Non-Violent Direct Action

App. 1 hour 45 minutes

Materials: Definitions of “Direct Action” and “Violence” on butcher paper, “violent” “non-violent” “I'd do it” “I wouldn't do it” signs, Cop Hats, Batons, Masking tape (to mark injuries)

Introduction

5 minutes)

• Introduce trainers
• In this workshop, we want to focus on non-violent tactics rather than the history behind non-violence. Any discussion of theory of non-violence will be directly related to thinking strategically about the safety and effectiveness of specific tactics that we call non-violent.
• Who has:
  * deescalated a situation (in activism or not)
  * used consensus
  * been to a protest
  * been to a non-violence or direct action training
  * done CD or direct action
  * been arrested
• We don’t have the absolute answers. For discussions to be useful, please speak up – especially minority opinions.
• For this training, we’re going to use this definition of direct action: Achieving your goals by the most direct means possible - with the fewest intermediaries.
• Successful campaigns usually use a mix of direct and indirect actions. The Civil Rights movement used sit-ins as well as lobbying.

Defining Violence

(15 minutes)

Matrix of Morality – so what is violent, anyways?
(10 min)

[Make the room a spectrum of violent to nonviolent from left to right, and “I would do it” and “I wouldn't do it” from top to bottom. You'll give participants some hypothetical situations and actions, and they'll move to a place in the room that shows how much they think that action (in that situation) is violent, and how likely they are to do it.]

[Put signs on the four walls of the room - two walls with "Violent" on one wall and "Non-Violent" on the opposite wall, and two walls with "I would do it" on one wall and "I would not do it" on the opposite wall.]

[In a small group, you can get everyone to talk at least once by asking two people per question why they're standing where they are.]

• We’re going to give you some hypothetical situations, and you're going to move to a place based on whether you personally would do it, and whether you personally think it's violent.
• This is a spectrum, so if you feel really wishy-washy about something, you can stand towards the middle. For example, "Destruction of private property." [trainers move to appropriate location]
• We’ll ask folks why they’re standing where they are, but you can pass if you don’t want to answer. “[Trainer], why are you standing there for ‘Destruction of private property?’”

Hypothetical questions:
- destruction of private property
- ownership of private property
- dropping bombs
- paying taxes
- eating meat
- imposing economic sanctions
- physically restraining a person from smashing a window
- throwing tear gas canisters back at cops

**What Is Nonviolence?**

(5 min)

- As we can see by this exercise, we all have different definitions of violence and, therefore, non-violence. What are some definitions that people have of violence?
- For the sake of this training, we’ll define violence as: The use of force to harm or intimidate a person. Obviously, this is just a working definition so that we can get through this next hour productively, not the final say on what violence is.
- Also for the sake of this training, we are going to focus on direct violence. That is, a cop hitting you over the head rather than the concept of private property or racism. It is important to not perpetuate violent behaviors & assumptions in our work. This means recognizing and combating personal racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc. in ourselves and others. But that’s a whole other workshop.
- Non-violence is a tactical approach that involves finding ways to achieve our goals without harming people. [emphasize this point/concept throughout]
- Sometimes, the concepts of non-violence and pacifism are used interchangeably. They aren’t the same. Non-violence is a set of tactics (aka a strategy) and pacifism is a set of beliefs (that is, an ideology).

**Why use non-violent direct action?**

(10 minutes)

**Safety**

- On the street, they help to ensure safety of individuals and groups
- Scared cops are dangerous cops – but mention that cops often get violent when your protest is effective, whether or not you use violence
- Some organizers will come up with Action Guidelines, like “No groups or individuals will engage in violence, verbal or physical, etc. etc.”
- To make protests more inviting to people who aren’t active yet
- Less likely to be nailed by the criminal Ju$tice system
- Protecting folks who are targeted

**Effectiveness**

Being effective can mean many different things. It’s a good idea to first determine the purpose or goal of direct action so you can choose a tactic that is most likely to be effective (i.e. fulfill the purpose or meet the goal)

**Some potential goals/purposes of non-violent direct action**

- create a spectacle to bring attention to an issue through mainstream media
- educate public on certain issue/ change public opinion through visibility on street
- disrupt normal order of things
- shut down meetings or events
• impact those in power through their pocketbooks
• create a visible show of resistance and inspire others
• to have fun and stay active

Some things to think about:
• Non-violent direct action as a strategy used in conjunction with other strategies (outreach, education, legislation, armed revolution) in order to effect social change that is wide in scope and long-term. The ANC in South Africa successfully fought Apartheid using mostly grassroots organizing, but also non-violence and violence against military and civilian targets.

