

PREREQUISITE TO GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS FACING IMPOSSIBLE ODDS (LIKE OUSTING TYRANTS ) - A CHAPTER OF A NEW BOOK BY JIM BRITELL

## OPEN A FILE ON YOUR PROBLEM

A grassroots campaign against a powerful foe is a battle where your best source of ammunition is data you weaponize into persuasive information, and the simplest way to collect, organize and mobilize data is to put it in a case file created specifically for the issue.

What does it mean to open a case file on a problem and what are the three reasons every new campaign needs one? Opening a file means simply to start a new electronic or paper file and give it a name. In that file, you put notes, clippings, photos, observations, contacts, notes of meetings and telephone calls and other data pertaining to the issue.

Files serve three purposes.

1. At some point in every campaign you will need accurate information for letters, testimony and law suits. Campaigns may go on for months, years and decades and absent some filing system all the past documentation and information about an issue will be soon lost or unfindable if you haven't organized it. A possible ally or expert you need a year from now will be soon forgotten if you don't record their name today.

When I use paper manila folders for files I staple a piece of paper to the left side to record phone calls chronologically and on the inside cover of the folder itself I record people's names and phone numbers. When I work on the problem I open the file and right there is the history of it and all the relevant people who were ever involved. For many issues, I have paper and electronic files so I can save things I run across online in an electronic format. At any one time, I usually have from 100-200 electronic and paper files for the various issues I follow and some of active files are 50 years old. I started actively collecting information to write the article you are reading in 1976. In 2009 I took steps to get an important out of print book about case files available online so it readers of this article can access it.

2. Contemporaneous notes of phone calls will help you recall and document exactly when you were given verbal information and who gave it to you and provide probative evidence of what you were told. If an agency representative assures you that a deadline will be extended as a courtesy to you or that a specification was changed to satisfy your concern and later you find they weren't, a contemporaneous written record of your conversation can prove what you were told even if you were not given that information in writing. Otherwise it is just he say, she say. Similarly, an email to someone summarizing what you were told is primary evidence of a conversation long afterwards – if you can find it, and you will be able to if you cross file it in your electronic case file

3. There is also an existential reason to open case files. Sometimes seemingly insurmountable problems create hopelessness and despair when there seem to be no possible solutions or where going public may be dangerous to you or loved ones. In these situations, the distance

between taking no action and taking even a small action is a giant step emotionally. When you open a file on your hopeless cause and place your first piece of information in it you will feel a little less hopeless. The act of opening a case file is not merely the first step of a journey the act itself creates the faith, confidence and courage to continue. Since opening a file is the essence of the difference between no action, and action, it overcomes the main obstacles to activism - apathy, indifference, sloth and inaction. This is because the driver of most problems and campaigns is seldom good vs evil, but evil vs indifference. To win a campaign against impossible odds first requires you to believe the impossible – that you can do it. Opening a case file gets you over that first hurdle.

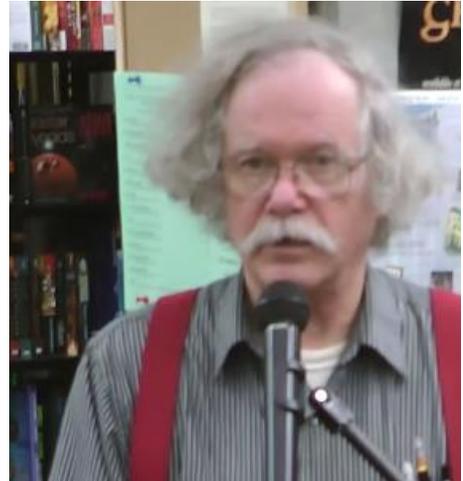
Some of the major societal transformations in the 1950's may have been indirectly caused by the opening of case files, these were: the spread of ecological consciousness; elimination of book censorship; new age forms of religiousness; respect for land and indigenous peoples and the liberalization of sexuality. In his book "Investigative Poetry", Ed Sanders the poet and rock musician who is considered the bridge between the beat movement of the 50's and the hippie movement of the 60's, claims these changes and others were due to the beat poets particularly Alan Ginsberg, and his poetry and that of others of the beats were based on detailed investigative case files these poets opened on society's problems. In fact, Ginsberg's most famous poem "Howl" consists of snippets from Ginsberg's hundreds of case files. The people responsible for publishing Howl were arrested and put on trial for distributing obscene literature and their victory in that trial abolished book censorship in the United States.

