

# ***Where Do We Go From Here?***

## *a post-election strategy workshop training report*

by Daniel Hunter  
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There is life after the elections! Activists and people interested in social change need to continue the fight and move into creating smart strategy. We also need to do some reflection and relaxing after the intense push many groups put into the elections.

In this training report, we describe what we did for this workshop and some of the results. It was led on the Saturday following the elections (November 6<sup>th</sup>). It was led by Daniel Hunter (lead facilitator) with Sue Edwards and George Lakey.

This report is written in a way that follows the design of the workshop we led. That way, if you want to support your group in post-election life, you can grab tools and ideas to assist you groups. Enjoy and feel free to take tools and ideas!

### **The Goals of the Workshop:**

- reflect on the election and its impact your work;
- recuperation from the intense lead up; and
- building strategy for the future and generating new ideas about what's next.

### **Some Assumptions:**

- Many activists have been engaged deeply in the elections. Part of the process of healing is regrounding in the larger work they do – housing, labor, environment, etc. One way we design for this is to support people to group together based on those interest area and reflect collectively about how did the elections affect *our work*.
- Emotions are important. People need to grieve, rage, and allow their feelings to show up. And, as importantly, those feelings need to be validated. Therefore, our design is to maximize the *range* of feelings and give validation to all of them.
- One important aspect of strategy is empathy building. Some critical analyses of the elections have lacked empathy – instead targeting particular segments of society (Southerners, Midwesterners, working class people, evangelical Christians). Rather than engage in one-dimensional bashing, strategy involves making folks three-dimensional and understanding their motivations. So we also design for empathy building in the workshop.

## The Design:

### Tools

(Tools with a “Δ” are available on TFC’s website:

<http://www.TrainingForChange.org>)

#### Diversity Welcome (Δ)

A tool to warm-up a group and invite the diversity of the group to show up. Facilitator welcomes different groups (men, women, transgendered folks; heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian & gay, queer folks; people of all political stripes, etc).

#### Goals/Agenda Review

#### Mingle: Something that you think might be getting overlooked in the elections... (Δ)

The mingle invites one-on-one interactions to discuss.

#### Stand Up If...

Facilitator models: “Stand up if...” and completes the sentence with something true about themselves. S/he then stands up and everyone else for whom that is true. Then everyone returns to sitting and waits for anyone in the group to stand up next. In this workshop, the facilitator modeled with “Stand up if you’ve been foggy since you found out Kerry conceded.” (He couldn’t remember how to set up the exercise – so a great time for facilitator transparency.)

### Design Notes

*In the beginning of a workshop, people always wonder: “Who else is here? Is this a safe space for me?” This tool helps to build that safety by acknowledging the diversity. In this diversity welcome, it was especially important to welcome the diversity of feelings (tired, angry, frustrated, despairing, confused, foggy, shutdown).*

*Great time to remind participants of the modesty of the goals. It’s not to become completely healed, but to continue to move along the way.*

*This tool also helps build a safe space – or container – through one-on-one interactions. The mingle is one of our favorites for warming up a room. Plus, it allows folks to begin sharing their own perspectives – activists are often anxious to share “what’s not being noticed!”*

*Again, container-building. And this time, it allows participants to identify their own feeling states and get recognition that they’re not alone! The number one lesson for people in moments of stress: your methods of coping (shutting-down, being quiet, being in rage, etc) are all normal. (See handout.)*

Story-sharing in fours: “Where were you when Kerry conceded?”

Folks of the older generation have the line, “Where were you when JFK got shot?” Now we have “Where were you when Kerry conceded?” Invite folks to share the story – did they stay up the night before? Did they think Bush had already won?

*More normalizing and container-building. Allows for people to reflect on the election but not get stuck into analysis (which tends not to help people release emotion). It is personal and invites personal self-disclosure.*

In the groups of four, then share: What have been your feelings since then? What states have you gone through?

Debrief with an emphasis on *normalizing* the different responses. Write up the various feeling states people have been in (everything from sadness and shock, to blame and judgement). Then share the handout.

