

# Strategy



# Goals:

*To gain an understanding of what strategy is, as well as learn some specific strategic frameworks and concepts which can be used to think through, plan, and execute a strategy.*

# Tactical hell



“Tactical hell consists of all of the people around us who are vying for power or some kind of control, and whose actions intersect our lives in a thousand different directions. We are constantly having to react to what this person does or says, getting emotional in the process.

# Tactical hell



“Once you sink into this hell, it is very difficult to raise your mind above it. You are dealing with one battle after another, and none of them end with any resolution. It is very hard for you to see the hell for what it is; you are too close to it, too mired in it to think of any other way. Because there are so many people now vying for power in this world, and our attentions are so distracted in many different directions, this dynamic only gets worse and worse.”

# Strategic heaven



Strategy is the only answer... Strategy is a mental process in which your mind elevates itself above the battlefield. You have a sense of a larger purpose for your life, where you want to be down the road, what you were destined to accomplish. This makes it easier to decide what is truly important, what battles to avoid. You are able to control your emotions, to view the world with a degree of detachment.” - Robert Greene “Tactical hell or strategic heaven?”

# Tactical hell



Can you think of a time in your organizing when you've felt lost, or stuck in "tactical hell"?



# What is strategy?



Strategy is the use of rational thinking to link effective means to desired ends, making a choice about tradeoffs, and following through on your decision. Marx and Engels used the phrase “line of march,” which is to say, what is our pathway to our destination?

# Where does strategy come from?

“This ideal of fighting rationally comes to us from organized warfare, where the art of strategy was invented and refined. The word "strategy" comes from the ancient Greek word strategos, meaning literally "the leader of the army."

Strategy in this sense was the art of generalship, of commanding the entire war effort, deciding what formations to deploy, what terrain to fight on, what maneuvers to use to gain an edge. And as this knowledge progressed, military leaders discovered that the more they thought and planned ahead, the more possibilities they had for success.”

- Robert Greene, *33 Strategies of War*



# Goals, strategy, and tactics



# Getting to your destination





# Aims, objectives, or “policy”



Policy is your overarching objective or objectives. Are you trying to end a war? Stop a coal power plant from being built? Is it something even bigger, like ending capitalism? Before you commit to a tactic (for instance, “we should protest”) you may want to start with your aims, or “ends.” Start with your destination and work backward. Don’t settle on a tactic or a strategy before interrogating your end goal.

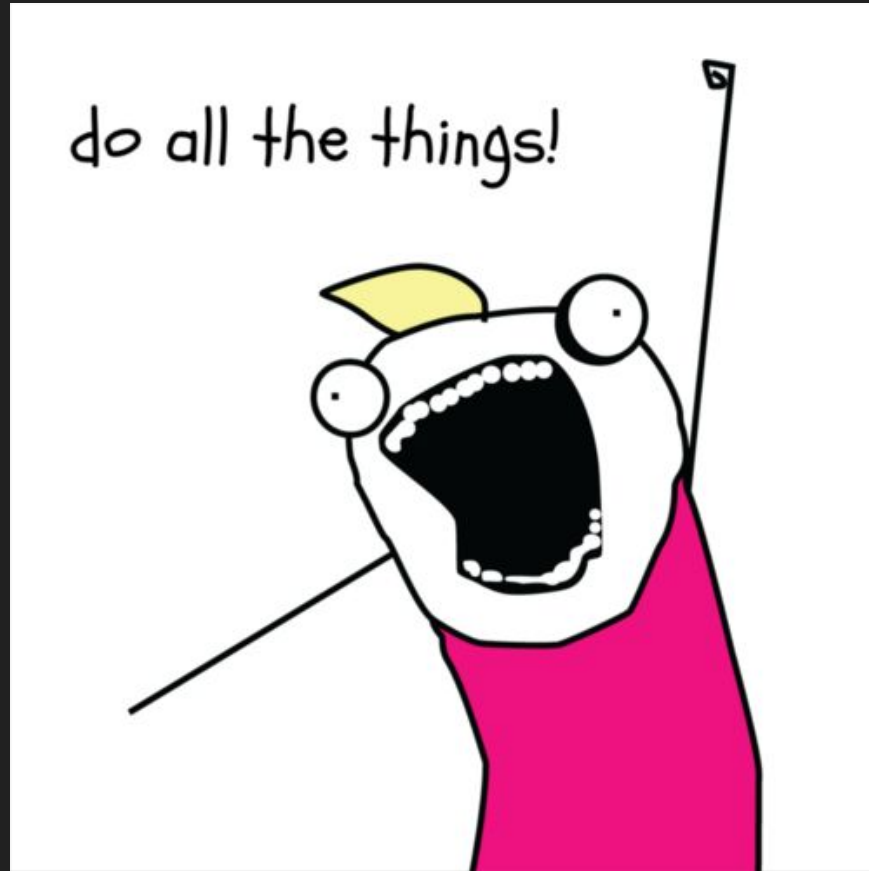
# Strategy, or “line”



The military strategist B. H. Liddell Hart once gave the definition of strategy as “the art of distributing and applying means to fulfill the ends of policy.” Your strategy is your big picture approach to how you are going to achieve your goal.