Some Non-Violent Direct Actions
• Sitting in intersections / Locking down
• Sit-ins, Kiss-ins, Cough-ins, Die-ins
• Banner hangs
• Walkouts
• Taking over a welfare office
• Billboard redecoration / Public Art (Graffiti)
• Homeless encampment in front of city hall
• Giving free food to people in public places
• Workplace strikes
• Property Destruction

Dealing with violence in a non-violent way
(35 minutes)

Hassle line role play (15 min)
Have people split up into two lines facing each other.
Scenario: One line is blockading the entrance to a GAP, the other line are customers trying to get in to shop; cut after five minutes

Discussion about de-escalation
What did the shoppers do?
• Targeted ‘weak points’
• Teamed up
• Getting angry
• Personal attacks / physical attacks

What did the protesters do?
• Deescalated, calmed things down
• Planned ahead of time (sound bites, chants, contingency plans)
• Teamed up to help each other
• talked to shoppers & identified with them
• body language, tone of voice, eye contact
• mirroring

To sum up:
• Be prepared – with talking points, chants, alternative shopping venues, contingency plans, etc
• Know and trust each other
• Be aware of what’s happening around you
• Know your goals
• De-escalation is key to non-violence strategies. Keep your eyes open and defuse problems before they occur.

[Switch roles and do it again. Option: To make it more difficult, this time the people trying to get in are working class folks trying to get to their jobs or trying to cash their paycheck before banks close for the weekend.]

**Quick Decision Making** (10 min)
During an action, it's important to make decisions everyone can live with because people are putting themselves at risk. But, you usually have to make decisions quickly. How can you do both?

- Figure out your quick decision-making process **before** the action.
- Brainstorm ways to make quick decisions
  - Majority rules, temporary leader, no-block rule, etc.
  - Brainstorm ways for everyone to be happy & safe even if you can’t agree
    - “Buddy” system for people who want to/need to leave
    - Recognizing/Defining at-risk roles and “support” roles. Discuss everyone’s risk-tolerance and choose roles so that everyone can participate in the action even if they don’t want to risk arrest or violence.
  - Non-arrest risk roles are as important as any others.

**Police Liaison Role Play** (10 min)
[Scenario: Participants are in a large group picketing an ROTC building. Two police officers (trainers) arrive and try to make them leave, though they are vague about why. When everyone talks and yells at once, the cops call for backup and declare an unlawful assembly.]

What happened?
- Different activists were communicating conflicting things to the cops.
- They did not agree on what they would and would not compromise on.
- With everyone talking, the cops can’t understand anyone.
- The situation escalated until the cops called for backup and they got arrested when they maybe didn’t have to.

How could this situation have been handled differently and maybe not resulted in arrest?
- Key lesson: Use a police liaison to more effectively communicate with cops.
  - A police liaison can stall for time.
  - The police liaison is not kissing ass, is not going to try to be their buddy, and is not adversarial. You should approach it as a business relationship.
  - This means communicating the starting point for negotiating (where they’ll go, whether they’ll quiet down, etc.), and then serving as a go-between for the cops and protesters.
  - This does **not** mean making decisions for the group.
  - Negotiate with the "ranking officer" or the highest ranking officer present, as he/she is almost always the one in charge (or at least responsible for what happens).
  - A police liaison should go out to meet approaching cops so that he/she can talk to them away from the group or action, thus taking the heat off of your friends and giving you more of a chance to de-escalate.
  - Since the police liaison is closest to the cops and maybe giving them bad news, you have a higher risk of arrest.
  - Cops will want to talk to the “leader” — that is, the straightest, whitest, biggest, male-est person. Work out group dynamics around these issues ahead of time.

