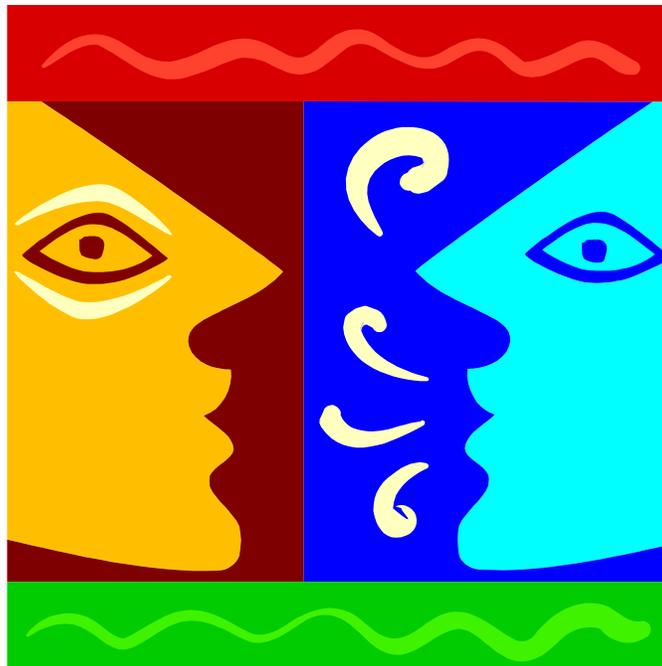


*Relational Organizing Resources*  
**The Art of One-on-One Meetings**



**A Primer by the  
Montgomery County Education Association**





# Individual (Organizing) Conversations

## A framework

- The essential basic tool of organizing is the individual meeting/conversation
- The “radical” tool of relational organizing
- Also called the relational meeting, one-on-one, organizing conversation
- It is itself an “action” – the “action” is to build a relationship around self-interest
  - Story
  - Passion
  - Vision
  - Values
  - What motivates them
  - What they will act on
- Essentials of an individual meeting
  - Short – 15-25 minutes
    - Do not need to get to everything in the first meeting
    - Close with conscious curiosity – they will want to meet with you again
  - Deliberate
    - Not limited to chit-chat or small talk
    - Not about “selling” the Association
    - Not about a “task”
    - Not about the immediate
    - It is person-centered
    - It is about listening and trying to see the world from their perspective
    - It is about probing
      - Agitation (around their interests), not irritation (around your interests)
      - Taking people deeper
      - A conversation, not a script
    - It is about extending an invitation
  - Calculated vulnerability
    - It involves risk on both sides – when someone invites you to “go in”
    - Let people know you are on their side
    - Enter as a relative stranger, leave with the beginning of a public friendship
    - Be a real person with your own story and be willing to tell your story to build the relationship
    - Leads to another meeting
      - Look for energy, cut your losses if there is none
      - ***Eventually leads to action***

Self-interests and individual meetings are about building a collective (an infrastructure) that will grow the organization and foster solidarity among colleagues.

# One on One Conversations & Assessments

**Effective organizing means building relationships, one at a time and over time, through structured one-on-one conversations. Organizing conversations are the most effective way to gather information, identify employees' concerns and issues, share factual information, inoculate against other campaigns, move members to action and ultimately effect positive change and grow membership.**

## **Purpose of the Organizing Conversation**

- Develop a positive, trusting relationship with the other person.
- Listen
  - To identify concerns and issues
  - Identify leadership and relationships
- Assess employees on a variety of factors and issues
- Move into action

## **How to Have an Organizing Conversation**

### **Introduction**

Who you (organizer) are and why the conversation is important

### **Ask Questions/Listen**

What does the individual or group of individuals do at work, what is it like to work there, what is good about the job and what is not good? A good organizer uses the 80/20 or 70/30 rule of listening to talking.

### **Educate**

Give factual information to bargaining unit members on issues, actions and other pertinent information.

### **Agitate**

Why are things the way they are, and who makes these decisions? How would things be better if you had a voice in making these decisions?

### **Inoculate**

Provide clear expectations for likely outcomes and messages that will come from the opposition. Provide factual and evidence-based refutations.

### **Invitation to Action/Assessment Question(s):**

Move the employee to action:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit membership</li> <li>• Schedule appointments for additional conversations</li> <li>• Attend a meeting</li> <li>• Sign a petition</li> <li>• Wear a button</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit on Association or external committees</li> <li>• Serve as Association Rep. (or other formal or informal position)</li> <li>• Political campaign</li> <li>• ???</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

**VOICE/INDUSTRIAL AREAS FOUNDATION  
INDIVIDUAL MEETING  
OUTLINE**

**Opening:**

- Credentials (who suggested that you meet)
- Part of a larger effort to get to know leaders / potential leaders at the church/synagogue/mosque/institution/community.

