resources and your needs, you say, "This year or this month we will try to get these particular facts before this special group of people in a way that may lead them to do this particular thing," you will have a basis for deciding whether truck tours, paid advertisements, leaflets, or a combination of a number of methods will be the best investment.

You probably make a fairly definite plan for your money raising. That is to say, you decide about how much you will go out to get; you have a program or a statement of needs as a basis for your appeal; you have a list of prospective givers; and you adopt a method for asking for the money, such as a week of concentrated effort or a letter campaign or several related forms of publicity and definite requests for funds.

Such a plan is necessary in your all-the-year-round program of educating the public regarding the service you have to offer them, or the activities in which you wish them to share, or the issues on which you wish them to take a stand.

The main elements of this plan are:

THE OBJECTIVE
THE MESSAGE
THE AUDIENCE
MATERIAL AND METHODS

We cannot, within the limits set for this paper, discuss all of the elements in detail; only certain outstanding features which it seems essential to develop in relation to each other may be touched upon.

The Objective

A workable plan will combine these main elements into a project or series of projects that you may reasonably hope to carry out within a month, or six months, or a year. To illustrate a project: We will suppose that your general purpose is to get the public to demand clean milk. One project will be to make interesting and intelligible to the mothers of children under school age in the Fourth Ward not more than two or three things that they themselves can do to help in getting clean milk.

Or your general purpose may be to keep alive, or to bring to life, the interest in your organization of your 600 or 6,000 members of the dollar-a-year variety so that they will mean more to you than merely being annual contributors of a dollar apiece. Your definite project might be to select, out of the whole list, members of a certain type who could perform some particular service that would give them a sense of personal intimacy and responsibility toward the movement and make this special service easy and natural for them to perform.

A current project on a national scale is the Keeping Fit campaign of the U. S. Public Health Service which aims, before July 1, 1920, to bring to the attention of 50 per cent of the 4,400,000 boys in this country between the ages of fifteen and twenty certain facts about social hygiene. Thus, in turn, each state and each community is provided with a definite goal, both as to numbers and time limit.

In these brief statements of sample projects or programs the objective stands out conspicuously. And it is the simplicity and reasonableness of the objective that makes it possible to work the other elements into their place in the plan.

For this procedure falls in line with our national psychology and temperament. One of the reasons why Americans do not take to cricket is the seeming endlessness of the game. We like nine-inning games, unless cut short by darkness. But we will be just as ready to see or to play another nine innings tomorrow and every day thereafter. We do not tire of the game itself, but we

do wish to reach definite decisions, to gain particular objectives, and then we shall have even greater enthusiasm for the next game.

In the selling of war savings stamps it was not nearly so effective to say "Buy war savings stamps and help win the war" as to say "Buy 10 thrift stamps and feed one soldier for one day." A large part of the job in wartime campaigns consisted in dividing up big objectives into tangible, simple, realizable ones.

The Message

With your objective agreed upon the next element is the message, or we may call it the subject matter or the talking points of your educational campaign. The three main problems here are:

1. *Limiting* the subject matter.
2. *Selecting* what best fits your special audience and your immediate purpose.
3. *Getting together* or going out to find new arguments, examples and figures.

Limiting the Subject Matter

A sense of the urgency of our social aims presses upon us so strongly that it is very hard to hold back and deliberately take one step at a time. You can be convinced this morning, perhaps, that it would be a good thing to limit the talking material of a given educational project to one small part of the subject on which you will center your effort for a definite period. But when you begin to write your copy for printed matter or slides or addresses, or whatever forms you will use, the things you are obliged to leave out, if you follow the plan here outlined, seem so important that you simply must at least mention them, and so at once you begin to break down the whole scheme of your planned campaign by various scattered efforts.