Sanders said that opening a file on a new problem creates a social, moral, ethical, and metaphysical ripple, and the case file is a flashlight which simultaneously illuminates and helps you find other flashlights (a flashlight to find other flashlights). He created a branch of modern poetry called Investigative poetry to promote the idea that all advances in human freedom have depended on opening of case files and delivering the information in them with poetic sensibility. He argues that opening a file is doing applied poetry and that throughout history despotism and superstition have grown whenever the poetic principle becomes extinct.

Ed Sanders provides these rules for maintaining files on problems, beasts and tyrants:

- When visiting a hostile data source do not bring files with you and tell some where you are going and when you expect to return
- Back up all your files and keep them in a safe place
- Don't get angry at your opponent or target nor internalize grouchiness

### **Ed Sanders, founder of the Investigative poetry movement**



*Investigative Poetry* is a book of poetry and historical survey of mankind's use of case files to defeat tyrants and create freedom. It can be downloaded as a PDF at <http://www.woodstockjournal.com/pdf/InvestigativePoetry.pdf>

- Never allow hatred of the data target to wire you up to the point of insanity or violence
- Keep a list of questions you want answered so you are always ready if presented with unexpected access to information or people.
- Periodically review your files

An extreme fictional example of how opening case files can bring justice under insurmountable problems but failure to heed Sander's warnings can create serious problems, was the character Madame Defarge, in "A Tale of Two Cities" by Dickens. Twenty years before the French Revolution. she opened a file on two aristocrats who abused, raped and killed her family, by recording their names in her knitting and so began her famous list of evil doer aristocrats which she kept until the French revolution when all the names in her "investigative case file" were guillotined. However she unfortunately succumbed to severe "internalized grouchiness" and became a villain in the story.

I had a real-life experience on 4/13/1985 that shows the power of opening a case file. Back then I was a mid-level government manager in San Francisco, Chief of Management Information Systems, with a minimum of 12 years to go before I was eligible for retirement when I read a newspaper story in the Wall Street journal about how federal land managers in Oregon had falsified computer records to show there were far, far more large trees growing in National Forests than existed to justify the clearcutting of old growth forests. At that time, I was not an environmental activist nor interested in forests particularly, but I was concerned about the phenomenon that managers sometimes falsify computer records to meet their performance goals and quotas. So, I clipped that article on public forest logging manipulation and put it in a file, gave the file a name (Data manipulating) and a number (160) and later put more clippings on that issue in that file (which I still have).

Three years later in 1988 my agency unexpectedly offered early retirement to managers and waived the minimum age requirements, so I retired and moved north to rural Oregon at the edge of a National Forest that contained much of the last remaining old growth forests in America and joined a local environmental group to go on their hikes. Within a month I unexpectedly became its Conservation chair and soon after a full-time volunteer ancient forest activist, and a minor leader in the West Coast forest protection movement. So, it came to pass that on 4/4/90, almost 5 years to the day after I clipped that article I found myself testifying before a standing room only joint congressional committee investigating illegal timber cutting practices on public lands. Thus, I was in a small way responsible for bringing an end to the clearcutting abuses described in the article I clipped 5 years before and the activism I was a part of reduced logging in Pacific Northwest national forests by 80%. My path to that congressional hearing began with opening a file on a problem that interested and bothered me even though at the time there seemed absolutely no conceivable way I could ever do anything about it.

The simple act of opening a case file at once creates poetry, courage, efficacious prayer, and ammunition.

From a new book in progress which is a sequel to "Organize to Win" downloadable at [Britell.com](http://Britell.com)