

**Will Rogers: A Path Forward for Progressives --  
Selected Newsletters**



**WILL  
ROBINSON**

- Founding partner of The New Media Firm and nationally recognized media consultant and champion of integrating digital and traditional advertising for progressive campaigns.
- Over four-decade career starting as Iowa organizer for AFSCME and building deep relationships with labor and Presidential caucuses.
- Recent writing and Substack columns stressing progressives must move from episodic campaigns to permanent media and organizing ecosystems, centering trust, emotion, and everyday lived experience
- Named AAPS *Democratic Campaign Strategist of the Year* in 2012 and the 2025 GAIN Power's *Living Legend* Award—on top of dozens of Pollie, Reed, and Telly awards.

*The following are three of many insightful newsletters by Will Robinson which the Values to Vote Project of the Grassroots Iowa Network has used in its work to support grassroots advocacy and assembled for others here. **Highlighted in red are points that Values to Votes have emphasized as key to successful grassroots organization.** For more information about Will, visit the New Media Group website and his substack newsletters.*

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**People Are Our Power. So Why Aren't We Training Them?**

WILL ROBINSON, JULY 02, 2025 NEWSLETTER

I'd rather have 10,000 people communicating locally in their communities than 1,000 managing tools from an app. Everyone can be a communicator. Everyone can be an organizer. But only if we train [and support] them.

In every campaign, we talk about three core resources: time, money, and people.

The amount of time is fixed - and unless you're Doctor Who, you don't get more of it. Money? We've gotten better at raising it, but we still struggle to spend it wisely.

But people - our volunteers, organizers, digital activists, and local leaders - they are our most *valuable resource*. We have the people. We're just not investing in them. Not emotionally - we do that. But practically. In training. In tools. In the skills they need to win.

**Let me be blunt: we are failing to train the people who want to help us win.**

Our people still show up. They protest. They knock on doors. They share posts. But too often, they're using outdated tools with little support and no real guidance on how to be effective in today's decentralized, digital-first environment.

Look at digital. We've got passionate supporters online - but thanks to social media algorithms, most of what they share never escapes the progressive echo chamber. And **our field programs? They still rely on strangers knocking on strangers' doors**, often in communities where a Ring doorbell is more likely to record silence than spark conversation. One voter told me, "*A stranger at my door just feels like a salesperson now.*"

**We're still running 1990s field programs in a 2025 media world.**

And here's the kicker: the bright, committed folks who sign up to work on campaigns often *don't know how to communicate in this environment either*. And we don't train them. We hand them canned programs, outsource to consultants, or give them platforms to manage—when we should be teaching them to *organize communities, create content, tell stories, and move people in lasting, authentic ways*.

Here's what I know to be true:

I'd rather have 10,000 people communicating locally in their communities than 1,000 managing tools from an app.

Everyone who wants to be part of this movement has a phone or a laptop. That means *everyone* can be a communicator. Everyone can be an organizer. But only if we train them.

This is personal for me. I came up in the days of Project 500, EMILY's List, Wellstone Action, Participation 2000 - when we trained *thousands* of everyday people every year: teachers, janitors, students, grandmothers. They didn't need to be experts. They just needed to know *what to do*. And we gave them the tools to do it.

Today? There are still great training programs out there - but they're underfunded, under-recognized, and nowhere near the scale this moment demands.

Let's be real: **The progressive movement doesn't have a people problem. We have a training problem.**

We can put a million people on the street. But what happens when they get home?

We need a nationwide, tech-enabled, grassroots-powered training initiative that turns people into organizers, communicators, and digital messengers—in their towns, their churches, their unions, their group chats. And **we need to equip the people and communities most harmed by Trump's attacks with the tools to fight back—on their terms, in their voices.**

This isn't about another campaign app. It's not just another webinar. It's about *real training*. Ongoing support. Local leadership. Creative autonomy.

And **most importantly, it's about letting go of top-down control. The future of organizing is bottom-up, networked, and noisy. That's where our power lives.**

Over the next few weeks, I'll be sharing ideas and proposals for rebuilding the training infrastructure our movement so urgently needs. I hope you'll join the conversation.