*Normalize, normalize, normalize.*

## **BREAK**

### Work-based groups Tasks

Get into work-based groups (labor, housing, media, etc.) as the group decides.

In those groups complete the following three tasks:

- (a) What are 5 themes from the election that relate to your work? (Harvested the top 2.)
- (b) What are some gaps related to your work? (We believe one major gap was the lack of vision all-around – by progressives and Democrats alike. Therefore:)
- (c) What are some elements of vision your group has to offer?

*This design is to help activists regroup and re-center – get focused again on the elections but in the context of their larger work. In this way, we want to encourage people to not get stuck in “what to do in 4 more years thinking” – there’s plenty to do right now!*

Self-care: group stretch *or* massage in a circle (depending on the group)

*Activists doing self-care? It can happen! Here’s a small piece of it, which sends people into lunch with it on their minds.*

## **LUNCH**

*During lunch we encouraged people to take care of themselves. We brought comic books (Boondocks, Jon Stewart’s new book), had good food, and made an altar. We also encouraged folks playing frisbee*

Skits in groups of four/five: What is the completely worst possible scenario for the election that didn't happen?

*Crying and raging are good for emotional release. So is laughing! Lead this skit in a light way to help the group laugh a lot and have fun!*

### Force Field Analysis (Δ)

So things are not the *worst* they could be. Nor are they the best. So what are the main forces that are pushing against each other? What forces are pushing for things to be better? What forces are pushing for things to get worse (from our perspective)? (Handout on how to lead the Force Field Analysis.)

*This is a strategic tool to help with analysis. Since the election has been so tunnel vision for many activists, this helps activists get the "big picture."*

### **BREAK**

### Empathy-building: other points of view

We wrote a handout (see third handout) to give activists some points of view outside of mainstream activism: white working class, rural Midwestern, African-American Baptist. We passed out the handout and then debriefed with people's personal reactions.

*We highlighted these points of view since we have seen them blamed by activists (other groups have also been blamed, but these we had access to people from that perspective for an immediate post-election reaction).*

### Parallel Lines Role-play (Δ)

Given that there are margins in every group, what are some of the margins that folks in the room might want to reach out to? (It might be one of the three groups mentioned in the handout, or others.)  
Role-play on how to reach out to a new group (each line identifies a margin to reach out to and has the person play that role).

*What's a workshop without skill-building? This role-play is designed to assist participants to identify 1) what external behaviors assist them to come across curious and respectful; and 2) what internally helps them do that.*

### Announcements and Closing

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For more information on strategy and training of trainer workshops TFC offers:

**[www.TrainingForChange.org](http://www.TrainingForChange.org)**

## HANDOUT:

# Moments Like This

tips for dealing with life after the election

Hard moments like this are... well... hard. There's a lot to learn about how we cope in moments like this because each of us handles the stress and strain in different ways. People around the world have given us some great thinking about what seems to help people "deal," and even become more powerful as a result.

It's only two days after the election and I can already notice different states I've gone through: total shock, anger, sadness, righteous indignation, more anger, disappointment, grief and despair, more shock, feeling like my mind was blown away, unexpected exhaustion and fatigue (some expected, too!), craving isolation, craving people, craving ice cream and so on. You probably have your own list.

It's true that we all have our own processes about how we handle bad news. Some of us get energetic and get super-involved. Some of us pull out. Some of us go crazy trying to do both. We might journal a lot, read a lot, pray a lot, find ourselves blanking out a lot. We might try talking about the elections all the time – or completely avoiding it (I've been doing both).

And here's the bottom line about trauma and how to handle it. Researchers about trauma say that the number one, most cross-cultural, most widely applicable rule is this: Whatever you're feeling, it's 100% normal.

That's right! Some of us sometimes feel like we're not processing it the "right" way. In fact, the way we're doing it is perfectly normal and a fine way of doing it. Shutting down, being super-angry, restlessness, being sad and feeling bad, all of them are different ways of coping (plus hundreds of other ways).

