SHAME THE AUTHORITIES BY DOING THEIR JOB

Fix a problem as best you can in order to pressure authorities to fix it properly.

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"IT'S A GREAT TRICK: TEMPORARILY SOLVING A PROBLEM WITH A QUICK, LITTLE FIX THAT CAN BUILD SUPPORT FOR BIGGER AND BETTER SOLUTIONS."

"Egg whites are good for a lot of things — lemon meringue pie, angel food cake, and clogging up radiators."
—MacGyver

Imagine a problem that you, as a regular citizen, can't solve alone. Let's say your city had decided to privatize road repair, and now your street, paved with poor materials, has lots of potholes. You could complain about it, you could create a petition to pressure local authorities and the paving company, or you could stand idly by waiting for someone else to take action.

Or . . . you could choose to fix it yourself! Of course, there's a huge gap in quality between what you and your friends can do with a limited amount of time, money, and expertise, and what a professional fix would look like. But if you fill the potholes temporarily with cement, traffic would immediately move better and you could use the action to gather support and build pressure against the privatization of public services. It's a great trick: temporarily solving a problem with a quick, little fix that can build support for bigger and better solutions. You could even put a sign on each patched-up pothole saying "citizens, not politicians, fixed this mess." It might just embarrass the city administration into living up to its responsibility to provide public services.

The Black Panther Party made excellent use of this tactic in the 1960s. Sick of waiting for the City of Oakland to install a traffic light at a busy intersection near a school where several children had been killed and injured by vehicles, the Panthers set up an armed crossing guard to escort children across the intersection. No further

POTENTIAL RISKS

1) Remember: this is all about temporary solutions. So, be clear to keep the focus on the actual, lasting change that you are fighting for. You don't want your ad hoc solution to let the authorities off the hook from fulfilling their responsibilities.

2) Don't make a DIY fix that could break and hurt someone. D'oh! (see: PRINCIPLE: Take risks, but take care)

3) Be clear about whether you want to make a temporary fix, or fix the problem for real. Sometimes what you actually want is to have the community solve its own problems in a way the state never could.

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Daycare Centre Sit-In

deaths or injuries were reported until the traffic light was finally installed — more than a year ahead of schedule.

In another, more recent, example, the Rolling Jubilee campaign bought off hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of average Americans' bad debts for pennies on the dollar, and then forgave that debt. While the project does indeed help a few people facing bankruptcy, it was never conceived as a silver bullet for people's debt problems at large. Of equal or greater importance was the message it sent about the arbitrary and unfair nature of the entire banking system. It's an ad hoc fix that underscores just how broken the entire banking system is, and how easy and beneficial it would be to simply erase that crippling debt.

Similarly, in a city such as São Paulo, Brazil, which has no recycling policies, citizens can't create selective garbage collection by themselves, but they can bring visibility and respect to the informal workers that make their living — and take care of 90 percent of São Paulo's recycling — through their own DIY solution (see: STORY: Pimp My . . . Carroça!). What society can do is celebrate them as heroes, improve their work conditions, and galvanize support for city-wide recycling and trash collection.

Or take the Max Feffer tunnel in São Paulo, whose walls were totally covered by grime and soot from engine exhaust. Alexandre Orion chose to selectively clean some parts of it through reverse graffiti — erasing some of the soot to expose the wall beneath, rather than drawing over it. No police officer could ever arrest him for cleaning a public space, so local authorities had no choice but to clean all the walls in the tunnel, which is what Orion wanted in the first place!

When citizens are able to fix something completely, but opt only for an ad hoc DIY solution, that's bad. But an ad hoc solution can be used as a provocative first step towards bolder and more lasting solutions (see: PRINCIPLE: Escalate strategically). All it takes to devise a clever, unconventional solution that will attract attention to your cause, and pressure the authorities into action, is a little creativity and a willingness to get your hands dirty.

LEARN MORE

Strike Debt — Debt Resistance for the 99%!
http://strikedebt.org/

Rolling Jubilee
http://rollingjubilee.org/

Daycare Center Sit-In
Beautiful Trouble
http://beautifultrouble.org/case/day-care-center-sit-in/

- Dow Chemical Apologizes for Bhopal
- Orange Alternative
- Pedestrian death puppets
- Pimp My . . . Carroça!
- Reclaim the Streets
- Replacing Cops with Mimes
- Schools of Struggle
- Streets Into Gardens
- The Salt March

Tactics

- Anonymous suggestion box
- Citizen's arrest
- Identity correction
- Reverse graffiti

Principles

- Be the change you want to see in the world
- Breakfast is persuasive
- Don't expect a concrete outcome from a symbolic action
- Escalate strategically
- Focus on basic needs
- Kill them with kindness
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Show, don't tell
- Solidarity, not aid
- Take risks, but take care
- The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative
- The real action is your target's reaction
- This ain't the Sistine chapel
- Turn the tables

Theories

- Action logic
- Direct action
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Gerontocracy
- Hacking
- Prefigurative politics
- The commons
- The tactics of everyday life

Methodologies

- Hardship to grievance

TAGS

Art, Communications, Direct action