

# 3

## ISSUES ANALYSIS

### In this chapter, you will learn:

- ◆ The importance of listening.
- ◆ How to do individual interviews.
- ◆ How to determine commitment.
- ◆ The importance of social capital.

**T**here is certainly no shortage of problems that need to be addressed in low-income and working-class neighborhoods. There usually is no shortage of social service providers in these same neighborhoods. Frequently, social service agencies declare which problems need to be addressed in a given community, how they are going to be addressed, and who will address them. (Surprise! Themselves!) Organizers do the opposite. They look at what community members want to change and develop their

personal commitment to do so. Organizers must look at their role in a very different way. Invariably, students think the first thing to do is to hold a big meeting and ask all the people what they think. No! No! No! No! Imagine trying to get anything done in your personal life this way. For instance, suppose you were dating a number of people at the same time. You were confused about what you should do next, how to decide on only one you wanted to see more seriously, and, at the same time, stop seeing the others. Would you invite them all to a large conference room and, with all of them in the room, ask them what they thought you should do? No, I bet you wouldn't. Because if you did, they would all have different ideas, they would all disagree with one other, and they would all start looking at you with a little less of a heart flutter. In fact, the only conclusion they could come to would be what an idiot you were. That's why you wouldn't use this strategy as an organizer either. Think a little more about the "Hey, I got it; let's invite everyone to a big strategy meeting." Suppose there was a crime wave in the neighborhood. Suppose you invited people to a big meeting to discuss the problem. God help you if a lot of people showed up. (Luckily, they probably wouldn't.) If they did, the people would bitch and moan and argue with one other about who was committing the crimes and that "somebody" should do something about it. Each person's circumstances would be portrayed as worse than anyone else's. The problem is worse on *my* block, *my* side of the street, *my* sidewalk. People would play a contest of "Oh yeah, that's nothing, let me tell you about me." It would be like an open mike night in a coffeehouse: folksinger after folksinger, crooning off-key in song after song about train wrecks, coal mining disasters, and lost love suicides. It might be a bit of a downer. There would be no positive energy or group cohesion.

So, if it's not the big meeting, and it's not deciding for yourself what everyone else needs, like the social service agency, then what exactly is it? It's the totally unglamorous, repetitive process of listening to individuals one-on-one. You listen to each person very carefully. You hear what people say. You look for the emotions behind their thoughts. You look for the values that shape their thoughts. This is a skill that can be gained through practice. After all, we live in an American society that rewards talkers and undervalues listeners. When was the last time you turned on the TV or radio and watched or heard a "listen" show? There are no listen shows. There are a lot of talk shows. We see politicians and we judge their ability to give speeches, not their ability to listen intently. We study public speaking in college and never are asked about our skills in listening. Do we give citations and awards at our place of employment to great listeners? Don't let the

underappreciation fool you. It is the community organizer's greatest skill. So let's go through a series of steps to lead us to taking a specific action. Organizers refer to this process as developing an "issue."

## ONE-ON-ONES

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**One-on-Ones**—Meeting with one person, listening carefully to determine his or her self-interest

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There are several practical reasons why speaking and listening to people individually is the place to start.

1. *There is a good chance of an honest exchange.* When there is no one there but the two of you, there is much less tendency to posture, lecture, and overdramatize. There are no cameras rolling. There is no roomful of people to impress. Remember, you cannot build a real relationship around anything but honesty.

2. *You can listen and not miss much.* When you only have one person to listen to, you listen a little better. The person can catch you if you yawn. The person can tell when you drift away to that vacation in Hawaii you've always wanted to take. As you zero in to listen to that one person, you can pick up nuances, inflections, and deeper meanings. There is a big difference between someone saying positive things with an eyebrow versus someone saying those same things with a raised eyebrow.

3. *You can ask pointed questions.* As the person speaks, you can zero in on the really important stuff. You can get to the heart of the matter. You can drill to the core of the person's beliefs with precision. In a group or large meeting, sometimes things stay too general. Sometimes members of a group stay superficial because relationships of trust have not been built. With one person, you can follow up with questions that get to the motivations you need to recognize. There is a big difference between "Yes, I am concerned about the homeless" and "Here's how I felt when my family was homeless." Organizers need to gauge motivation and depth of commitment and individual conversations get you there quickly and accurately.

4. *You can connect on a personal level.* Seeing one person elevates the importance of that person to you.