//Repeat the role play if time allows. Let participants choose a police liaison, and remind them to
meet the cops as far away from the protest as possible. The cops should threaten and give them a hard time. End the roleplay when the police liaison communicates the cops' demands to the activists. Debrief: Did the police liaison: meet the cops far from the protest, successfully listen to the cops demands, communicate to the cops that they'll have to talk to the protesters, and then actually communicate it to the protesters.

Street Tactics
(35 minutes)
• Now we're going to talk about physical tactics that are used to protect people from police violence in the streets.
• These exercises involve some pushing and grabbing. If participants have any injuries that affect how they can participate, they should put some masking tape on that area so everyone knows to be careful.

Sitting
[Role play this situation with some or all participants: Participants are blockading a street. Trainers (acting as cops) try to push them back. People will fall down, an officer will say “I was assaulted!” and pepper spray people, etc. Then debrief – when everyone tries to push back against the cops, it's dangerous, scary & escalates the situation. Also, with a real line of cops, you'll usually lose that fight. Solution: everyone sits in place.] Sitting in place is good because:
  • it's visually de-escalating
  • impossible to push a group that's seated
  • safer than meeting force with force
[Practice sitting in place so that everyone can sit without falling all over each other. (Hint: cross your feet at the ankles and sit on them.)]

Amoeba
[Same scenario, but after participants sit, the cops try to grab someone from the front of the line (“There's the organizer! Get her!”). Then debrief – it's dangerous and scary to be the object of a tug-of-war between protesters & cops. Lots of opportunity to touch (meaning assault) officers. Also discuss who gets targeted (people of color, “leaders”, people in black, trannies, etc).]

[Solution: The crowd absorbs the target like an amoeba absorbing a morsel of food. The target scoots back, the people behind open a spot and pull them through, the people in the front line close the gap. The targeted person keeps moving until they're pooped out the back of the amoeba]
  • Ideally the target should get pooped out the back of the crowd and get away.
  • The cops can't get into the middle of a tight seated crowd.
  • Affinity Groups should practice this together.
[Practice this a few times. Each time rotate so that everyone gets a chance to be in the front row. Trainers can go after a new person as soon as their first target gets absorbed.]

Puppy pile
[Next level: same scenario, but the cops grab the target before they can get absorbed, and start beating them with batons. Solution: puppy pile. Basically, people drape themselves over the victim, trying to spread the hits from 1 person's head to 3 people's butts.]
  • Try to cover the person's head and torso
  • Victim should be in the fetal position on their side so they can breathe
  • Everyone should guard their heads and necks with their arms and hands
  • This isn't a free-for-all dogpile. Avoid crushing your friend.
  • Ask for/give consent – some people might not want to be piled on
• Now we’re going to practice this together in groups of 4. The trainers will go around and lightly tap people with our “batons” if their butts aren’t in the air.

**Going Limp**
When you’re rigid, you're easy to pick up and move. When you're dead, limp weight, you are very hard to pick up and move. [Demonstrate going limp with 2 people picking you up by your elbows & knees and 1 person guarding your head to make sure you don't smash it if dropped.]
- Always! tuck your head – do it by looking at your belly button
- Make sure you don't flail around and accidentally “assault” an officer
- Expect to get roughed up at least a little
- In even medium-sized groups, this can be extremely effective at slowing down the cops
- Break into groups of 4 (at least) to practice. Make sure someone is behind the person going limp and has their hands right behind their head to make sure it doesn't hit the ground.
  [trainers walk around to make sure everyone’s safe]

**Dealing With Chemical Weapons**
- They suck
- Go to a medics training and be prepared

**Ways to Reduce Arrest Risk** - (5min)
It’s also fun not to get arrested or beat up. How can we reduce our arrest risk?
- Corporate camouflage
- Scope out ahead of time
- Participate in actions that are low-risk (ie not necessarily breaking the law).
- Try to disperse when cops say “disperse” - maybe before, if it looks like the cops are getting ready to arrest people and you don't want to get arrested.
- Be aware of what the cops are doing so you can react before it’s too late.
- Run

**Evaluation**

(5 minutes)

• What did people like?
• What can we change to make the training better?