

## **Workshop #13**

### **Helping Bureaucrats See It Your Way** (Understanding the bureaucratic mind in relation to government work)

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Major changes in United States cycling will (or will not) happen depending on the actions of government bureaucrats. As an advocate of cycling you must be able to influence the actions of bureaucrats. My goal was to share proven techniques, developed from 1983 on, for getting bureaucrats to "jump" in the direction you want.

To be an "advocate bureaucrat" is possible, but there are constraints on advocate bureaucrats that citizens advocates do not have. Citizens can jump up and down the bureaucratic chain of command at will and can speak to the press whenever they want to. On the other hand, bureaucrats have the staying power and continuity that comes with having a paid staff, i.e., they have been at it a lot longer than the citizens they deal with.

As a citizen advocate, you must be a catalyst for change. You will only complete substantial projects and/or implement large changes when you are a part of a team effort.

The workshop focused on successes and failures in changing what bureaucrats do. The techniques can apply to anything, not just bicycling. Unfortunately, the specific examples given during the workshop had to be omitted from this summary due to space constraints.

The first step in bureaucrat motivation is for you to establish long-term and short-term goals. Long-term goals give you staying power (e.g., a higher quality of life in your area). Short-term goals allow positive feedback and rewards (e.g., stopping police harassment, stopping/reversing bike bans, better maintained trails, proper street grates).

You must keep your eyes on the prize (i.e., achievement of the long-term goals), while keeping your nose to the grindstone (i.e., piece by piece implementation of the short-term goals).

Bureaucrats count on you lacking long-term goals, and expect you to burn out because everyone before you has eventually fallen to the side. You and your allies must see short-term changes to have positive feedback along the way, but don't expect to see a change in the bureaucracy in the week-long or month-long horizons.

Ask for more than you want, because you will almost always get less than you ask for (the "half a loaf of bread" theory). You must carefully judge whether accepting a third of a loaf is worth it. One-third of your goals can be worse than nothing if it leaves you with something so bad or ineffective that it reflects badly on your program.

The three major components of implementing a program are:

- o politicians
- o paid staff, and
- o citizen support.

Now with an explanation of each group:

- o Politicians, the people on the policy making body, are usually volunteers or are very low-paid (e.g., city council, county commissioners, state legislators). Market your program to the people who control the policy-making bodies. They may be white middle-class to upper-class fat-cat types. Even though you market your program to the controlling group, the program must meet the needs of all economic and racial groups. It must make everyone's life better, not just those who fit the mold of the currently-in-charge.

For example, one of the two City Councilmen to speak and vote against the 1985 Dallas Bike Plan was a black. He fought it tooth and nail, but was outvoted 9 to 2. After several years of implementation, he saw the bike plan benefiting his district through bike education in schools and bike route signing. The bicycle advocates are now his "brothers" and he even co-sponsored a city 1989 fiscal year budget amendment to fund the part-time bicycle program manager position as a full-time position. The budget amendment was approved without opposition.

- o Paid staff are the bureaucrats who implement your program, either poorly or well. If they don't believe in your program, you will spend your entire life supervising sloppy implementation by people who couldn't care less about the success or failure of your program.
- o Citizens are voters who must vocally and visibly support your program. Without such support, your program will eventually fade away because the previous two groups will see you as a paper tiger. You need a high percentage of your supporters to be visible and outspoken because government is driven by those who speak out.

Based on past experience, politicians and bureaucrats know that a very low percentage of people who care about an issue will actually speak up. To the extent you are successful in getting a large percentage of your people to speak up, you will have an impact beyond your actual strength. If they think you are a 500-pound gorilla, you will be treated with the respect a 500-pound gorilla deserves -- it then becomes irrelevant whether you are a 90-pound weakling or a 1000-pound King Kong. The same is true of the coverage and respect you get from media.

When asked which of the three groups -- politicians, paid staff or citizens -- is the most important, ask yourself "Which leg of a three-legged chair is the most important?" True, you can balance on two (or even one) leg for a while, but anything less than three legs is unstable in the long term. You need the support of all three groups because you are in it for the long haul.

If God told me I could only have one of the three groups to start my program with, I'd pick citizen involvement in a minute. With citizen involvement you can create support from the other two groups over a long period of time. Support from the other two groups almost never results in an upwelling of citizen support.

Being a part of an organization will give citizen advocates credibility. Organizations provide a letterhead, funding, and access to your supporters in the form of a newsletter. Your local bike club is the best vehicle available for communicating with and organizing your supporters. A successful bike club has three elements:

- o fun (rides, meetings, parties, etc -- never lose sight of the fact that most people bicycle because it is FUN!),

- o advocates of bicycling who "work" City Hall issues, and
- o a great newsletter. The newsletter is especially important because not all members attend meetings or rides. A newsletter updates everyone as to what's happening both in the "advocacy" and "fun" departments. Each member will read the articles they are interested in (e.g., the "party and ride" members can skip "City Hall" articles and "bicycle commuters" can skip the "party" articles). Having an evenhanded and fair newsletter editor is the most important facet of having a balanced bike club that addresses the needs of all members and all cyclists. Even though newsletter appeals frequently don't bring a large response, they make recruiting of volunteers easier because most club members already know what is happening when you contact them to ask for their help on a given issue.