**Introduce Yourself:**

- Brief introduction of yourself and key turning points for you (where grew up, what you care about, why live here now, why joined your institution, what your goals are for your institution, your role in that)

**Middle: Focus on the other person:**

- Look for the personal underpinnings of person's public life. Key stories. Why questions. What experiences shaped them—compel them to lead & make change?
  - Listen for pivotal experiences, relationships and interests in their lives.
  - Ask how different events shaped them as a person and as a leader.
  - Ask how/what role their interests and activities play in their lives (studies, family, religious observance, work, play, etc.)
  - Does the person have a following? If so, where and who do they lead? How have they acted to make change—organized to change an injustice and/or to change their institution/community?
  - What types of relationships do they have with other leaders/ institutions?
  - What do they want for themselves/the people they care about? How do they want to develop themselves?
  - Share stories about yourself and talk about how your leadership has been shaped by the key events in your life.
- End:**
- What might you challenge the person to act on based on his/her own self interest?
  - Referrals – what other leaders do they think you should meet with? Why?
  - Possible organizing next step. Call other leaders to credential you? Bring leaders together to discuss key issue? Come to a training? Meet with another leader from your institution, etc.
- Evaluate/Reflect:**
- Is this person a leader/ potential leader? If so what would be a good place for them to lead based on their self-interest(s)?
  - What did you learn about the person's self-interest?
  - How might this overlap with the goals/ activities of your organization?

## *Going Public: An Organizers's Guide to Citizen Action*

By Michael Gecan<sup>1</sup>

### Excerpts on Individual Meetings

“The trouble with many of us, and with our culture as whole, is that we don’t take the time to “relate,” to connect publicly and formally but meaningfully with others. Instead, we live in what Richard Sennett called a “tyranny of intimacy”—presidents pretending to share our pain or talk show hosts prying into the most intimate corners of private life. Or we feel a need to maintain constant and superficial contact with others. We see and are seen by others. We sit in meetings and conferences and dinner sessions with scores and hundreds of others. We “touch base” with others or “make an appearance” or “give brief remarks.” We buy and collect better tools – a tyranny of technology – to stay in touch. But all real living is *meeting*, not *meetings*.

We don’t take the time to meet one to one with others, to hear their interests and dreams and fears, to understand *why* people do what they do or don’t do what they don’t do”<sup>2</sup>. ...

“When you develop the habit of doing individual meetings, you stop thinking of people as “the poor” or “the rich” or “the establishment” or even “the enemy.” You don’t just size up another person to see if you can make a sale –whether the commodity is the church, the doctrine, the political candidate, or the citizens organization that you happen to be packaging and marketing that day. You resist the urge to find out just enough about Icie Johnson, Domingo Lind, or James T. Reeder to determine whether or not they will follow you or “plug into” your worldview or your set of assumptions.

No, you sit and listen, you probe and challenge. You try to gauge whether or not you and the other can build the kind of public relationship that is mutual and respectful and capable of withstanding the tension that all healthy relating tends to generate over time. You challenge them in a way that you can only do effectively when you are face to face, one to one, “How can you

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gecan is an organizer with the Industrial Areas Foundation. © 2002 by Michael Gecan. Originally published by Beacon Press, Boston MA, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Page 21

stand to live in this place? What have you tried to do to turn it around? Are you willing to work with groups you say you dislike to make a difference here?” And you let others agitate you, as they did. “What are you, a white guy, doing here?” “What makes you think that EBC will be any different from all the other do-nothing groups around here?” “What does any of this have to do with ministry and faith, anyway?”

Done well, individual meetings allow people to break out of the kinds of relational ruts that limit us all. The person who walks in the door of the congregation is no longer just a congregant or client. And the person who works on the parish staff ceases being a one-dimensional provider. We see more of the many facets of people who have come to think of themselves as invisible or voiceless not just because the powers that be fail to see them and hear them, but because those who claim to care about their concerns also fail to relate to them and with them. And they see more facets of you. They see a not particularly big, not particularly tough, not particularly gung-ho person standing in their doorway—someone with a feel for politics, not a simple formula, someone who can laugh and who can fight, if need be<sup>3</sup>. ...

The best and most effective organizing –in schools, in corporations, in unions, in congregations, in politics, anywhere – still starts when people rediscover the habit of doing individual meetings well and then consistently do them. The right public relationship, as a major bank claims in its advertising, *is everything*<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Pages 24 - 25

<sup>4</sup> Page 29

# Practice Sheet

**Story of Self:**

**Key Questions to Guide the Conversation:**

**Story of Us and Now:**

**Next Steps/Referrals:**

# Notes



CREDITS: Many thanks to the National Education Association, the Fairfax Education Association, the Industrial Areas Foundation, Mike Gecan, and the numerous other organizations and organizers whose work has contributed to the materials reproduced here.

