

PRINCIPLE

DEFINE “HARDCORE” STRATEGICALLY

When movements heat up, there’s a tendency to become so extreme that you lose touch with your base. Good leaders will define that “extreme” in constructive ways, and escalate their campaigns strategically.

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“GOOD LEADERS ANTICIPATE THE EMERGENT DESIRE FOR HARDCORE — FOR ESCALATION — AND THEY OWN IT.”

There is a tendency within highly cohesive political groups to want to turn up the heat. It seems to be written into the social DNA of oppositional political groups: When group members’ level of commitment increases, they want to go further. They want to be a little more hardcore. This tendency toward escalation and increased militancy can be a good thing — but not inevitably. It all depends on how *hardcore* is defined within the culture of the group. It can either move a cause forward — or send it into a dangerous or dysfunctional downward spiral.

Compare the trajectories of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) — two of the most important radical youth organizations in US history. Students for a Democratic Society imploded in 1969 and the Weather Underground was born because some leaders succeeded in defining hardcore to mean immediate armed guerrilla struggle against the US government — an absurd prospect for their context. In the case of the SNCC, on the other hand, some very astute leaders defined hardcore to mean acts such as going into the most segregated areas in the south and organizing some of the poorest, least educated, and most disenfranchised people in the entire country. SNCC engaged in other, more visible hardcore tactics as well.

In both cases, hardcore really was HARDCORE. (You can’t satiate the desire for hardcore with anything less!) Members of both groups demonstrated overwhelming levels of commitment to the values of

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Stories

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- Bidder 70 (Tim DeChristopher)
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- Justice for Janitors
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- Sign Language Sit-in
- Stolen Gas Campaign
- Streets Into Gardens
- Stripping Power in Uganda
- Wisconsin Capitol Occupation
- #YouStink

Tactics

- Blockade
- General strike
- Hunger strike
- Mass street action
- Occupation

Principles

the groups they belonged to. Members of both groups risked their lives, were imprisoned and brutalized, and some lost their lives. But hardcore was defined strategically in the case of SNCC, and tragically in the case of the Weather Underground.

Good leaders anticipate the emergent desire for hardcore — for escalation — and they own it. They model it themselves. And they make sure that the expression of hardcore is designed to strengthen bonds between the group's core members and its broader political base. It should feel hardcore to the participants, and it should look like moral leadership to the political base and to a broader public.

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LEARN MORE

Canvas Core Curriculum: A Guide to Nonviolent Struggle
<http://canvasopedia.org/project/canvas-core-curriculum/>

On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about the Fundamentals
Robert L. Helvey, The Albert Einstein Institution, 2004
<http://www.aeinstein.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/OSNC.pdf>

- Anger works best when you have the moral high ground
- Choose tactics that support your strategy
- Choose your target wisely
- Escalate strategically
- Maintain nonviolent discipline
- Use your radical fringe to shift the Overton window
- Would you like some structure with your momentum?

Theories

- Al faza'a (a surge of solidarity)
- Cultural hegemony
- Direct action
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Hamoq and hamas
- Political identity paradox
- Revolutionary nonviolence
- Revolutionary reform
- Strategic nonviolence

Methodologies

- Pillars of power
- Power mapping

TAGS

Campaign strategy, Movement building