You will need to avoid a general exhibit on tuberculosis, for example, but instead prepare some form of graphic material calling attention to the particular project on your tuberculosis program which you are about to bring to the attention of your community. An offer of space at your county fair or at an in-

dustrial exposition in your city, because it offers an opportunity for reaching many people, representative of all sections of city or county, is not a call to tell all about tuberculosis or about all phases of your program against tuberculosis. Rather this possibility presents but one of various types of opportunity you will wish to make use of for securing widespread attention for the next project for which you wish to get extensive support. And the concrete, specialized appeal is all the more likely to gain a hearing and clinch remembrance of your work in competition with the multitudinous and clamoring appeals thrust upon the fair or exposition visitors.

You, as is the case with every social worker, have a number of talking points so dear to your heart that it is one of your greatest trials, when you go out to talk or write to a particular audience on a definite educational mission, to leave any of these spoiled children at home. They kick and yell and scream like the undisciplined children that they are and refuse to be left behind. Part of your difficulty is that you do not know which child will make the best impression, because they all look good to you, and you do not like to play favorites.

Selecting for Your Immediate Purpose

Many a social worker and the publicity man who tried to interpret his message for him, have come into conflict over what to select from the talking material on hand. Often the publicity man, who is thinking chiefly of the public, the audience, does not like anything that is handed to him, and goes out and finds something for himself which, as likely as not, does not in the least serve the social worker's aims.

Selecting the subject matter for a popular educational program is a job for that hard-to-find person who sees clearly your objective, who has also the wellknown but not always existent publicity sense, together with the uncommon sense which enables him to select to the satisfaction of both the social worker and the public. One organization that has built up a large department of public education asserts that it takes six months to teach a pub-

licity man so that he can talk their fairly difficult subject matter with the right viewpoint. Possibly they ought to add that after the second six months he is in danger of getting too much of the inside point of view.

Preparing New Talking Points

From time to time it is necessary to get new arguments, new stories, new groupings of facts and figures, as a basis for producing the talking material of a special project. The changed conditions, the new audience or the nature of the program demand periodical overhauling and freshening up of the stock—an inventory of ideas and information. The advantage of your planned program of education is that you will recognize the need of this fact-gathering and allow time and arrange facilities for it.

To sum up regarding the message once more, you must accept the self-discipline of limiting yourself to one small part of the subject for presentation at one time; there must be the study of your material from the outsider's point of view for the purpose of selecting wisely; and there is always the question or possible need of bringing together new data, of laying in a new line of goods, so to speak, for the particular "special sale" next on the calendar.

The Audience

We hear a great deal said in these days about educating the community and cultivating public opinion on a social topic. What does it mean? When a health measure has been passed by the city council, or a budget has been oversubscribed, you say with great satisfaction that "the public has shown that it approves of our work." The "public" in this case possibly being as much as 2 to 5 per cent of the population, a percentage sufficient for your immediate purpose, perhaps, but certainly not enough to claim that there is a public demand for the legislation, nor popular or general support for your organization.

Many of us are often convinced that "our" public is a large one because we seldom get outside of it. Everybody we meet in our daily activities knows about our topic and perhaps even about

our organization. We become less assured when we get among the people that we find in the barber shops, gathered at the club, meeting at the labor temple. Miss Wald, in securing a wartime passport, had so many difficulties with getting the term "social worker" understood, that she gave it up and called herself a "special" worker—and then very few questions were raised.

It is not that we fail to let the public hear about us and our work; it is that we are too prone to approach a *general* audience with a *general* topic in a casual way. Look over the reports of "addresses given," as listed in your annual report. You may point with pride to the fact that not less than 123 audiences of not less than 7,948 people heard a talk on your topic. These audiences included 3 women's clubs, 5 lodges, the Breakfast Club, 7 parents-teachers' associations, some church societies, a settlement club, and a bricklayers' union. What did you accomplish by that broadcast sowing of good seed and eloquent pleading in numerous and widely scattered corners of the great field? Did you ever get back to cultivate the crop? Were you able to find anything to harvest?

It would seem to be just as important to separate the general audience into its natural divisions as it is to divide the subject matter so as to make specific appeals. Let your given educational project be directed to selected groups that can perhaps be counted, or at least can be identified by the places where they live or work, where they go to church or attend the lodge.

