

PRINCIPLE

KILL THEM WITH KINDNESS

Kindness is sometimes harder for the authorities to rebuff than anger. When done with true compassion and some artfulness, a kind gesture can win over the public, and even help to humanize an inhuman situation.

CONTRIBUTED BY

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"IT'S A CORE ELEMENT OF NONVIOLENT PHILOSOPHY TO RECOGNIZE THE HUMANITY IN EVERYONE AND SEEK TO CONNECT WITH IT."

"Above all, be kind."
—Kurt Vonnegut

There's a time to be angry (see: PRINCIPLE: Anger works best when you have the moral high ground). There's a time to be reverent (see: PRINCIPLE: Use the power of ritual). There's a time to be funny (see: PRINCIPLE: Use humour to undermine authority). And there's also a time to be sweet, charming, and generous. In fact, that time is often.

A 2011 foreclosure auction in Brooklyn, US, for instance, was movingly disrupted by protesters breaking into song. The song wasn't angry, it wasn't agitated; it was sweet, beautiful, and compassionate — even toward the auctioneer. That's what made it so powerful: the protesters were grounded and determined. They kept singing their sweet song even as the cops led them away.

When you lead with kindness, you're more likely to be seen as the sympathetic character in the story (see: PRINCIPLE: Lead with sympathetic characters). You've come in good faith. You're trying to make things better. You come with smiles, gifts, and an open heart, and you are met with stony-faced indifference, scorn or abuse. In the eyes of the public and the media, you are the good guys. You are the reasonable ones. This is not only good tactics (see: PRINCIPLE: The real action is your target's reaction), it's an assertion of your basic humanity against unjust and inhumane structures.

Just think of the iconic anti-Vietnam War protester putting a flower in the soldier's gun-barrel in 1967. Or more recently, the "99%ers" from Occupy the Boardroom who set up online "pen pal"

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Billionaires for Bush
- Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army
- Conflict Kitchen
- Countering Homophobic Policing
- Daycare Centre Sit-In
- Flower Speech Campaign
- Gezi Park iftar
- Harry Potter Alliance
- Orange Alternative
- Public Option Annie
- Replacing Cops with Mimes
- Santa Claus Army
- Standing Man
- The Teddy Bear Catapult
- Trail of Dreams
- Walk a mile in her shoes

Tactics

- Advanced leafleting
- Artistic vigil
- Creative disruption
- Creative petition delivery
- Occupation
- Public filibuster

relationships with the country's top bankers. When they were stopped by security from delivering their heartfelt stories in person, they folded up their letters into paper airplanes and sailed them over the heads of the cops toward the bank headquarters. For some, cars parked in bike lanes would be reason enough to slash some tires, but not for the Bike Lane Liberation Clowns, who instead will approach drivers and kindly implore them to leave. Those who remain are given fake "this could have been a real ticket" tickets warning them they're in violation of New York City parking rules.

It's naïve to think that power will change its ways because of a sweet appeal or a considerate gesture or a paper airplane. But at the same time, it's a core element of nonviolent philosophy to recognize the humanity in everyone and seek to connect with it. The more we humanize politics, the more likely we are to win. The bureaucrat who secretly agrees with you is more likely to quit, and lend his skills to the revolution. The cop who's been given cupcakes and coffee by a Granny Against the War is that much closer to refusing an order to pepper spray a group of college students linking arms. The foreclosure auctioneer, touched by song, isn't going to slam that gavel down quite so hard the next time. And the public, witnessing all of these actions, is more likely to be moved to action themselves. All of these things don't interrupt the workings of power on their own, but at a human level they matter, and over time they add up, sowing seeds of beautiful trouble, and creating allies in the most unexpected places.

Originally published in Beautiful Trouble.

LEARN MORE

Strong Kindness: How Can We Respond Skillfully To Dominating Behavior?

Zuzana Žilková; Center for Partnership Studies, 2017

<https://centerforpartnership.org/news-events/strongkindness/>

35 Powerful Images of Kindness Found Within Conflict

The Kindness Blog, Huffington Post, 2017

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/35-powerful-images-of-kin_b_6013278.html

Principles

- Anger works best when you have the moral high ground
- Be the change you want to see in the world
- Breakfast is persuasive
- Foster safer spaces
- Lead with sympathetic characters
- Maintain nonviolent discipline
- Play to the audience that isn't there
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Recapture the flag
- Shame the authorities by doing their job
- The real action is your target's reaction
- Think narratively
- Use humour to undermine authority
- Use the power of ritual

Theories

- Framing
- Hamoq and hamas
- Human rights
- Prefigurative politics

Methodologies

- Peel the onion

TAGS

Action design, Nonviolence