## Stop Measuring Marches. Start Building Power.

**WILL ROBINSON, SEP 06, 2025 Newsletter**

Progressives have taken thousands of actions and put millions in the streets. If protests alone could stop Authoritarianism, we'd be done by now. What works is structure, discipline, and defections.

**Protests DO matter.** They give voice to outrage and remind us we're not alone. But the progressive resistance has built its energy around events, not power. Successful anti-authoritarian movements don't measure themselves by crowd size—they build parallel institutions, practice disciplined, repeatable rituals that invite broad participation, and prioritize cross-sector defections that strip authoritarians of legitimacy.

Right now, we're stuck in a loop: *raise the alarm* → *mobilize* → *go home*. The result is a cacophony of messages and a base that's already exhausted. We keep doing what we know—even when it's not working—because we've never lived through an American coup. (And yes, history nerds: the Burr conspiracy doesn't count—it didn't even get a song in *Hamilton*.)

Losing elections has consequences; that's how we got here. Getting out won't come from louder protests but from smarter organizing. **Because we've never faced an authoritarian takeover at home, it's tempting to confuse mass rallies with real power. But history teaches otherwise. From the Baltic Way to Solidarity in Poland, from People Power in the Philippines to Otpor in Serbia and Sudan's resistance, the lesson is clear: authoritarian regimes fall not from spectacle, but from structure, discipline, and defections.**

### Three pillars for winning (the series roadmap)

1. **Build Parallel Institutions, Not Just Protests.** Create coordinating hubs that outlast news cycles—labor halls, congregations, student coalitions, veterans' posts, local pages—aligned on timing, message, and escalation.
2. **Invest in Nonviolent Discipline & Culturally Resonant Rituals.** Keys, candles, choirs, human chains, window signs—repeatable formats that feel safe, dignified, and *theirs*.
3. **Prioritize Cross-Sector Defections Over Crowd Size.** When nurses, clergy, truckers, small-business owners, and retired generals cross the line, legitimacy shifts. That's the ballgame.

### What's missing now

- Siloed spaces (unions over here, students over there, faith groups elsewhere).
- Event-brain (announce → march → disperse) instead of structure-brain (recruit → train → escalate).
- Optics that the right exploits because we lack disciplined marshals and a widely adopted code of conduct.

### 30-Day Starter Checklist

- Stand up a **metro "Resistance Hub"** (labor, faith, students, public employees, veterans, local creators).

- Publish a **shared 30–60 day escalation calendar** with 1–2 rituals anyone can do weekly.
- Train 20 marshals in de-escalation; adopt a **one-page code of conduct** for all actions.
- Launch/refresh **local community pages** (FB/IG/TikTok) with consistent visual language and templates.
- Identify **10 targets for defection** (one per sector) and a ladder of public asks.

#### **What this series will deliver**

- Concrete lessons from overseas movements (Baltics, Poland, Philippines, Serbia, Sudan).
- A build-sheet for structure, a kit for nonviolent discipline, and a playbook for defections.
- A reconciliation layer: national strategy ↔ local implementation through content cells and county pages.

#### **Call to action**

**What are you already doing?** What’s one ritual your community would actually repeat weekly? What institutions in your county could host a hub? Drop ideas in the comments; I’ll fold your best into a public “Action Packet” draft.

## **30 Years Later: What I Told Campaign Staff Then—and What We All Need to Hear Now**

**WILL ROBINSON Newsletter June 13 2025**

Way back - way back - when flip phones were king and AOL was the internet, I wrote a short memo called “Rules for Campaign Staffers.”

It wasn’t meant to be a big deal. Just a few hard-earned lessons I’d picked up after too many mistakes, long nights, and cold pizza dinners - written for a couple of junior staffers I was mentoring.

But then something funny happened: the rules caught on.

They got photocopied, emailed, stapled to walls, blogged, tweeted, dropped into training decks, and passed from organizer to organizer like contraband wisdom. That was never the plan - but I'm glad they helped.

And here's the surprising part: **they still hold up**. The tools have changed. Attention spans have shrunk. But the fundamentals of campaigning - urgency, trust, clarity, discipline - haven't.

So for nostalgia's sake - and for every new organizer who just got turf and a laptop—here they are again.