When you have picked a group with certain clearly defined interests you can also select, if you try hard enough, the aspect of your subject, the particular talking point if you please, which touches most nearly the personal interests and routine habits of the members of that group.

Many of us take the easiest course and appeal to everyone indiscriminately on the basis of all being public-spirited citizens who will do their civic duty if it is pointed out to them. It is not cynical nor critical to say that most people are concerned chiefly with their own particular interests, and it is only under unusual pressure or in some public emergency that they become aware of

themselves as "the public." This protest was recently voiced by an average good American against the flood of appeals to his Americanism: "I like Fourth of July orations and we ought to have them, but I like them on the Fourth of July!"

We may as well recognize that it is just the average human being concerned with earning a living that we are talking to. But it is very likely that persons who are engaged in a given occupation or living in a certain neighborhood will, for that reason, have some particular personal interest in the project we are promoting. Our task then is to find the circumstances under which we can best reach these people, whether in their club meetings or by personal visits, or letters, or the journals that they read as a class, or in some other way.

A second reason for selecting one group at a time to the exclusion of others is that, if you have a limited amount of time and money, you are much more likely, with a picked group, to follow them up through various avenues and keep on the job until you have had a chance to make a real impression. If, on the other hand, you merely speak before a woman's club, distribute a few leaflets among workers in a factory, show a motion picture to those who come to a parents-teachers' meeting, and so on, you have stirred up a little interest here and there which you have no way of turning to account. You are so busy opening up new avenues all the time that you are unlikely to follow many of them to the end.

The following groups suggest a rough-and-ready way of dividing your community as a basis for determining *the* audience for a particular form of your message:

1. Your staff, if you have one; your officers and your board; and your committees.
2. Your members and contributors; co-operating bodies, such as the women's clubs, the business organizations, or whatever local bodies have appointed co-operating committees, passed resolutions of endorsement, or otherwise recorded themselves as being on your side.
3. The constituency you seek to serve: the victims of tuberculosis, the mothers of babies likely to be neglected, or

whoever has a direct personal stake in what you seek to accomplish.

4. The general public, the great reservoir from which you will ever seek to recruit co-operating groups and individuals, members and contributors, committee members, and even board members. The general public will also contain those groups, large or small, through which you will gain the objectives or quotas set for this year's program, as, the group of public officials responsible for inaugurating or maintaining a project, their constituencies who will hold them responsible, or the group in the community which offers the main line of resistance to your project.[1]

Material and Methods

Now that you have classified and selected your projects, messages, and audience it is timely to consider materials and methods for interpreting the projects to the various audiences with a view to gaining the results sought. Until you know what you are to say and to whom it is to be said it will be futile to consider what mediums to use and how to make use of them.

You have, as a range of choice, probably every legitimate form or medium and method ever developed for awakening interest, spreading information, and securing action, from town crier, Punch and Judy and morality plays, to billboards and motion pictures. The question whether you will reach people through newspapers, through letters, motion pictures, meetings, or any one of the various other avenues that are open, is not a question that can be discussed very satisfactorily apart from a particular educational campaign. Also, the problems of technique in producing and using any of these forms are too varied and too numerous to make a beginning in discussing them here. If, however, you have carried your plan to the point of knowing what particular facts you wish to get attention for and what particular groups you are going to cultivate, choosing the form in which to present your material becomes more simple.

[1] For a fuller discussion of the subject of this section, see "Selecting the Audience," in The A B C of Exhibit Planning, E. G. and M. S. Routzahn, Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

Here are a few suggestions regarding the choice of forms and methods for publicity; and like all generalizations, most of them are "not so" unless you allow for a generous margin of exceptions.