To develop a winning strategy, you need it to fit with actual real-life conditions (it can’t simply be abstract), and it needs to be informed by a productive theory of social change, power, etc. Ultimately you will have to weigh tradeoffs and make a choice, and follow through on your decision.

Embracing tradeoffs; learning to say “no”



# Tactics



In our movements, most debates we have are matters of tactics. The outcomes of these debates often have very little impact on the overall trajectory of our movement. Generally speaking, the important thing to do is commit to a strategy, and remain flexible on tactics.



# Bad and lucky breaks



# Moralistic and strategic thinking



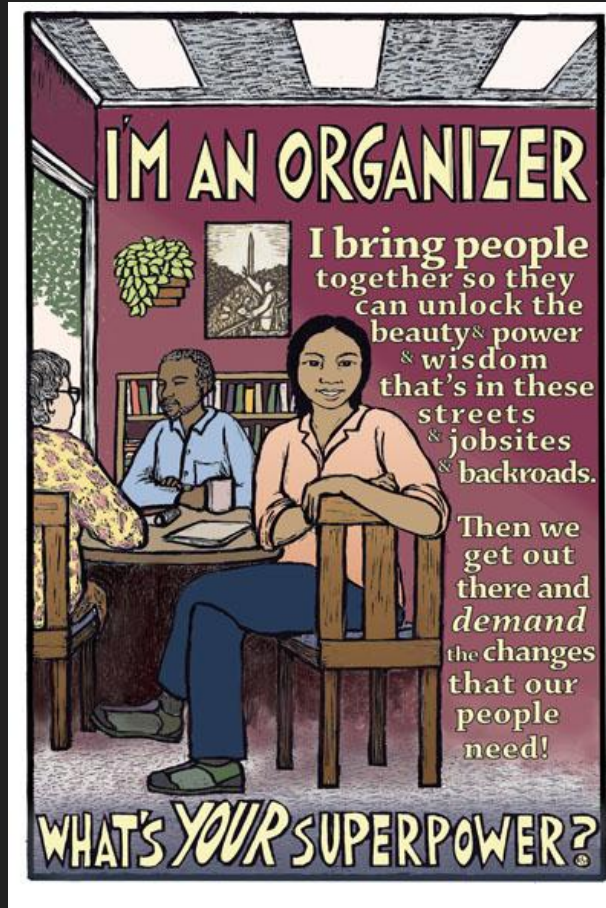
Execution; actually doing the damn thing

**JUST DO  
→ THE ←  
DAMN  
THING**

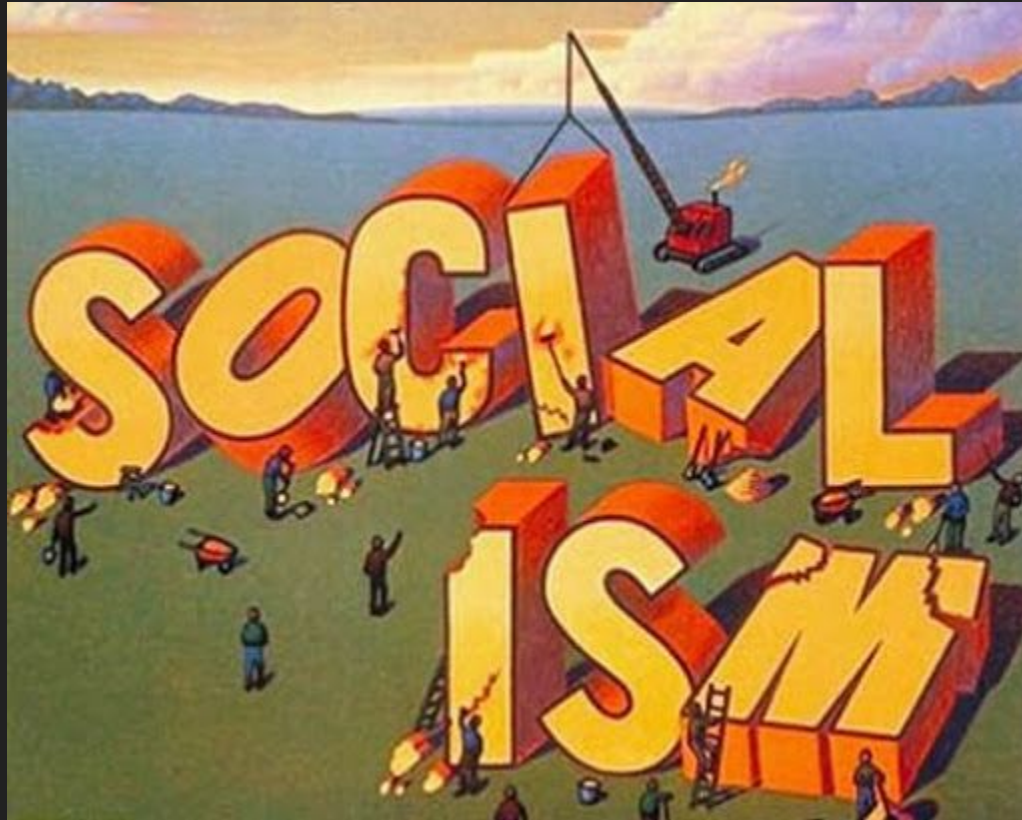
# A simple strategic decision-making rubric

