

Storytelling iSchool is the online way to learn how to tell better stories and use them for advocacy, fundraising, recruitment and more. Here's what recent graduates have to say:

Andy's class gave me the permission I needed to experiment with concepts, structure and language, and to talk to others in real time about their experiences and frustrations. I take a lot of Storytelling iSchool with me into my institutional writing projects, and I think my non-profit has benefited as a result.

Suzanne Gravette Acker,
Communications and Development Coordinator, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio

The great thing about Storytelling iSchool is that the principles you learn there not only work, you understand why they work. This gives you more control over your stories and with control comes greater impact. I've changed what I focus on and in what order since finishing iSchool with Andy, and the changes show.

Victoria Tirrel, Communications Assistant, Bush Foundation

I was delighted that three of my staff members could attend your on-line course. We are in the process of changing our brand, overall look and messages. When we have completed the process we have decided to have a day of storytelling led by the three graduates of your course.

This is a fabulously efficient way to give staff a chance to grow professionally in ways that offer the organization an immediate return for the investment.

Diane Wood, President, National Environmental Education and Training Foundation

Registration for the February 2007 session is now open. To learn more and register online visit www.agoodmanonline.com

The Activation Point: Why You Need to Find It

Even when your target audience is informed and concerned, they can remain stuck in neutral. Learn how to find their *activation point*, however, and you can shift them into drive when you need them most.

Kristen Grimm's personal activation point was a phone call. "I remember being on a conference call with a nonprofit when someone said their issue was polling really well, so they were *sure* their audience was ready to act." As president of Spitfire Strategies, a communications firm with extensive experience in public interest campaigns, Grimm was not so sure, and she had heard that kind of optimistic prediction once too often.

"I kept seeing this big disconnect between what people say they care about and what they're ready to *do*," Grimm says. So, with

backing from three foundations and advice from a panel of communication experts, Grimm set out to study this frustrating gap between caring and doing. The result is *Discovering the Activation Point: Smart Strategies to Make People Act*, a must-read that will be released on December 11th.

In November, as the new study was being readied for publication, I asked Grimm what readers could expect to learn from her research. Her answers are inside along with an excerpt from Chapter II, "Testing the Temperature."



Free-range thinking™ is a monthly newsletter for public interest groups, foundations, and progressive businesses that want to reach more people more effectively. For a free subscription, send your request to: andy@agoodmanonline.com or call 323.464.3956. Back issues are available on the web at www.agoodmanonline.com.

Newsletter edited by Lori Matsumoto.



a goodman

GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

444 north larchmont blvd, suite 102
los angeles, ca 90004

► **Goodman: So let's start with the obvious question – what is the “activation point”?**

Grimm: The activation point occurs when the right people at the right time are persuaded to take an action that leads to measurable social change.

What's the difference between an activation point and a tipping point?

With a tipping point, the social change is going to happen because people are already moving in this direction. The activation point is the architecture for getting to the tipping point. It's what *starts* people moving in the right direction.

You talk a good deal about persuasion in the study. Do some nonprofits consider this a dirty word?

Persuasion has become mixed up in some people's minds as manipulation, and there's a big difference. Manipulation usually implies lying and convincing people to act *against* their own interests. Persuasion is very different, and we wanted to give some very specific advice about how to do it. If knowledge alone were enough to inspire action, the world would already be a better place, but that's not what we're seeing. You have to plan for persuasion.

Who can benefit from reading this study?

Nonprofits and the foundations that support them. But keep in mind we're talking about issues that people know a lot about and say they care about. If your issue is one with low knowledge or a lot of “swing voters,” you may not be at a place where you'll be able to use this.

And the obvious last question: how does someone get a copy?

You can order a complimentary hard copy or download a PDF version at www.communicationsleadership.org.

The following is an excerpt from Discovering the Activation Point: Smart Strategies to Make People Act, published by the Communications Leadership Institute and Spitfire Strategies with support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Open Society Institute, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Our research demonstrated that hope is a powerful incentive for bringing a person to an activation point. The stronger the hope, the more likely the action. A sense of possibility enhances one's desire to help. In fact, hope is a critical concept – among the most frequently named in conversations about emotions.

Not surprisingly, hope emerges when a person feels in control, while hopelessness arises when people feel no control over adverse outcomes. Any successful call to action must build upon a sense of possibility. The audience target must believe it can make a difference and expect a positive outcome. Albert Bandura, a renowned social-learning psychologist at Stanford University, suggests that organizers initially structure situations “to bring success; don't prematurely put them in situations where they are likely to fail.” Disease groups trigger this sense of hope when they talk about someday finding a cure.

The Living Wage campaign uses hope as an activation point. In Florida in 2003, a broad coalition of labor unions, community organizations, churches, senior citizen groups and others set out to offer a living-wage referendum to voters to raise the state's minimum wage to \$6.15 an hour. They made it clear that raising the minimum wage would help everyone. They called the campaign Floridians for All. They faced considerable and well-funded opposition from the powerful restaurant and tourism industries. But the campaign tapped hope for economic improvement for low-income families, and hope for success at the ballot box to move the effort forward. The minimum wage measures won in every county in Florida, even the most conservative.

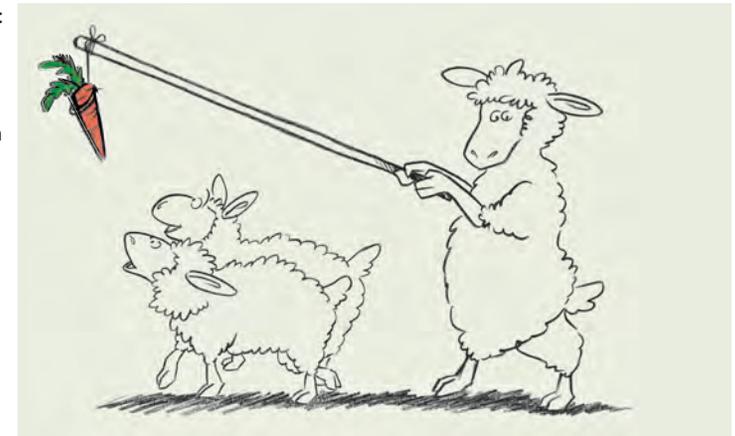
On the other hand, some rhetoric is devoid of hope. The Institute for Public Policy Research in the U.K. tracked rhetoric around global climate change and found one pervasive pessimistic model described as follows in the Warm Words report:

“Climate change is most commonly constructed through the alarmist repertoire – as awesome, terrible, immense and beyond human control. It employs a quasi-religious register of death and doom, and it uses language of acceleration and

irreversibility. It contains an implicit counsel of despair – ‘The problem is just too big for us to take on.’ Its sensationalism and connection with the unreality of Hollywood films also distances people from the issue. In this awesome form, alarmism might even become secretly thrilling – effectively a form of ‘climate porn.’ It also positions climate change as yet another apocalyptic construction that is perhaps a figment of our cultural imaginations, further undermining its ability to help bring about action.”

from Warm Words: How Are We Telling the Climate Story and Can We Tell It Better?, 2006

The problem with this model of rhetoric is that it emphasizes that the problem is too big to solve. People can either panic or dismiss the problem. Very few say to themselves, “I will be the one to fix this insurmountable challenge.” Instilling hope means showing audience targets that change is possible. Optimism is a critical component of persuasion. ■



An illustration from *Discovering the Activation Point* (which does not advocate pulling the wool over your audience's eyes.)