Newspaper Articles

1. Through the newspapers you reach the constituency that you have already cultivated broadcast—including some of the people who read your news just as naturally as the office boy turns to the sporting page. When you have an unusually good story, or good headlines, it probably reaches a larger group. Publicity specialists may show you just how to prepare copy as the editor wants it, what goes into the first paragraph, and how to make friends with the reporter. The press agent may even make things happen that will give you headlines on the front page, or you may have a drive with slogans and catchwords and names and pictures of prominent people all presented to the public in a way that gets widespread attention for the name of your organization. But all this may not bring you any nearer to the particular objective of your campaign unless you also have news that makes talk about the definite ideas or facts that you wish to get people interested in. It is your *subject* that you want people to talk about and remember, not merely the names of people, the cleverness of a device, or the musical features of a program. You will need to provide in your plan for activities that have news value and that will at the same time carry your message.

Graphic Material

2. Graphic material is usually selected as a matter of course. Exhibits are a form of publicity and education to select with some reluctance because of the difficulty in producing them and the limited opportunities for using them effectively. There is not a standardized technique for producing any and all forms of exhibits which corresponds to the technique of news writing or of letter writing, or of laying out a piece of printed matter; and such technique as there is, is not the stock in trade of any professional worker who is to be found in the average community.

Moreover, national organizations as yet have not discovered how to build exhibit material that is of much use in all sections of the country.

If, however, you have an especially good chance to reach your desired audience with graphic material, as, for example, at the county fair, one suggestion I would offer is that you set your imagination to work on object lessons or graphic talking material, the sort of thing that Dr. W. W. Peter demonstrated so successfully last year at the National Conference of Social Work. That Dr. Peter's method may be used as successfully here as in China is evidenced at any fair or exposition where one of the biggest crowds is sure to be gathered around the man who talks with something in his hands, or something to move or something to do.[1]

Spreading Information through Volunteers

3. Finding work for volunteer helpers is a real and important method of getting publicity and producing educational activity.

Those people whom we have already attracted to our subject, at least to the extent of a subscription or the letterhead use of their names, offer a fertile field for intensive cultivation in this regard. The job (which takes time for planning, to be sure, and some supervision) is to find something that these persons can and will do. We are all well aware that people of the common human-being variety are interested chiefly in what they themselves are doing. It is by finding the things that they like to do and can carry out without putting into them more time and effort than they think they can afford, that we can really vitalize people's interest in our movement.

Perhaps the simplest service of all is giving advice. Everyone is glad to do that, and even though you cannot always use it, you can make use of the goodwill and a certain sense of responsibility toward your movement that grows out of the giving of the advice. One financial director brought to life a board of directors who had so far been merely names on the letterhead, by submitting to all

[1] See "The Health Show Comes to Town," by E. G. Routzahn, Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

of them proof sheets of a new letterhead on which their names appeared and asking them to make suggestions about the arrangement, type, etc.

Probably, the key to success in getting active workers is extremely simple assignments to be performed within definite time limits, and the assignments themselves made in writing and not vaguely suggested in a meeting. The director of one campaign had been talking to various clubs and after each talk invited the club to appoint a committee to co-operate with him in his educational campaign. No committees were appointed, however, and he became very pessimistic about getting others to help. By changing his tactics and asking for a committee not merely to co-operate but to do a particular and simple thing at a particular time, the results were very much more satisfactory.[1]

Meetings

4. The verbal presentation of your work is possible under such widely differing circumstances and has such distinctive advantages that few educational programs will omit it entirely. All executives of social welfare agencies should learn to talk in public, although they should not make all the speeches. Oratorical appeals probably have but little value save in stirring people to action to meet an immediate emergency. But practically all audiences welcome straightforward talking upon a definite, limited subject. For campaign purposes an address should seldom be more than ten minutes long, with a few added minutes wherever possible for the answering of questions. All that has already been said on limiting the subject matter of an educational project applies with even greater force to the verbal presentation of the project. Not so long ago many addresses were given upon "Tuberculosis," with the speakers beginning several hundred years B.C., and coming down to the present day. Now the tuberculosis movement is being interpreted by addresses upon "Fresh Air,"

[1] A more detailed discussion of the use of volunteer committees, together with a number of sample outlines for committee work, will be found in The A B C of Exhibit Planning, already referred to.

