

## **Be the Media**

Back in the 1980s, media genius Tony Schwartz demonstrated how the New York Times is a less powerful medium than the humble answering machine. Schwartz produced two radio ads: the first excoriated City Councilors for their failure to protect the public on a current issue; the other praised them for their wisdom and courage. On Monday night, Schwartz called each Councilors office, and left a message: "We've purchased radio time on Wednesday, but we won't know which ad to run until after Tuesday's vote. Here are the two ads – please vote yes." He concluded the message by playing both ads. Apparently, the Councilors got the point and voted accordingly. The proposal passed, and on Wednesday the ad of appreciation for the positive vote hit the airwaves.

People working for change realize they need to speak in public. But they often over-value the importance of the media they have the least control of, such as the daily newspaper or television news, and undervalue the media they easily control. Instead of asking, "How can we get better news coverage?" advocates need to ask, "How can we deliver the right message, to the right person?"

Today, anyone with a computer can be a publisher. Because they are publishers, organizations for change must also understand they are reporters too. Reporters talk to people about what is happening and why. They put people on the record. They organize information in ways that set the terms of discussion.

Working as reporters (for a newsletter, web site, report, etc.) advocates can call decision makers, opponents, and interested bystanders, and make the story public. And they can call their fellow reporters, including those working at the Times, to share the news. After all, most reporters get the news from the news