Strategies for Changing Public Opinion

Some issues are too controversial for legislative fixes. The public outcry that would commence immediately upon the mere mention of even the possibility of controversial legislation can be enough to send even the most battle-hardened legislator into hiding. Before legislation is a possibility, you need to change the public’s perception of your issue.

Most likely there is a general misunderstanding or prevailing myth about your issue that needs to change before it can be honestly addressed. For example, there is a presumption from people that all those currently residing in a corrective institution are violent offenders that need to be locked up forever to keep society safe. While it is true that there are some offenders in corrective custody that are a danger to society, it is far from the whole picture. But until you convince the general public that this notion is a myth, elected officials will be wary to wade into the controversy.

Moving public opinion doesn’t happen all at once, and honestly sometimes it doesn’t happen at all. But if you are passionate about your issue, there is no reason not to put in the effort.

Talk to Everyone – Never underestimate the power of talking to friends, neighbors, acquaintances, colleagues, family, and anyone else you may come across about your particular issue. You never know who you may be talking to or who those you’ve spoken to will pass your information along to. It truly is a small world; you’d be amazed at how effective word-of-mouth actually can be.

Speak to Groups – Many community groups, local clubs, civic organizations, and trade/industry groups are constantly searching for speakers for their events. Take advantage of these opportunities by reaching out to them or keeping track of their areas of interest. Your issue may somehow tie into their mission. By speaking and educating them on your issue and how your issue relates to theirs, you may have just swayed an entire group of people to look at your issue in a more favorable light!
Use the Media – Getting your word out to the masses is most effective through media outlets and is where most people get information regarding public policy.

- Get to know the media, let them get to know you.
  - Read, watch, or listen to see which sources/reporters pay attention to your issue area, and then introduce yourself to them.
  - Send a packet of information with a personal note offering your help. Serve as a resource for information and quotes. BE SURE TO INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION.
  - Follow-up your informational packet with a personal phone call reiterating your offer to be a resource when needed.
  - Contact them occasionally with real life stories (reporting gold), results of a new survey or report, your viewpoint/reaction on a local story or national trend, etc.
  - Become their go-to-expert on your issue. When a story happens regarding your issue, work to make sure they think of you.

- Write an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor
- Call into a talk radio show
- Get interviewed by a reporter
- Get booked on a local TV show

Swaying public opinion is an incredibly useful, and sometimes necessary, tool that anyone hoping to shape public policy would do well to learn. Take the time to learn the above tactics and watch your agenda move forward.