### **Will Robinson's Rules for Campaign Staffers**

*(Still True in 2025)*

#### **1. If it's not in writing, it doesn't exist.**

Your memory isn't a filing system. Write it down. Confirm it in an email. Share it in the thread. Budgets, timelines, plans—campaigns run on receipts.

#### **2. There is no such thing as “off the record.”**

Reporters are not your friends. Also: there are no rules anymore.

#### **3. Don't hold private conversations in public places.**

Planes. Trains. Bars. Bathrooms. Assume your Uber driver is live-streaming.

#### **4. Don't believe any number that ends in zero.**

“100 volunteers.” “200,000 impressions.” “1,000 door knocks.” All sound made up. Ask for the real math.

#### **5. Never turn down a chance to eat or use the bathroom.**

Campaign time is chaos time. Skip meals, make bad calls. Fuel up and hydrate.

#### **6. Don't spend your own money.**

If you pay for it, it's a contribution. Use only authorized funds. And never admit you have a credit card - especially to an Advance person.

#### **7. There isn't always a “right” answer.**

“It depends” is real. Context matters. Don't chase certainty - chase clarity.

#### **8. In a campaign, someone has to be in charge.**

Campaigns are a place to foster democracy, not practice it. Someone has to make the final call. Let them.

#### **9. Assume nothing.**

The worst mistakes happen when you assume someone else handled it. Triple-check.

## **10. If you make a mistake, fix it before you analyze it.**

Stop the bleeding. Then debrief. Don't write a memo while you're still on fire. (*And bad news doesn't age well.*)

## **Fast Forward to 2025: Now We're All in the Comms Department**

Back in '99, these rules were about surviving the inside of a campaign. But in 2025? Every single one of us is in the media business.

Whether we like it or not, we're all broadcasting -swimming in a 24/7 flood of memes, disinformation, influencer hot takes, podcast rants, livestreams, and AI-generated chaos. Voters are deciding who they trust - and what they believe - before we even open our mouths.

So I've written a new set of rules. Not just for campaign staff, but for anyone trying to lead, organize, persuade, or survive in today's media jungle.

## **12 Rules for Communicating in 2025**

(*A Sneak Preview*)

### **1. Culture beats credentials.**

People follow people they *like*—not experts they don't trust.

### **2. Media is always on.**

Traditional campaigns work in bursts—then go quiet. That's not how persuasion works anymore. Treat communication as a daily, ongoing dialogue.

### **3. TV is no longer the 800-pound gorilla.**

It's still around - more like a 200-pound gorilla with silver hair. But it's not running the zoo anymore.

### **4. We don't just have a message problem - we have a media structure problem.**

The Right is communicating 24/7 - from bots to podcasts, memes to livestreams. We're not even in the same arena. **Progressives must stop thinking in bursts and start building permanent, coordinated media ecosystems - trusted messengers, local voices, constant presence.**

### **5. In the Hunger Games? Cooperate.**

Stop attacking or ignoring your allies. Start amplifying them.

### **6. We need more than a message, a podcast, or a piece of tech.**

You can't app your way to trust - or automate your way to persuasion. Tools are only as effective as the relationships and behaviors behind them. Voters don't want a shiny new

platform - they want to feel seen, heard, and backed. Technology should support organizing, not replace it.

**7. Voters have broken up with us.**

They didn't ghost us. We ghosted them.

**8. [Progressives] don't need a new message. We need new behavior.**

This isn't a messaging problem - it's a conduct problem.

**9. Break down the message silos.**

We've got too many groups pushing isolated, issue-based messages that contradict or compete with one another. To win hearts - and elections - we need alignment, not fragmentation. Our messages should reinforce, not cancel, each other.

**10. Audience first. Always.**

Start where people *are* - not with what you want to say.

**11. It's about communications *and* organizing.**

Content is a tactic. Community is the strategy.

**12. Lead with emotion, not just information.**

Facts alone don't move people - *feelings* do. Craft messages that resonate emotionally, then back them with substance. If it doesn't connect, it disappears.

So yes, the tools have changed. The platforms are unrecognizable. But the lesson? Still the same:

**Don't just say what you want to say. Say what people need to hear—from someone they trust—in a format they can feel.**

Let's get to work.

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