When someone has been asked to meet with you as part of a large group, well, it doesn't quite sit as well with that person. If you meet with just Rachel, then Rachel feels she rates in your book. It is a powerful psychological message to send. "Rachel you are so important, that even though I could be doing millions of other things, I'd rather spend my time listening to you." Now that says a lot about what you think of Rachel who, in turn, thinks you are a really astute person. She is not some statistic at a rally; she is the key to success.

Many activists feel guilty about spending a whole hour talking to one person. They say, "Shouldn't I be doing more with my time so I have a bigger impact?" Resist this feeling of guilt suggesting you are not doing enough. You are doing exactly what you should be doing. You are building relationships through honesty and trust. There is a big difference between someone telling you what they think you want to hear and someone telling you what they really do think. In low-income communities, people will frequently fish around to see what services you or your organization might provide or the candidate or ballot issue that you support. Be very careful when this happens. This is a technique to determine your agenda so they can then tell you what they think you want to hear as a way to make you happy and get rid of you. It goes like this. You say, "Hello sir, I am with the East Side Youth Organization. Do you think loitering is a problem?" They say to you, "Don't you run those wonderful basketball leagues in the summer? Why that's the kind of wonderful thing our young people need." They do this to get their young cousin into your program and have you leave without asking a bunch of inane questions. You leave like the cat that ate the canary, thinking how respected you are and how good it is to get input from the community. See how far away this is from what people really care about and what they might be willing to do about it?

Also, beware of an almost opposite problem: the appearance of disinterest. People sometimes hide genuine interest because they are isolated and think they are the only one with a particular concern. They believe they don't have the power to change it. They think you are not interested in helping them accomplish what they want. When this reaction kicks in, instead of admitting one or more of these reasons they say, "I don't really have any interest in changing anything." A novice could easily misread this and, even worse, start blaming the residents for unwillingness to get involved. You have to push past this half-fake disinterest. Say something like "Why do you still live here?" to break the logjam. For instance, one person might say, "I'm not a member of any group in my neighborhood." Another might say, "I try to keep to myself." And another might say, "I just don't trust strangers."

Is this an apathetic bunch? Maybe; maybe not. Could it be that they all happen to live in a very high-crime neighborhood? You would really have to listen to know. Only through careful listening could you determine the reasons and causes for their statements. Once you have determined the true meaning behind the comments, you will know better which issues to focus on and which direction to take.

## COMMITMENT

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**Commitment**—People’s willingness to do real work while addressing their concerns

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As you listen to more and more people, a pattern begins to develop in what you hear. Even though the words and phrases are different, similarities surface. These similarities hold the potential to become a direction for collective action. You see ideas that could hold a larger number of people’s interest. For instance, maybe all the people you talk to remember fondly a time when they were proud to be living in their community. Many talk about specific things they were proud of. They show emotion talking about what they have lost. They would love to get it back. When this happens, you can begin a second step. This second step tests people’s willingness to participate in bringing back the thing they have lost (library, store, police station, etc.). If people are unwilling to participate beyond articulating their feelings, you have reached a dead end. You never have a viable issue if people are unwilling to put personal effort into addressing it.

Community organizing is not a social service approach. People cannot demonstrate a need and then have community organizers provide the program to address that need. Instead, community organizers must discipline themselves at this key stage to make sure that they do not design or propose a specific program or intervention. Instead, community organizers raise the bar and ask the residents to participate and make a commitment to be part of the solution. This is the exact spot where many professionals (government employees, school administrators, social workers, counselors) make a key mistake. They feel that as professionals, they have expertly identified a need and now must appropriately design the expert intervention that leads to the eventual solution. Stop! Do not pass “Go.” Do not design a program. Do not fund-raise. Do not collect \$200. Take a deep breath and in this Monopoly game, try to get a “Get-out-of jail-free” card. This is your chance

to savor the real freedom that comes from a good organizing strategy. This is not a time to spoil all your efforts. You have just seen a real pattern in what people care about. You now have a chance to involve them in completely new ways. You have the opportunity to have them experience some collective and individual power. For some of them, this may be the opportunity of a lifetime. They will not be empowered through some program you design. Instead, tap their creativity, their desire for respect, their hunger to be involved with others. You must be the one who sees their abilities to play these roles.

