

Meeting with a Target a training by Picture the Homeless

When we meet with someone in POWER, our goals are to move that person to do something that will either move our campaign forward, or do something that will impact PTH members collectively. Because these are the goals, a meeting, is an ACTION. We are changing the dynamics of who has power. When we move a target (person with power) we have more power than the target. THE ONE WHO CONTROLS THE MEETING IS THE ONE WHO IS IN POWER!!!!

What a Person in Power Wants Out of Meetings

People with power meet with community groups all the time. Most of the time, it's for appearances. If they're elected officials, it looks good in the newspapers or on their mailings to constituents. If they are bureaucrats in agencies, it's because they want to seem open to the community. Many times, they meet with community groups because they are afraid of us—we have the power to make them look bad. *A target's goal going into a meeting is to never promise anything or concede to a demand. People in power are very skilled at avoiding doing things that change power dynamics, and at pretending they agree with you but never committing to anything.*

Tactics a Target Will Use to Not Answer Questions or Respond to Demands

- **Come in With Their Own Agenda and Run the Meeting** – This is a very effective way that people in power control meetings.
- **Diverge from the Agenda** laid out at the beginning and/or get into a long debate about something that, while it may be on the agenda, is not part of the demands or questions.
- **Deal with people as individuals**, and/or get into individual problem solving or focusing on individual people's stories.
- **Intimidate People** by using large words and bureaucratic speak, or by coming with a large number of staff, assistants or “professionals”.
- **Say They Don't Have the Answers**, or don't know, or are not the one to make the decisions.
- **Say They Have Not Thought About the Issue** and need time to think.
- **Get Off Track** and start to talk about other things they are working on.
- **Play the Victim to Get Your Sympathy and Support**. They will tell you about how hard their job is, but the budget is small or the other side doesn't want something done.
- **Lie to You—or make commitments they have no intention of honoring**. A target might be all smiles and radical rhetoric when we're sitting down with them, and then they never return our calls.
- **Be Silent**. Silence creates tension. Very often, when someone is silent we fall into their trap and start rambling on and on about our demands. THE MORE WE TALK, THE LESS THE TARGET HAS TO SAY.
- **Outright Refuse to Answer the Question**. Sometimes people are very offended by a direct question, and because it is outside their experience, will react very badly.

Five Easy Mistakes to Watch Out For:

1. Not sticking to the agenda
2. Debating with each other
3. Interrupting while someone else is talking
4. Losing your temper
5. Leaving without clear commitments

What-If Scenarios:

What to do if the target avoids responding to PTH by doing these things . . .

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| Come in With Their Own Agenda | Be prepared! Come in with our own short agenda, speak first and run the meeting. A good strong leader who will facilitate is critical. |
| Diverge from the Agenda | Have and keep to a written agenda. You can refer to it. Have a good facilitator who will make it more likely that they will come back to an agenda. Make sure you have enough copies for everyone in the room. |
| Deal with people as individuals | Remind the target you are there as representatives of a larger group and not their because of your own individual needs. |
| Intimidate People | Do not be afraid to ask questions or to ask them to speak in words that everyday citizens speak in. PUT THEM ON THE SPOT!!!! “With so many budget cuts and staff cuts, its amazing that HRA can afford to have so many staff people at a meeting where we just want to meet with one person, Patricia Smith.” |
| Say They Are Not the One | Make sure you do effective research and tell them you know what power they have and role they have. |
| Say They Have Not Thought About the Issue | Ask them what information they need to make a decision, and say that we will come back to hear their answer. Put a concrete time period on an answer. |
| Get Off Track | Remind them that you are there for a specific reason. |
| Play the Victim to Get Your Sympathy and Support. | Tell them exactly what power they have, what they can do and that they have the power to do something right for the community. |
| Lie to You | If a target makes a commitment, make sure they understand that we will be holding them accountable. This is where follow-up is so important. We need to show them our power, and make it clear that if they don't honor their commitments, they'll be seeing us again... |
| Be Silent | Turn the target's silence against them! When <i>WE</i> are silent, it creates more and more tension and pressure on the target to respond. If they want to turn it into a staring contest, so be it. |
| Outright Refuse to Answer the Question. | Ask the question again and wait till they answer the question. |