That also means it's okay for others to be feeling what they're feeling. I was at a meeting here in Philadelphia where someone began to talk about how bad they felt – it felt like a failure to them. A second person interrupted, "But we won Pennsylvania! Don't feel bad."

It's great to cheer each other up. But the way that second person interrupted, it didn't help the other person in *their* state – that person needed to feel bad for a little bit. I made a small intervention: "It's okay for each of us to feel what we feel."

The powers-that-be would love for us to begin attacking each other. Let's not give them what they want! You have your process. That's normal. I have mine. That's also normal.

A Special Note: Paying Attention to the Body

Moments like this can be great times to take special care of your body because a lot of stress shows up in the body. I'll tell you the obvious: eat well, sleep well, drink well. (I'll even mean it for real!)

One of the things experts say about stress and trauma is this: physical exercise is particularly important soon after stressful events. Why? Because people often create a lot of adrenaline in their body when they're anxious (like the lead up to the elections!). When it's not released, it becomes absorbed into the body (you might notice it as knots in your back, for example).

So what helps? Physical exercise is great. That doesn't just mean the gym, of course. I bike to work. You might take walks with friends. Do some carpentry in your house.

What also helps are things like yawning and crying. They're great for releasing tension in the body (physically they're proven to get rid of toxins in the body!). Massage. Laughing is super, too. I've been loving Jon Stewart and Chris Rock! Find what works for you and your body.

What else helps?

People that I have worked with in places hit by war keep telling me the same thing over and over again: when things are hard, seek community. Hang out with friends. Find some new people to hang out with, too (what a great time to reach across traditional community lines and make new friends).

Capitalism depends on keeping people separate. People who are separate are easier to scare. But people who turn to each other can support each other and can find commonality. So solidifying community is great.

Everyone can do this in their own way. A group of anarchists organized a rally on November 3rd that brought together several hundred folks to do a speak-out and share in community – a great event for community. In my church community we've been sharing lots of prayers.

In summary:

- Number one rule: It's okay to be feeling what you're feeling. It's okay for others to be feeling what they're feeling.
- Eat well. Drink well. Sleep well.
- Exercise and move your body.
- Seek community. Accept support. Give support.

## HANDOUT:

# Force Field Tool

*Based on Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis*

The force field tool is a way to help groups think about forces affecting our movement. It's an easy tool to use and helps to identify major themes and issues that are impacting us. It's a way to get at "the big picture" of what's going on, that doesn't require hours and hours of boring discussion. The force field analysis can help us tease out differences of perspectives within our group and thus produce a rich analysis of potential places of growth for the campaign.

The concept is simple enough: what are the forces (psychological, economic, environmental, historical trends, etc) that are supporting you to succeed. What are those that are against your success. Key is this concept: society is constantly in a state of flux. So understanding "where we are now" means seeing these two sets of forces as pushing on each other – we're not all in one direction or all in the other – we're in a state of tension. Our actions can help shift that tension to be win our long-term goals.

### **Basic Tool**

Steps:

1. Clearly identify the problem/campaign vision.
2. Identify forces contributing to the success and forces against success.

*(put up the following chart where everyone can see; sometimes we put it on the wall and have individuals write up the forces on cards and put them up with tape)*

Forces for Success (+)	Forces Against Success (--)

3. Rate the impact/strength of each force  
(+10 to +1 or -10 to -1 as relative impact of force on movement; again, discussion is an opportunity for sharing insights with each other)
4. Think collectively about how to maximize the forces for success and how to minimize the forces against success. What are tactics (currently being used and especially those not being used) that can maximize our success.