When you grow up poor or working class in our society, you are told, indirectly, hundreds of times each day, that you are a very limited person. You are told you are only good for certain things. If you see yourself as an equal to anyone in power, you are portrayed as arrogant, pushy, ungrateful, and “too big for your britches.” God forbid that a parent could know as much as a teacher, a teenager could know as much as a counselor, or a voter could know as much as an elected official. Over the years, and unfortunately now sometimes over entire generations, people learn that they must develop low expectations of themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods. You are the one who breaks the links in the chain or ties the chain tighter. You have the ability to be the first person to see the real potential that has been locked away. Look at yourself as an excellent talent scout. Try to not only recognize their abilities but also to fully count on those abilities. Organizers tell people that nothing can be accomplished without their involvement. We can only be successful if they become involved. Most professionals do the opposite. They frequently focus on what they can do for the client, resident, parent, and so on.

## ISSUE STRATEGY

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**Issue Strategy**—A detailed plan that addresses a problem in a clear, easy-to-follow, and measurable way

Strategy is key to any organizing effort. Change requires people to do things differently. Doing things differently requires thinking differently. Thinking differently comes from strategy. Think about your own family. If your younger sister always got her own way at your expense and you wanted to change this, how could you be successful? Would you just go to your parents and whine and

complain? You might. If you did, it would not work. Your parents would not want to listen to your whining and complaining and would see you as the cause of the problem. If, instead, you talked separately to your mom and dad about your sister and they both in their own way started to hint that they realized your sister was behaving a bit too immaturely, voilà, you now have gotten to the spot where strategy might get you results. Strategy must always be clear, easy to follow, easy to measure and reach achievable results in a reasonable period of time. The issues can't be so entrenched that they can't be addressed in a period of time that will hold people's interest and keep them involved.

Many organizers make the mistake of feeling that they are the ones saddled with the burden of devising a strategy. Strategy instead should evolve from input from a number of participants. You can have the kernel of an idea, but others help pop the kernel. The most effective strategies evolve from a series of discussions with committed individuals. Even if you are a brilliant strategist, strategy development should never be an "individual" responsibility. Say a brilliant strategist decides to brilliantly strategize all alone. If things later get sticky, watch what happens to a plan developed by a committee of one. Because no other participants were allowed to design the strategy, they begin to blame the solo artist. Instead, when the strategy evolves from an entire committed group, members of the group meet to retool, think together, stay on their toes, keep devising and revising strategies until they formulate a solution and achieve their goal. Now, to be realistic, some organizers are excellent strategists. They have the ability to stay ahead of the pack. They may remain a little quicker and more accurate than many of the people they are working with. If you are lucky enough to count yourself in this category, you still must develop everyone else's confidence so they learn to strategize as well. If you are not the greatest strategist, take notice! There are many others who are better. See how lucky you are?

## THE EXTRA WRINKLE—SOCIAL CAPITAL

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**Social Capital**—A series of relationships that cause people to want to help one another and be helped in return

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In my experience in conflict organizing, deciding on an issue followed a pretty simple formula with a series of steps that took you down the same

path no matter where you worked. In one-on-one interviews, you looked for what made people mad. You helped them to focus on a target for that anger. You personalized the target. You mobilized people to put pressure on the target. You sought concessions from the target. There was time pressure to achieve these concessions or it was feared that people would get frustrated, lose confidence, and give up. As a result, the issue had to be “winnable,” with the victory coming in a relatively short period of time. Once I began to believe there were limits to this approach, I wanted to move on and build additional relationships beyond just the people who were angry and suffering from the problem. I wanted to build connections with people outside the situation who might have their own self-interest in helping. I wanted to test an assumption that sometimes even those people or organizations causing the problem might be coaxed into becoming part of the solution. Robert Putnam describes this additional step of going beyond the “victims” and reaching out to others very well. Putnam is famous for writing the book *Bowling Alone* (2000). He won me over right away because the book jacket on the original hard-cover edition has a picture of him and his 12-year-old pals wearing their team bowling shirts. I mean, you have to like a guy who puts that photo on the cover. He writes a great deal about the concept of social capital. Social capital is the glue that holds communities together. It is a series of relationships that lead to social networks and people helping one another and being helped in return. Your extended family, church group, college roommates, poker buddies, and neighborhood crime watch participants can all be sources of important social capital. The denser the spiderweb of social capital, the stronger the community becomes. In other words, the relationships you build are valuable and as more relationships are built, power grows.