"The Nurse and Tuberculosis," and other even more concrete and limited subjects.

But much remains to be thought out as to planning and conducting meetings and in occupying to advantage portions of meetings. What the chairman should know and should say; how to cultivate questions and how to answer them; how to shape the talk to the needs of the particular audience; how to select and present definite things for the members to do; what printed matter, if any, should be distributed, and how to get the audience interested in the printed matter—these are some of the questions calling for study and experiment.

There are twice 57 varieties of publicity, and then some more, which cannot be discussed this morning. As already stated, it is hardly possible to say that any one form of publicity or any grouping of publicity methods, is a good thing or a bad thing to use apart from consideration of the purpose to which it is put and the skill with which it is prepared.

I should like to suggest, however, that you beware of the uncritical adoption of the methods, or the materials of others, however successful they may have been. Perhaps a badly done letter which A sent out may have brought in the bacon notwithstanding its obvious crudities or mistakes. Somewhere in it was the magic touch which overcame all other weaknesses, and we may be unable to spot the winning element. The letter that B sends in imitation of A's effort may not contain the right appeal or be addressed to the right list, or a letter may not be what he needs to use at all. The use of a poster in another's successful effort does not necessarily warrant the deduction that we should gamble our hard won funds on that particular form of publicity. Someone may win with every device poor or badly used, but victory came because of his personality or the personal leadership of someone else. The safe imitation of any form of effort is that followed after scrutiny of all elements, including some not likely to be catalogued when the successful worker tells the story of his success at a national conference.

The Audit

Supplementary to the main elements of a social educational publicity program should be a merciless personal audit of the finished project. After the returns are all in—when the last meeting has been held, the final distribution of printed matter made, and all activities of the immediate effort have been recorded as history—is the time to put yourself and your methods through the third degree.

Accept with becoming modesty the compliments of friends and well wishers. Then seek your chronic kicker and solicit him to unburden himself. He may be inaccurate and will surely be unfair, but out of it you may get some leads for further examination in seeking how better to plan and administer the next time.

Seek opportunities for meeting people who do not know you as the executive—people who belong to the audiences you have been reaching. Seek to learn what they think of various features of the effort. Did they respond to any of the appeals? Did they go to anything? Did they read anything? Do they remember any of the arguments? Did any of the printed matter reach them? Are they with you or "agin" you or your project?

This matter of checking up on the thoroughness with which your message was spread throughout the city, and the reactions of those to whom it was addressed, partly to be done while the project is under way, and partly at its close, is one that merits detailed discussion not permissible at this hour. But to be true to yourself and to your job you cannot afford not to give it time and attention, with prayerful solicitude that you will be able to untangle the lessons to be applied to the next project.

The Next Step

Possibly the chief reason for the failure to get good planning of educational and publicity work is that the executives and directors of organizations are necessarily so overburdened by the activities to which they are committed that, when they prepare the year's plan and the budget, they make no place in them for

publicity work, except to state in their list of aims that it is a very important thing for them to educate the public and that they intend to do it.

What we need is a new type of worker in the social welfare field, who has a background of social information and a genuine sympathy for both the broader and more immediate aims of social agencies and who is, on the other hand, trained in the technique of expressing social information in ways that will attract attention and create interest on the part of the people. Such a person does not necessarily need to do the newspaper reporter's work for him, or be an advertising specialist, or an artist, or a public speaker, but he must know how to plan publicity programs for the social welfare field, as the advertising agency plans a campaign for the manufacturer.

We cannot transfer without modification the technique of selling goods to the field of selling ideas and programs, nor can we take over a trained advertising or publicity man whose whole habit of thought and experience has been in another field, and find him wholly satisfactory. When social welfare agencies really feel the need of being more generally understood and more popularly supported, they will demand persons with the right qualifications. In the meantime, if you will look over that program for your year's work, and before you send it out see that you have some definite plan for making that very general statement about educating the public come true, you may be counted among the pioneers in the field of sound social welfare publicity.

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