## **Force Field as Tug Of War**

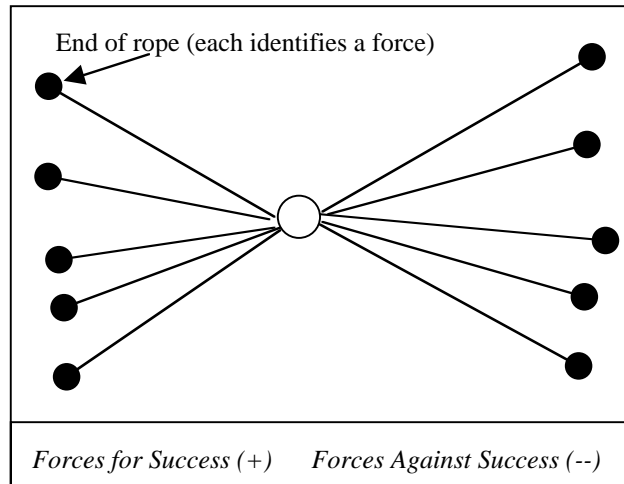
First approach too boring? Here's another way of leading that's even less heady. We've found this tool works with all kinds of groups – and it uses the body!

The basic format is a tug of war, with rope which has multiple ends knotted in middle. Small teams are created, half of which identify a negative force in your group's environment and half identify a positive force. These can be negative and positive forces acting right now and likely to act in the near future. As each team identifies a force, it takes its place on positive or negative side of tug of war.

(See the visual.)

Then, action!

After one side wins, teams huddle; negative force teams ask selves how their power could be under-mined; positive force teams ask selves how their power could be enhanced.



Each team writes its conclusions.

All teams report to the whole the two most important ways (of enhancing or undermining).

*Enjoy using in your own group/organization/coalition!*

## HANDOUT:

### POINT OF VIEW: WHITE WORKING CLASS PEOPLE

My people have never been secure, but in the last thirty years it's gotten worse. In my parents' generation one wage-earner was often enough to put food on the table and handle health care, so the mom could be a full-time mom and we could do more as a family – eat dinner together, go to the Little League games, do whatever. More decent housing was available for families like ours. Our neighborhoods were stronger, and we felt more community. Our children could look forward to earning more income some day than the parents, and be able to get more comforts and leisure activities.

More of us were in unions so we had some defense against the boss. More of us were in the same towns or city neighborhoods as our relatives so we could get more support through hard times in our lives. Maybe there were only two or three major industries in our cities but at least they were there and could be counted on. Most of our faith communities were stronger and we could count on the leadership to look out for us and remind us of the eternal truths even if we were often skeptical about some of them. And we could count on our armed forces, mostly made up of ourselves, to keep our towns and cities out of harm's way.

My people have never been treated fairly, considering the country couldn't run without us. But times *were* better: we were more secure, and we got more respect -- especially from the Democratic Party which we used to think was our party.

Now things have changed. There are lots of reasons to distrust the Republicans, but we have to ask: where's the party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt? Where's the party that fought for the unions and respected working class people like me? What we see now is a party run by millionaire politicians and Hollywood liberals and Volvo-driving upper middle class professionals who couldn't care less what my real-life conditions are. I hear people run down the military answer to the threat to American security, but when are they going to tell us their answer to the threat? What was Howard Dean's alternative for national security, for example? What was Kerry's?

Maybe the jet setters don't need community, but we do. And our communities are disintegrating. I'm not racist, but I will admit that I don't always know how to talk with black people or Latinos and it's harder for me to trust them than people that I've always lived with. Is that so different from the white upper middle class suburbs that the Howard Dean types live in? And gay people – there are people at work that I think are gay and they pull their weight and I don't have a problem with that – but I do worry about giving them everything like the right to marry. Every time I try to have a conversation about that with some pro-gay rights person I get sneered at and condescended to. If gay rights is about how dumb I am, well, that's the same old class

snobbery I get all the time. I don't need Democrats to tell me I'm dumb when I've heard that all my life.

Let's face it: every winning presidential candidate since FDR has been the one who has been the most populist. Think of Harry Truman vs. Dewey. Or Clinton vs. the senior Bush. Bush junior is rich and has rich friends but so did FDR, and I felt respected by both of them. I didn't feel respected by rich Kerry or most of his rich friends out campaigning. When I'm scared for my future and my family and my choice is between two candidates that each have pluses and minuses, I'll go for one who can at least talk to me with respect.

## POINT OF VIEW: RURAL MIDWESTERNER

I grew up in a small mostly working class town in the heart of the Midwest. I'm proud of growing up in an area that calls itself the crossroads of America. Some people joke that means we just connect the two coasts. But I enjoy pointing out that we grow the food that feeds the coasts, we build the buses and cars, the infrastructure that keeps the coasts going; we are traditional people that respect our history.