Organizers look inside the community to build relationships among the members. Putnam (2000) also looks inside the community and sees the need to build positive, reciprocal relationships in which the residents know one another and help one another. He calls the process “bonding.” Later, I came to the conclusion that there needed to be additional allies, friends, and partnerships with people outside the community. Putnam calls this effort “bridging.” I believed the working-class and poor communities I worked in needed to bond to grow stronger with residents helping residents, but they also needed to bridge to make new outside contacts to become even more effective. This process of bonding and bridging became the cornerstone of what is now called consensus organizing. I started to



think that issue selection still would be dependent on what the one-on-ones revealed but those one-on-ones also needed to be done on at least two parallel tracks. I had to determine what the self-interest and level of commitment was from potential reciprocal relationships stretching from inside to outside the community. What did both “sides” think? What topics were they interested in and why? What might be a way to get a commitment from them? How similar could proposed solutions become?

OK, as I said, this doubles your organizing work. But it also increases the chance that some real change can occur once an issue is pinpointed. If the issue can be framed in such a way that all involved want the same solution, we might be on to a pretty different and promising approach. For now, just try to let the idea of consensus organizing sink in a little. It helped one little neighborhood. Could it stand the test of one of the toughest, problematic, divided regions in the nation? Can you even conceive of the area we are going to on our trip? Let's really put the model to the test.

## WHY DON'T THEY JUST LEAVE?

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Dave Bergholz had been a musician, student activist, and community organizer. He never hesitated to give his opinion, get in your face to defend it, and always feel he was right. Dave Bergholz was an interesting guy and in 1985 he worked for an interesting organization: The Allegheny Conference on Community Development. The “Conference,” as it is called in Pittsburgh, was the ultimate good-old-boy network. You served on the board based on earning the position of chief executive officer in one of Pittsburgh's major corporate headquarters. Pittsburgh, despite its rather small size, has a very high percentage of companies that choose it as their international home. The Conference did not allow any delegation to vice presidents, public relations staff, or executive aides. If you were the CEO of Westinghouse, Heinz, U.S. Steel, or Mellon Bank you were asked to serve, expected to serve, and, as a result, you served. Bergholz has a striking resemblance to a bulldog. Saying he is intense is not quite capturing his true essence. He had an interesting pre-Conference life. He was an ex-1960s hippie, guitar-playing folksinger who, because of his supreme intellect, analytical ability, and political skills, had earned his way into the position of conference assistant director. In 1985, he wanted to see me. I had met him through my earlier Perry Hilltop work. He wanted to

talk about a region of small towns that lined the Monongahela River right outside Pittsburgh city limits. The area was called the Mon Valley, shortened from the name of the river that ran through all the small towns. By the mid-1980s, the economy of the region had dried up. The towns were built completely around the steel industry. Coal, mined in nearby West Virginia, was sent up the river to these towns where factories were built to make the steel. Downtown Pittsburgh housed the white-collar workers and projected the corporate presence. These steel mills, however, had enormous impact on the entire United States. The mills and the workers in them produced the steel that helped win the Second World War. They made the steel that built the Golden Gate Bridge. The region was so famous and so “state-of-the-art” that former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, when planning his historic U.S. visit, wanted to see two things: Disneyland and the U.S. Steel Homestead Works in Mon Valley.

By the mid-1980s, no one famous wanted to see anything in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Steel production had peaked decades earlier. Now, one by one, the factories were closing. This was a difficult time for the region. This was different from all the other cyclical slowdowns that had occurred before it. This time the closings were permanent. Experts predicted that 120,000 jobs would simply disappear.

Steel and banking executives, sitting on the Conference board, had made these decisions to close the factories. Lives of the families of the steelworkers were changing in dramatic ways. Incomes that had allowed families to achieve middle-class status had fallen through the floor. Men went from well-paying union jobs with excellent benefits to service jobs at or near the minimum wage. Many became permanently unemployed. Back in Buffalo, New York, my pals from the Eastside, who had laughed at the absurdity of going to college when you could make good money at the factory, also were being laid off. As they received their last paychecks, I was taking an elevator to the top of the U.S. Steel building in Pittsburgh. The view was breathtaking. To the north you could see Perry Hilltop. To the south you could see the first of a string of closed steel mills. The sky had lost the orange tint I used to anticipate on trips from Buffalo to Pittsburgh with my brother. Mr. Bergholz was ready to see me now.

