

Video lesson 1

Advocacy is the art of changing the institutions: either you want to change a law, or health care procedures, or any other decision from an institution.

Advocacy can include many activities, such as media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research, and so on. There are two major forms: Lobbying, which is a form of advocacy where a direct approach is made to decision makers on a specific issue. Public campaigning on the other hand aims at leveraging the power of public support to put pressure on decision makers.

So communications for advocacy is every piece of communication that directly aims at institutional change, whether you talk to

Politicians

Journalists

Bloggers

Public opinion

civil society groups

Religious leaders

Community leaders, elders, other opinion leaders

The entertainment industry

Or anyone else you can influence to help you achieve your advocacy goals

Video lesson 2

Communication might sound simple but there is more to it than meets the eye.

The essence of communication and the backbone of this course is that communication is never one-way.

Communication is always a dialogue, by which both the sender and the receiver are actively defining what is happening. The more you understand the receiver, the better the chances that your communications will be effective. This is particularly true if you want to avoid the receiver's resistance.

Always check if what you are trying to get across is really understood by your audiences: Do the images you use mean the same thing to them as they do to you? Does your tone of voice drive them towards you, or away. And of course, all other elements of your communication need the same scrutiny.

There are many types of communications that you can use to get your message across:

Verbal communications, like the words you use, your tone of voice

Non-verbal communications like body language, clothing, dance

Visual communications like images, symbols

And many more

So always try to understand what barriers you might face when you communicate and check if your audience has understood your message.

Video Lesson 3

The people you want to communicate with within your advocacy strategy will have different attitudes towards the issue you are advocating for. These attitudes require different communications for advocacy strategies.

People who are violently opposed are those you want to neutralise. There is very little chance they will ever change, so don't waste your time trying to communicate with them.

The mildly opposed might be able to change. However, there is work to be done. They first need to be informed, and their awareness must be raised on your issue and position

The undecided are the people you need to persuade

They are what is called the "moveable middle", the people who can swing either way, depending on who they relate to most

Supportive groups have either somewhat positive to very positive attitudes towards your issue. It is important to motivate and mobilise them.

So there are groups that you can aim to change, but change is never easy for anyone. It is important that you provide people with examples on how other people have changed before them. This is what we call “modeling the change journey” and it is a very powerful tool in your communications for advocacy strategy.

Video Lesson 4

Confronting your opposition is a risky strategy and must be thought of very carefully. When people attack you, when they insult or violate you, a natural reaction is to counter attack. If you decide to do this, think carefully before you attack back, blame and shame them, ridicule them or divide them so that they lose their credibility and undecided people will hesitate to follow them.

Whatever you choose, you must carefully outweigh the opportunities and the risks these tactics bring. The best strategy, however, might be not to engage with them at all.

What you must always try to do, is to stay on track in your messaging and not let the opposition derail you. You must also avoid repeating negative frames. Disputing something - in the end - only serves to reinforce it in the mind of the audiences you are trying to reach.

Video Lesson 5

If we were rational people, information would guide our attitudes and our beliefs. Information would be all we need to make decisions. But our rational mind needs energy to make decisions and energy comes from our emotions.

Still, it is important in communications for advocacy to be able to share information and data in order to support our messages. For this information to have the impact it needs to have, it should be based on strong research and have a compelling format.

Research comes in two shapes: Quantitative and qualitative

Quantitative research is about WHAT the situation is.

Qualitative research will usually focus on WHY the situation is the way it is.

Whatever information you provide, it should be expressed in a format that also carries emotions. Visual communications are particularly effective to convey information and data in a way that triggers people. An image is worth 1000 words.

Video Lesson 6

Attitudes are the expressions of people's feelings, whether they feel something is right or wrong, good or bad.

Attitudes are shaped by different factors. The most important ones are social norms and values

One of the most powerful tactics for persuasion is to show your audience that the social norm, a good majority of people, supports your cause. When this is difficult to make believe, then at least you can show that the social norm is MOVING towards your direction.

Advocates can also nurture the values that their target group holds and channel them towards their cause. The love for children for example can be nurtured towards acceptance of children who are different from the majority.

So persuasion is about identifying the common values between you and your target audience, and then driving these values in the direction of your cause.

So it makes sense to start with trying to persuade the people who you share a lot of values with. Everyone can't be persuaded at once, you have to take one step at a time!

Video Lesson 7

Mobilising is about getting your existing supporters, or potential ones, to stand behind you. It is about leveraging their existing energy. Mobilisation strategies normally don't aim at changing hearts and minds; they work with the hearts and minds you have already won over.

There are different types of supporters. Some are just vaguely interested and some are passionate about your cause. All supporters have their place on the engagement ladder. To move your supporters up the ladder, you need to tailor your approach and messages to them.

Organisations have been experimenting with different ways to get people to engage: asking them to comment, inviting them to change their profile picture, sign petitions, donate, take independent action, and many more.

But whatever strategy you choose, you have to create specific engagement journeys that bring your supporters from one step on the ladder to the next.

Video Lesson 8

When you have a message you want people to hear, you can take a megaphone out onto the street and start shouting your message. Will people really stop and listen among everything else that is going on around them? Probably not. But if you spend the majority of your time on your own media, this is sort of what you do.

Communication is not a one-way process, but an interaction between two active parties. This is even more true in digital communications, when audiences can tune in and out of the conversation through a simple click.

A different approach is to find out where your target group gathers, online or offline, meet them and take time to listen and understand them, find out what they like, what they are interested in. And then start talking to them, in a way that they respond to, in a place that they know.

Reaching beyond the choir doesn't mean shouting louder. It means approaching your target group differently.

Video Lesson 9

Stories are one of the most compelling ways to get your message across. They have the power to ignite our imagination, trigger our emotions, and counter many forms of resistance.

But not all stories are good stories for advocacy. Some are testimonies, some are entertaining, some are monologues. But to develop a really convincing story there are a few tricks that will help.

First, your story has to have a clear structure, made up of different building blocks, such as a clear setting, conflicts, choices, and a clear resolution.

Then, the hero of your story has to be someone who your audience can identify with. Someone they trust, someone they believe in, someone they feel for. And then your story has to speak to life lessons that your audience can understand.

So with a clear objective, a good structure, a relatable hero, relevant messengers and an innovative format, your story is set to conquer the world!

Video lesson 10

When you start developing your communications for advocacy strategy, it is important to use some essential building blocks.

First, you should have a clear end goal in mind and be able to visualise all the different stepping stones that will design the pathway to reaching this goal.

Next you should identify who you want to influence to reach your goal. All the people and groups you need to influence are the different target audiences of your communications.

For each of these groups, you have to identify the right approach: neutralising, informing, persuading, motivating or mobilising.

For every approach that you chose you need to research what the right narratives are that will influence your target audience. This is done through quantitative and qualitative research.

You are now ready to choose your communications tactics: words, images, facts and figures, tone, symbols, stories, and more. Each tactic that you chose should resonate with your target audience. For instance, storytelling is a very specific form of communications and must be carefully crafted to have the desired effect.

Now that all your communication tactics are ready, it's time to develop a dissemination strategy that will allow you to reach your target audiences,

In this strategy your supporters should be mobilised in a way that takes them up the social engagement ladder.

Last but not least, to measure the effectiveness of your strategy, keep a close eye on the outputs and outcomes of your communications throughout the implementation of your strategy.

Good luck building your communications for advocacy strategy!