When I see the Midwest mostly "go Red" (and not in the communist sense) it's not that I'm proud of that. I want the Midwest to complexify its perspective even more and to not succumb to homophobic and sexist overtures. But I want it to do more than switch to "Blue." I want it to be fully respected for what it has to offer and have that integrated into a vision for greater harmony and justice.

What do I mean?

In my small town, all the families knew each other and were connected with each other. Unlike cities where people seem to bounce around, we had a tight network, a woven community fabric. Generations of families knew each other and grew up with each other. Families knew and cared for each other.

So when our industrial base began moving to Mexico and out of the country, my town turned to each other for support. The unions had failed at keeping our jobs safe. And so we valued community and held on to the fabric of community – it means survival to keep it. That means we believed in keeping traditions alive; to different people that meant different things, but included: 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebrations to honor our ancestors, Girl Scouts who still went door-to-door, Sunday afternoon church dinners, our annual Rose Festival, jazz concerts (we were the first place jazz was recorded). Yeah, we like apple pie, too.

To change any part of the fabric of that community means to change us all.

So when I hear that my town voted for Bush, I'm not surprised (it votes socially conservative every year). After all, what does the democratic party have to offer my town to help it in its survival? Better yet, what do progressive activists offer to me? Outsiders can talk about shifting economic analysis, but let's talk about the survival of the community, too (that's what I hear when I hear the right talking about "morals" and "values").

I hate hearing that the issue is just "education" – that Midwesterners (or Southerners, or rural folks) just need to vote in their class interest or understand the economics of the issue. What us rural folks have to offer is a concrete ability to build community and hold communities together – sometimes that shuts people down, but it's also an effective weapon against economic terrorism. Until you can appreciate that strategy we've developed and respect our wisdom – that means changing your minds (not just changing ours!), you'll never be able to work with us.

## POINT OF VIEW: AFRICAN-AMERICAN BAPTIST

My father is a Baptist Evangelical fundamentalist minister. My grandfather, too. Scared you yet? I can actually scare my activist friends when I say that.

Isn't that quite a reflection on both some Christian Evangelicals – and the activists who get scared?

My father (the evangelical pastor) fights against racism daily by helping kids make college work for them, keeping people out of jail – working to dismantle the whole prison industrial complex, and mentoring black youth. In the 80s he was targeted by the FBI for teaching liberation theology. (The US has a history of targeting Christian radicals.) He's also fought in church politics to keep Christian theology centered on the love that Jesus Christ taught. And in the past decade he's become increasingly in despair as he gets isolated – isolated from the Christian support that *is* growing more conservative and progressive leftists who range from barely tolerant to downright nasty.

Him and dozens like him – because he's not alone. Just recently he attended an international conference in Thailand for Christians trying to keep social and economic justice issues at the forefront of Christian theology. Around 40% of Christian evangelicals voted for Kerry. We can be evangelical (which means we believe it's worthwhile to spread the word) and be all for bringing down the empire. We're worth being allies with.

(Can I tell you how hard it is to have to write that? My tradition, African-American Baptist, was the mainstay of the Civil Rights Movement! And now we're suddenly just a homophobic, hate-filled group?)

I've been on the board of directors for the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America for several years. Every time I mention it I have to add: "We're the radical Baptists" – as if I should apologize for being in a religion whose fundamental tenet is that people can have their own beliefs (we call it autonomy of the church).

The misunderstandings of Christianity makes it hard for me to be involved with many leftist activists – and I know others who are strong in faith communities can sometimes find this to be true, too. It keeps the movement from growing when up to 80% of US Americans identify as Christians and yet I get hostile reactions when I talked about my God. It keeps me from talking about morality (which *doesn't* mean bashing gays) or the spiritual warfare I see going on or how my personal relationship with God is keeping me strong.

Rather than bashing my people, find ways to embrace us and let us be ourselves and our religious tradition.