Dave is a very direct bulldog. He cut right to the chase. He knew I had some experience organizing a community credit union in the Mon Valley; he knew about how I worked. He and his boss, Bob Pease, and the Allegheny Conference board of CEOs had been strategizing about the Mon

Valley. There were thousands of very angry people looking for someone to blame. Who better to blame than the corporations? Bergholz wanted to know what I would recommend that they do. Have you ever had an opportunity to tell people what to do when you have no responsibility for following through? It's fun. I talked and talked. Then, after listening very carefully, he said something that almost made me slide off my chair. He said that he liked my suggestions and offered me a job. Me? My father was a warehouse worker who never went to high school, let alone college. My mother cleaned other people's houses for a living. I did go to college, but it was Buffalo State, not Harvard or Stanford. CEOs? Billionaires? I thought, come on, is this some sick joke? I knew these people might respect my strategic ability, but to hire me was to say something entirely different. Hiring me was saying that they trusted me as if I was one of them. To take the job meant that I was saying something about my roots and myself. It would be like a peon being invited to rub elbows with the upper crust. Class issues are seldom talked about but often deeply felt. I said no as politely and gently as I could.

I clenched my fists on my armchair. I looked out at the skyline. I braced myself for what I thought would be a venomous tirade. I expected a vindictive speech about how I was an ungrateful idiot who would never work in this town again. Or maybe even worse, he might make an effort to accentuate the salary and explain what the opportunity would do for my status and career. I could not have been more wrong. I knew Bergholz was brilliant, but I didn't know how brilliant. He looked into my blue-collar, Catholic, working-class eyes and taught me the supreme power of understanding another person's values. He knew yelling would backfire. He would have justified my decision if he had become vindictive. He didn't appeal to my desire for money or status because I had no such desire. Instead, he became as calm as I ever saw him and said, "Well, then we won't hire anyone else to try to help these people because we only trust you." He played the guilt card. He knew every time I watched the news and saw an aimless protest march, every time I heard about an ex-steelworker on a bridge contemplating suicide, every time I saw the line stretched around the corner at the food bank, I would think about what I might have been able to do to help. I said, "When do we start?"

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Every person has different ways in which he or she can be effectively motivated. The key is to understand how to motivate each particular person.

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When people heard about my new job, they were in complete shock, and so was I. A few non-organizing friends thought it was a terrific opportunity but even they couldn't believe the Allegheny Conference wanted me to work for them. I knew that my life was going to change the next day when I realized I had only one suit. I couldn't wear it Monday through Friday. So I went downtown to Kaufman's Department Store. The salesman asked if I had gotten a new job. He said that most people that buy several suits at once had gotten a new job. With only passing interest, he asked where I would be working, and when I told him, he gave frantic instructions to the tailor to make sure he got everything just right. These suits were going to be worn in the offices of the Allegheny Conference. This made me feel extremely uncomfortable. I was afraid no one would think I was no longer the same person. I was the same kid who had sat in the dentist's office years earlier. Except now, strangers were reacting to me with something other than pity. It made me feel just as confused as when I was at the dentist's office.

It was my first day in the office at the top of the U.S. Steel building and I was 15 minutes early. I stopped at Weiner World for a cup of coffee and looked straight up; I noticed how worried I was that I would spill the Weiner World coffee on my brand new suit. It was the first time I ever had worried while in Weiner World. On my first day, I saw how much independence I would be given. The entire staff was friendly and they all kept asking me enthusiastically, "What exactly are you going to be doing for us?" I had no job description, no specific tasks, and there was no orientation for me to attend. I decided to put my thoughts down on paper. I thought, reflected, and planned. Every day I got memos about what the rest of the staff was doing. It was important stuff about the mayor, the governor, and the state legislature. On the bus on the way home, a headline in the paper quoted U.S. Steel CEO, David Roderick, who had announced more layoffs. When he was asked what advice he would give to the ex-steelworkers he said, "Why don't they just move?" This was not going to be a walk in the park.