There are three stages of dealing with a bureaucracy:

- o Stage I: The bureaucrats ignore you and hope/expect you to give up and go away. They know they will outlast 99% of the people and organizations that push for change. One of your toughest jobs is going to be to convince them you are here to stay, that you will be there the day they retire and they might as well relax and get used to your input. You will frequently have to go over their heads and deal with the policy-making bodies and upper staff management (this ensures the bureaucrat is getting heat from above (the bosses) and below (the citizens) at the same time). They won't like having a bright light shine under their rock, but they will get what they deserve by choosing to be unresponsive to citizens.
- o Stage II: Now the bureaucrat responds, but mostly out of fear of pain. They do not like you, but they will respond just to keep the heat off their backside. You have to watch everything they do, because the bureaucrat does not understand and is not committed to your program. It's not HIS program, it is still YOUR program, and the bureaucrat responds only out of fear. When they do the right thing, thank them from the heart for doing it right, even though they probably only did it because you were ready to beat them over the head with a 4 by 4. Thank their bosses, send your praises to the politicians and write letters to the editors of the daily papers.
- o Stage III: Gradually you will develop a partnership relationship with the bureaucrat. He accepts your program as his, he does the work and fights the bureaucracy. Even though it doesn't seem fair, let him present your ideas as his, let him get all the credit and recognition. If they get positive feedback for all the hard work they do everyday in implementing your joint program, they will be even more committed to the success of the program. You must always remember that your goal is to improve the quality of life, not to get your name in the paper or face on TV. Let the bureaucrats have the limelight while you act as their behind the scenes consultant.

In your dealings with bureaucrats, you will find several different types:

- o Those who will never do anything for your program and will fight it as though it is against motherhood and apple pie. Fortunately this type of bureaucrat represents a small percentage of the total.
- o Those who do a good job but are harassed by other bureaucrats, the press, budgets and schedules. They are trying to make the best of a tough situation. These bureaucrats represent the large majority of the total and are the ones where you should invest most of your volunteer hours.

- o Gorilla bureaucrats (they think like you do, but just happen to be paid by the city) are another small group. They will stick their neck out and push for changes in the city. Each one is a goose who lays golden eggs -- do everything you can to help and protect them while never doing anything that will hurt them. You will see the largest return on invested volunteer hours when you deal with bureaucrats in this group. Friendly staff people may feed you "interesting" information (e.g., when they are stymied or blocked or need help). Take special care to develop their trust in you.

When dealing with bureaucrats, there are several "Laws of Bureaucracy" you must keep in mind:

- o "A bureaucrat at rest tends to remain at rest." A bureaucrat has immense inertia.
- o "A bureaucrat in motion tends to remain in motion." If they are building narrow trails or use parallel bar grates on roads, they will continue to do so unless guided in a new direction. Try to get them started down the road of change by taking small steps. For example, get the police to start a bike patrol unit. The police will receive favorable publicity, increased citizen support, and see higher productivity while you will realize a better understanding by police of the problems that face bicyclists.

The city may not promote their good bike program, so you will do it for them, but be careful to give them all the credit. They should get the credit because it is their program. What you do is make sure the media talks to the right people. Favorable publicity also further commits them to the program (and makes it more difficult for them to cancel the program if they still have reservations).

- o "The inertia in a bureaucracy is directly proportional to the square of the employee count." It's easier to get things done in smaller cities/counties/states than in larger ones.
- o "A bureaucrat will do what you want when doing it is less painful than not doing it." This will be one of your primary operating rules when dealing with bureaucrats stuck in Stage I relations.

You will spend varying amounts of time dealing with various level bureaucrats:

- o You need top-level bureaucrats on your side to influence the policy-making board. Ideally, the policy direction taken by the city/county/state is set by policy-making boards, the city council, or county commissioners. In reality, some top bureaucrats carefully feed the policy makers only the information they want them to see; when there is an absence of full information, the city council will naturally draw the conclusions the bureaucrats want them to draw. Your life will be much easier if the top-level bureaucrats are letting your views get through to the policy makers.
- o You need mid-level managers on your side to influence daily implementation of your plan. A mid-level manager is someone who is high enough to make things happen, but not so high that he is out of contact with the reality of what is happening in the field. These are the guys you will work with most often after you have progressed beyond Stage I and Stage II bureaucratic relations.
- o You will not spend a lot of time with low-level managers and worker bees. They are always treated with the respect you give any hard working person, but the reality is there are so many of them and so few citizen advocates that you must reach most of them through the higher- and mid-level bureaucrats.

Politics is not a dirty word, it is reality. You have good political abilities when you can convey a message to another person.

