

“The Struggle”

The goal of this outreach is to obtain true stories of struggles from members of our community. We are seeking to raise awareness of the breadth and scope of problems such as systemic injustice and inequality. Because of our nation's moral failures, millions of our neighbors are suffering. We are dedicated to helping them give voice to their struggles in order to raise awareness and increase empathy in our nation. As you are engaging in this outreach campaign, please keep in mind the breadth and scope of needless suffering that we are seeking to ameliorate. Please keep in mind that many Americans are so privileged that they truly don't realize the breadth and scope of injustice and inequality. Your mission is to help people tell their stories of struggles so that we can confront ignorance with truth.

The three MOST important principles:

- 1. Genuine smiles**
- 2. Eye contact**
- 3. True listening**

If you've never done anything like this before your biggest concern is probably about what to say. Toss that worry away. What you say when you approach someone is not nearly as important as your presence. Are you out there because of genuine concern for people? Let that show. There's nothing more important to an outreach like this than simply conveying that you care. And genuine smiles, eye contact and true listening will cover a multitude of clumsy words. Remember, your primary goal isn't to spread information; it is to learn about people's experiences.

If all you can muster is “Hey, I'm with the Poor People's Campaign, and I want to know about problems you encounter so our campaign can help solve them,” people will talk to you. They will tell you their stories. Because people want to be heard. People especially want to be heard when they are struggling. But is this the best way? The most respectful way? The most natural way?

How do you usually greet people? . . .

. . .

That's right. You just say, “hello.”

Since this outreach is about starting conversations, let's plan to start each conversation like thousands upon thousands of conversations you've started in your life.

You: Hello / Hi / How are you doing today? / How's it going? / etc.

You: Listen. (Practice TRUE LISTENING. Don't be worrying about what you are going to say next. Just listen. There is a good chance that they will say something like “How's your day been?” back to you - especially if you are wearing a GENUINE SMILE and keeping EYE CONTACT.

When someone asks “how is your day going” or anything similar like “what are you doing” or - probably the most abrupt you'll get - “what do you want,” give them an honest answer. So if somebody asks about your day, tell them. Don't launch into information about the campaign. That isn't what they asked about. If part of your honest answer includes mentioning that people have shared their stories with you, there's a good chance they'll ask more questions about that. There's also a good chance they'll simply start telling you their story. Because . . .

People want to talk about themselves. You just need to give them the opportunity.

But what if someone says something like, “what do you want?” First, don’t assume they don’t want to talk to you. They’re just more forward than most people are. Second, give them an honest answer. I can’t tell you what your honest answer is. Maybe it is something like, “I want to help solve poverty in America.” Maybe it’s “I want to hear how your day is going.” Maybe it’s “What I WANT is to be home in a bubble bath with a bottle of wine. But we have a huge problem with poverty in Hawaii. And I want more people to be aware how big this issue is. So I’m talking to people about their experiences and about what people or the government might be able to do to help make life better for them.”

So start a conversation. There’s a good chance that once they know that you are gathering stories about people’s struggles, they’ll simply start sharing about themselves. Once this happens make sure that you are TRULY LISTENING. As long as you’re listening, you’ll know what to say because it will be following up on information they’ve shared with you. Make sure you aren’t waiting for an “opening” to get in what you want to say. This isn’t about you. It’s about them - their story.

Here are some questions that you’ll probably find yourself asking often as follow-ups to what the person is sharing with you:

- What do you think people should know about _____ that they might not realize?
- Do you feel like people in government understand your struggles?
- Do you feel like people in government understand [the situation that they just described]?
- What do you think would help you most with [the situation that they just described]?
- If you weren’t spending so much time _____ [something they’ve described having to do in order to get by], what would you like to be doing instead?
- If you weren’t spending so much on housing/transportation/insurance/etc. [that they’ve mentioned], what would you like to be able to set some money aside for?
- [If they mention a problem caused by inequality/corruption/stupidity/racism/bigotry/etc.] You mentioned that X happens because of Y. Do you think there are even more problems caused by Y?

“Tell me more about that.”

You should consider using this phrase quite frequently. You’ll be amazed how much you can get someone to share by simply keeping a GENUINE SMILE and maintaining EYE CONTACT while TRULY LISTENING. If you’re doing these three things a simple “Tell me more about that” when they take an extended pause will often be enough to get them going again. If you’re really interested in something they said earlier you can say, “Tell me more about [what they said earlier that you are interested in]” or “Earlier you mentioned _____, can you tell me more about that?”

Audio Recordings

If you have experience with interviewing people in a live format with a recording, that is fine. However, if you have little to no experience doing so, we ask you not take audio recordings on this occasion.

Should you have the training and expertise to make such a recording that might be of use to local media, please be sure to have whomever you speak with to provide the following on the recording:

- 1) Their name
- 2) Their express consent to use their voice recording
- 3) A contact telephone number for a press representative to follow up for fact-checking purposes

Here are some pieces of information that people are likely to ask about:

- What are you guys doing?
 - Possible reply: We're gathering stories from people who want others to understand what life is like for them.
- How is that going to help?
 - Possible reply: Unfortunately a lot of people aren't aware how difficult life is for others. Right now we're building support and raising awareness so that we can take big, meaningful direct actions later.
- What kinds of actions are you going to take?
 - Possible reply: Once we've built a big enough group of people, we're all going to work together to determine what actions would best help address the struggles people are facing. What do you think would be most helpful [to solve _____]?
- What do you want to do with my information?
 - Possible reply: I want to hear your story. IF you want your story or part of your story shared, we can do that. But I want to hear about what you're going through even if you aren't okay with it being shared.
- What laws are you trying to pass?
 - Possible reply: The Poor People's Campaign isn't focused on specific legislation. It's focused on fundamental principles like voting rights and human dignity. You should check out PoorPeoplesCampaign.org when you can. What sorts of laws do you think are most important for helping Americans right now? (The purpose of asking this question is to learn more about them, not to start discussing/debating issues. Listen to them. Don't argue. Follow-up on their suggestions by asking about the reasons behind their suggestions.)

Don't dodge questions. Answer them directly and honestly. Give them any information they ask for. Tell them if you don't know the answer to something they ask. But segue back to their story. This outreach is about them, not you or the Poor People's Campaign. In addition to encouraging them to share their story with you, make sure that you are encouraging them to check out PoorPeoplesCampaign.org and that you are inviting them to the event. We want people to be able to speak at the event on June 18th. Be inviting people to this event. Encourage them to come even if they don't want to share. They can still be there for support.

Whether you are greeting a new person, asking follow-up questions or answering their questions remember that the three most important principles are . . .

1. **Genuine smiles**
2. **Eye contact**
3. **True listening**

Miscellaneous tips:

- When possible be on the same level as the person you are greeting or speaking with. For example, if they are sitting you should be sitting. Ask permission before you sit next to someone.
- Introduce yourself after the first exchange of pleasantries or before the first **"Tell me more about that."**
Example: "By the way, I'm _____. [Pause for chance for them to introduce themselves] Hey, earlier you mentioned _____. Can you tell me more about that?"
- Share bits of information about yourself. But do this in moderation because your focus is on their story. Use the information you share about yourself to show that you are listening to their story and/or to recognize commonalities between your life and theirs. Don't be a "one-upper."