## HOW'S THE CRANSHAW?

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I was developing a series of simple ideas and shaping them into a proposal. Although Mon Valley steelworkers were similarly affected by all the disinvestments and plant closings, I knew the residents fell into three ideological camps. Camp number one felt the closings were the result of the greed of international corporations that had figured out how to use slave labor

overseas, leaving the Mon Valley raped and devastated. Camp number two felt that the greedy, self-serving, shortsighted unions had bled the company dry with outrageous, irresponsible wage and benefit demands that sapped profits and forced the closures. Camp number three felt that the poor and minorities were always discriminated against by both the company and the union, and it was only because white people were losing their jobs that the current situation was being noticed. These three views were loaded with negative stereotypes. There was an almost total absence of trust. I felt that the first step needed was to create an “atmosphere” in which reinvestment could occur. To do that, these negative stereotypes would have to be dismantled. Some stereotypes are built on partial truths. I felt the need to chip away at these by understanding an organizing technique I call “The exception to your rule.” For instance, if people saw Mon Valley residents as lazy and uncreative, mired in yearning for a past that would never return, you must recruit residents that completely refute that image. You then say, “Wait until you meet this person”—he or she is the exception to your rule. If someone finds CEOs to be uncaring, fat-bottomed rich guys who never worked hard a day in their life, you find a decent, concerned, hardworking CEO to present as the exception to the rule. In either case, you would never lecture people about how unfair and incorrect their stereotypes were. People do not stop stereotyping because someone tells them to. Rather, stereotyping disappears when experience teaches people to decide for themselves that the stereotype no longer applies. In our society, we are the captains of our ships when it comes to stereotypes. We hold onto them as long as we want to. People don’t badger us into throwing them overboard. They remain aboard our ships until we say otherwise.

I knew that real change was needed in the Mon Valley. Real results had to occur. We didn’t have years to spend planning, thinking, and searching for order. Jobs had to be created, houses had to be built and renovated, and new businesses had to be started up. No comprehensive master plans, visioning exercises, or group wish lists would lead to anything. Real people from the Mon Valley had to do something concrete, lead something, and make something happen. If the local people took the lead, I felt that others from corporations and the government would have to help them by becoming willing and enthusiastic partners. Lastly, people from the small Mon Valley towns had to learn to work together. Everyone was in the same boat. Past competitiveness between towns had to stop. The townspeople needed to think regionally and develop regionally while maintaining their small-town identities.

My first step was to listen to community members throughout the Mon Valley. By listening carefully, I would determine what interests the community members held in common (perhaps to create jobs). I would test their commitment to work on a project rather than just demanding that someone else do it. Residents would then agree on a specific strategy (for instance, buying and renovating a building on Main Street and 8th Avenue) and reach out for partners from beyond the Mon Valley (investors, businesses, etc.). There you have it—a strategy. I presented my ideas to Pease and Bergholz. They liked what they heard. I thought I had the support that I needed. Then, they told me that to proceed, I would need the support of the entire corporate board. To gain their support, it would be my responsibility to make a presentation. I would be given 10 minutes.

I knew I needed to package my ideas for an audience that might as well have been aliens from another planet. They knew absolutely nothing about me and I knew very little about them. Before I got my 10-minute window, I wanted to tag along with my bosses to learn the art of effective communication in the corporate world. Frequently, meetings between staff and a CEO were held over meals at the city's most prestigious downtown private eating establishment, the Duquesne Club. This place was the kind of operation that I had seen once or twice in movies. I was to walk the 6 blocks over to "The club" with Bob Pease. He walked so fast with enormous strides and perfect posture. I almost had to run to keep up with him. I felt like the smaller of the two dogs in a cartoon begging the big dog to let me tag along. When we got to the club, I saw giant pillars, the doorman, the red carpet, and I fell flat on my face. That's right. I tripped on the plush carpet. The doorman dusted off my Kaufman suit and kept calling me "sir." Pease didn't notice that I fell; he was already through the brass doors. I had never seen so many chandeliers in my life. The table and servers were waiting; everything seemed to be waiting for us. We were to meet with one guy. We were 2 minutes early. He was exactly on time. I shook his hand. My luncheon companions started talking about golf—doglegs, sand traps, 3 irons, and tee shots. I bowl. Then they shifted to higher education, "Has Jonathan chosen?" One son is leaning toward Brown; his dad was pushing for Yale. Hey, I thought, want to talk about Buffalo State? Then it was on to wives. Charity balls apparently take up a lot of time. I started to sweat. My boss was supposed to be hitting this guy up for money and we were three fourths of the way through lunch and the question of money was nowhere near the table.

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Relationships are crucial when you are trying to get something accomplished.

