



Free Congress Foundation Commentary

The Next Conservatism #47: Building the Next Conservative Movement

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In the last two essays, I have argued that the next conservatism needs a new conservative movement. In my more than forty years in Washington, I have been involved in building more than one movement. There is a political mechanics involved that works pretty much the same way for any movement. Here, I want to share with you briefly how that mechanics of movement-building works.

The first step is to identify a target list. Who do you want to reach? For the most part, your target list will be people and organizations who already share some of your views, and who are likely to be interested in what your new movement wants to accomplish.

Next, you need to send out field teams to do audits. You want to audit each potential ally or target group on its own ground. Your audit asks questions such as:

- What local organizations are effective?
- What is their home ground?
- Who do they reach?
- How do they communicate?
- Who are their most effective leaders?

The audit is your map; it tells you the lay of the land, so you know who to talk to, who is real and who isn't.

Then you need to identify your own leader. It has to be someone other people can look to as a leader, and it has to be someone who is willing to take risks. You cannot build a new movement just by playing it safe all the time. As Napoleon said, if you are going to make an omelet, you have to break some eggs.

The next step is to get your leader together with the people and organizations your audit has identified as potential allies. He needs to have a written statement of your new movement's goals. For the most part, anyone who will sign on to those goals can be part of your movement. There will be cases, however, where your leader has to recognize that some groups may be unacceptable to other groups your movement needs more.

Then comes the single most important element. As your coalition of interested groups and individuals grows, you must maintain constant communication with them. They must always be receiving something new and interesting from you, including not only information but also activities in which they can join. Constant communication is the lifeblood of any movement, and if it is not maintained, the movement will die. Fortunately, thanks to the internet and other new technologies, it is technically much easier and much less expensive to maintain constant communication today than it was when I began in conservative politics in the 1960s.

While your new movement's leadership must always be open to communications from your troops in the field, it is a mistake to think any movement will just "happen" on a bottom-up basis. For the most part, your troops will be asking you, "What should we do?" Your leadership must be pro-active in coming up with things for them to do, things that will hold their interest while advancing your movement's cause.

Again, this is a simplified version of the mechanics of movement-building, but it touches on all the basics. Remember, no matter how good your message, without the right mechanics it will go nowhere.

With a correct, proven approach to political mechanics, I have no question that it is possible to build a new movement around the next conservatism. If I were twenty years younger, I would do it myself. In

fact, I would enjoy doing it. Nothing has been more rewarding in my career than working with the many good people who make up the conservative grass roots.

As it is, building the new movement is a task I will have to leave to others to lead. But I do stand ready to advise and assist them with all I have learned over more than four decades of building conservative movements. Creating the next conservative movement is something that needs to be done and can be done.

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