You must work on a program a long time before it reaches the city council. Get at least one council member on your side (your "ringer"). He may ask you to address issues of which he is uncertain. Help him do something that has nothing to do with your issues -- this builds creditability. Meet with him face-to-face. Give him your goals -- be sure to hit the high points: safety, quality-of-life, and reduced costs, etc. Establish a rapport, preferably before you are asking for favors.

Send your newsletter to key people (politicians, staff members, media, etc.). The newsletter can make an important good impression every month and somewhat compensate for the fact that you will never be able to make a personal call to touch base with every important person as often as you would like.

There are several things you must keep in mind as you deal with governments:

Remember that a politician's NO is most probably a MAYBE.

Never make personal attacks against anyone. Don't respond to personal attacks on you in kind (it can be very difficult to restrain yourself, but such restraint will earn you additional credibility in the eyes of those who see you keeping to the issues when things get tough). Don't get emotional.

The people on the other side have a full plate and many problems beyond the issues you bring to the table and having empathy for their problems will help you in reaching out to them.

Don't ever lie, exaggerate, or fudge. You will lose credibility and never be able to dig your way out of the hole you put yourself into.

Take nothing for granted. Keep meticulous notes on your meetings and phone conversations in case you are ever called on to document an assertion you made based on these meetings/phone calls.

Always remember to say "Thank you." People appreciate being privately and/or publicly thanked for what they do. Sometimes you will be limited to private thanks out of the necessity of protecting your secret sources inside the bureaucracy.

When you have a problem that needs to be fixed, start on a positive note, give credit for the good things that have already happened, and only then ask for a fix to the remaining problems. Bureaucrats need to feel appreciated for what they do and in control of the situation.

Isolate your enemies -- don't assassinate them. Reduce their effectiveness. Address each issue they bring up. Convince others that the complaints of your enemies are not substantial. Have people from all geographic areas and every ethnic background at public hearings. It is especially important to have citizen support from within the complainer's district.

When educating/lobbying or working with bureaucrats, tell them who you are, what organization you represent, and what you want to talk to them about. Get lots of citizens and other groups involved. Remember, environmentalists, runners, the "good roads" people, and the handicapped all have issues in common with you and a team approach will get more done with less effort.

Level-headed, knowledgeable people can be let loose to achieve general goals. Others may need to be kept on a short leash because they don't have the experience to act alone or go off the deep end when acting alone.

Don't ever characterize your bike program as anti-automobile -- that's political suicide! Try to hold ground somewhere between the most radical and the most conservative stance. You will appear to be more realistic, sensible, and truly concerned in the eyes of the bureaucrats. Even though the radical fringe will cause a lot of grief, they create a backdrop of anarchy and sometimes drive the bureaucrats to deal with your group as the most sensible one of the whole bunch.

Working with budgets is a delicate matter. Find someone who understands budgets. Have your budget expert review the entire budget for items that would look really bad if brought to the attention of a wide audience. The budget issue "pay dirt" on items not directly related to your program should almost never be used, but the mere fact that you have the "big nuke" will certainly keep the bureaucrats from using some of their less than ethical tactics against your group.

Don't suggest cuts from other sectors; you may alienate current and/or potential allies. Instead, concentrate on how good your program is and avoid falling into the trap of becoming bogged down while dealing with fragmented, warring splinter groups. Make the politicians face the task of dividing up the ever-smaller pie by themselves. Help them reach the correct decision by sending a variety of people to town hall meetings (this shows breadth to your support and makes the town hall goers co-owners of the program). Be gentle and tenacious and you will outlast other struggling groups that face the same cuts you do.

When you meet with bureaucrats, dress neatly in street clothes. You don't want to give people with "dress stereotypes" a chance to turn you off before you have a chance to even say hello. Take your helmet with you so the people you meet with will know you rode your bicycle. Carrying the helmet will prove you can look normal even when you use a bicycle for transportation. (Never carry a helmet when you did not bike in because you will lose your credibility.)

Follow up a commitment or significant conversation with a one-page, grammatically correct, spell-checked letter addressing only one issue. Be sure someone other than you proofreads the letter before it is sent. When you address only one issue in a letter, the bureaucrat must answer it, and cannot dodge the big bullet by addressing a secondary issue contained in the same letter. You will usually include the names of those you are copying the letter to. Blind copies are typically called for when sending the copy to secret sources of information or to staff members who are lower than the person addressed. Blind copies sent to "moles" should be sent to their home address so as to avoid exposing your source to reprisals. Sign letters with your correct name, using a company title, if applicable.

In a letter writing party, do not date letters so you can dribble them in (i.e., don't send them all at once). A hand-written letter is far better than no letter at all. Sometimes it's best to hand someone paper and pen, and ask them to draft a letter right then and there because people don't always do what they have good intentions of "doing as soon as they get home."

There are an abundance of technical and personal resources available. Go to Pro-Bike to learn and to make contacts. Come to this workshop and get a much better feel for what I tried to convey. This workshop summary only represents a fraction of the material presented in an hour and a half and cannot do the workshop justice (just like the workshop cannot do justice to seven years of City Hall experience). Hope to meet you at the next Pro Bike.