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The server went through the desserts. I'm a pie man myself and luckily they had pie. My confidence rose because I could make a selection I could relate to. That is until Bob Pease inquired, "How's the cranshaw?" He turned to the other guy who said forcefully, "What a splendid idea. Let's all have cranshaw." I had no idea what it was. This was terrifying to me because it meant there was a distinct possibility that I wouldn't know how to eat it. I had visions of flames, cream, and special spoons. Five minutes later I saw three slices of melon arrive, bearing a striking resemblance to what I've always called cantaloupe. I felt like I still had a few things to learn. Lunch was over, hands were shaken, and we were walking over the speed limit back to the office. Not once had money come up in the conversation. I guessed that even someone with as much expertise as Pease in this case just couldn't come up with an opening to discuss money. I asked him what went wrong. Pease looked at me like you would look at someone who couldn't open a childproof aspirin bottle. "What are you talking about? We got the money." He explained that he would be sending a letter asking for it officially, sliding it in with a rehash of the luncheon topics. He said simply, "We already had the relationship." It was a lesson I needed to remember. I especially needed to remember it during my 10 minutes of fame.

The day of the presentation, I got to the Duquesne Club 20 minutes early. The same doorman was on duty, and this time I didn't trip. The only person in the special private meeting room of the special private club was David Roderick, CEO of U.S. Steel. He was staring at the agenda. He had circled the discussion item number three, the Mon Valley Proposal—M. Eichler. He never looked up at me. The others filed in. We ate quickly. (Macaroons—no cranshaw.) It was my turn. Everything had a soft haze around it, like before the medication kicks in prior to oral surgery. The chairperson was friendly to me and introduced me in an upbeat, eager manner. I hit on all cylinders. I spoke crisply and confidently. The chair said, "Thank you very much. Any questions?" Only one meaty hand rose. The heads all turned. It was Roderick. He was red. The gist of his reaction was that he felt the Conference had no obligation to provide any help whatsoever. There would never be a future for this region, and that was that in the eyes of Roderick. I knew he was about to conclude. He was driving the last nail into the region's coffin and my body was down there, too. The boys were picking up their shovels. The chair glanced back at me as if to say, "Good luck kid, I wish you could climb out of the coffin, but I don't see how." I remember seeing Pease at the earlier fund-raising meeting. These men did not have a relationship with me. They had a relationship with Roderick. If I disagreed with him, I was dead. If I remained silent, I was dead. I looked him directly in the eye and

pretended as best I could that we were lifelong pals. I acted as though I had the relationship. I pointed my finger at him and with every ounce of confidence I could convey, I said enthusiastically, "You are absolutely right, Mr. Roderick, and it is for all those reasons that you so eloquently mentioned that we have to begin this program immediately!" Well, what I said made no sense whatsoever. It just had to look as if there was no conflict or difference of opinion between the two of us. Lots of these corporate leaders actually wanted to help. They just would not risk ruining a business relationship. The chairman emphatically intoned "Fine, all those in favor?" Bang! Approved! I had my program mandate. There was reason to celebrate. Cranshaw for everyone!

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When in doubt, agree!

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Issue analysis requires an ability to focus on something that can hold the interest of a lot of people. Remember not to choose an issue *you* think people should be interested in. Instead, choose something *they* are interested in. Suppose you are working for a social service agency that is located in a building that is hard to reach for most of the population you are trying to serve. If you went to your supervisor with the goal of making the services more accessible, you would need to strategize about the nature of the issue. There is a huge difference between telling your boss the issue is the agency's insensitivity to the clients; rather you should frame the issue as meeting the funder's goal of serving 500 families. In the first case, you have alienated the clients from your supervisor and the funders. In the second case, you have presented a way for them all to see eye to eye. OK, we've reached one of those occasions when a diagram might help a bit (see Figure 3.1).

1. Listen to community members (one-on-one)
2. Determine the common interests of community members (hearing similar things over and over)
3. Commitment (people are willing to try to do something about it)
4. Agreement on strategy
5. Reach out for partners (bridge social capital beyond the community)

**Figure 3.1** Issues Analysis



### Reflection Questions

1. What is the difference between an organizer's one-on-one meeting and a client's meeting with a therapist?
2. Why is it important for a poor or working-class neighborhood to increase its social capital?
3. If you wanted to become a community organizer, how would you explain it to your family?
4. Why was Roberto Clemente inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame immediately?
5. Why is it important to measure commitment rather than just analyze the problem?

### REFERENCE

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Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

