

# free-range thinking™

free-range thinking™ is a monthly newsletter for public interest groups, foundations, and progressive businesses that want to reach more people more effectively.

## Even The Name Tags

When Heal the Bay launched "The Forty Day Fight," they had their message ingrained in even the smallest detail. No wonder they beat the long odds and won.

**M**ark Gold, executive director of Heal the Bay, described his group's challenge as somewhere between "uphill" and "unwinnable." In a few months, a Southern California water quality control board would vote on storm water permits for Santa Monica Bay. Gold knew the permits could help prevent a toxic soup of pollution from washing off Los Angeles' streets, draining into the bay, and making swimmers sick. But he also knew the permits would be expensive for city governments to implement. The water board, comprised of conservative appointees more sensitive to economic impacts than environmental ones, was strongly inclined to reject them.

To win approval, Heal the Bay - a small, 3,000 member nonprofit with limited resources - would have to show the water board that area business leaders truly wanted the permits. This meant convincing hotel owners, restaurateurs, and dozens of others tourism and recreation types to call, fax, e-mail, or write letters of support to the board. Nothing less than a huge outcry would suffice. At this point in time, however, very few people besides Gold were

tuned into the issue.

Heal the Bay deliberately launched their campaign exactly 40 days prior to the board's vote to give the effort a memorable handle: "The Forty Day Fight." They began with a rally/press conference at the Hard Rock Cafe in Beverly Hills attended by 150 business and political leaders, and co-hosted by two of Heal the Bay's more prominent board members: Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Warren Littlefield (then president of NBC Entertainment). The hosts came with sound bites at the ready: "We have forty days and forty nights to flood the water board with letters, faxes and e-mails," said Julia. Reporters smiled sardonically, but they all used the line.

Each guest was told to bring blank stationery, and Heal the Bay had computers and printers on hand to customize and print letters on the spot. If guests forgot, they could use plain paper, or they could pick up a reminder card from Littlefield (strategically stationed at the exit) to make sure they followed through at their office.

As usual, attendees received name tags when they checked in - the traditional rectangular plastic holder with a paper insert for the guest's name and organization. Behind the insert, however, was a second piece of paper the guest didn't know about. This slip had a date on it corresponding to one of the forty days between the launch event and the water board's vote.

In his remarks towards the end of the rally, Littlefield asked the guests to remove their tags and look for a second piece of paper hiding behind their name. "This is your day," he told the crowd, explaining that they would each receive a call from a campaign volunteer on their assigned day reminding them to send another message to the water board. (Heal the Bay created a list of all guests with pre-assigned dates before the event.) In this way, Heal the Bay assured the generation of 150 more calls, letters, faxes, and e-mails.

When the water board voted forty days later, the commissioners testified that they had never experienced such an outpouring of public sentiment. Citing conflicts of interest, two board members recused themselves. The remaining six voted unanimously to approve the storm drain permits. Mark Gold called the vote the biggest single step the community could take towards cleaning up Santa Monica Bay.

### **In other words.**

Everything you do carries your message, from the obvious stuff (scripted sound bites) to the not-so-obvious stuff (name tags). Heal the Bay's name tags created accountability, showed creativity, and contributed directly to the campaign's goal. Find new ways to make every element of your next event deliver your message and serve your goal.

free-range thinking™ is written by Andy Goodman.

To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

To reach Andy directly, please call (323) 464-3956 or send an email to [andy@thegoodmancenter.com](mailto:andy@thegoodmancenter.com).

To subscribe to this newsletter, click [here](#).



where do-gooders learn to do better