1. Clarify the problem you're attempting to solve.
2. Brainstorm about possible choices. Don't criticize ideas at this point. You want as many ideas as possible, no matter how crazy sounding.
3. Winnow down the choices by asking this of each, "What would have to be true for this to be a good choice?" Some choices will be immediately discarded because the truth of their necessary conditions will be apparent to everyone.
4. If the truth value of some conditions for success are in doubt, find the truth or your best guess at it.
5. Make a choice.

# You are the organizer



Break





# “Proletarians & Communists” from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*



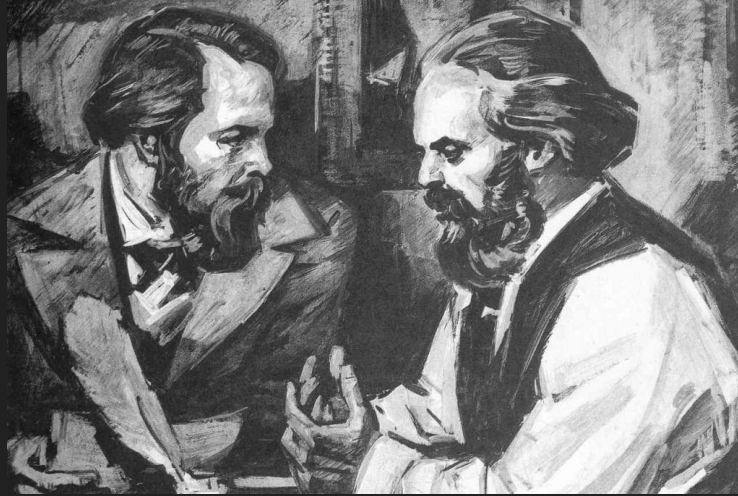
In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole? The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

# “Proletarians & Communists” from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*



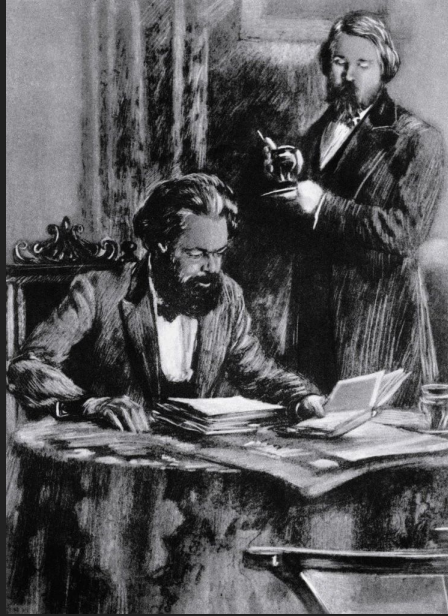
The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

# “Proletarians & Communists” from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*



The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

# “Proletarians & Communists” from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*



The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

# Our line of march: Getting where we want to go

“One of the inflexible tasks of any communist organization (and any communist leadership) is to help train everyone (both the communists at all levels, but also the supporters of the movement) to evaluate choices by these criteria: Where does it lead? Who does it serve?”

And one of the difficult tasks in moments of struggle is to apply those criteria consciously, in the midst of great pulls, demagoguery and confusion.”

# Our line of march: Getting where we want to go

“The correctness or otherwise of the ideological and political line decides everything. When the Party’s line is correct, then everything will come its way. If it has no followers, then it can have followers; if it has no guns, then it can have guns; if it has no political power, then it can have political power. If its line is not correct, even what it has it may lose. The line is a net rope. When it is pulled, the whole net opens out.” Mao Zedong, “Talks With Responsible Comrades At Various Places During a Provincial Tour” (1971)



# Our line of march: Getting where we want to go

“Ideological line has to do with what our thinking serves –not just whether we consciously are upholding the goal of communism, in words, but whether our larger network of ideas, methods, assumptions, slogans serve the process to preparing the people to be their own emancipators.

In some current (often academic) discussions, “ideology” is used as a term for false systems of ideas. But in a lot of communist usage, ideology just means ideas, our systems of ideas (and some ideologies are reactionary, some are false, some are progressive, some are true, etc.)

# Our line of march: Getting where we want to go



Political line has to do with questions of power. Politics in Maoist thinking is about power — who has it, how to seize it, how to wield it, who and what it serves ultimately.

# Our line of march: Getting where we want to go

No one should be too intimidated by having to start from scratch. If our “political and ideological line” is connected (and reconnected) with the larger historical goal of liberating humanity (if our policies and methods flow from that), then victories can potentially be won (again for our purposes!). Our forces can go from weak to strong, and from few to many.

This is also an argument against being too impressed with get-rich-quick schemes and short numerical success — in a pragmatic way.

# Our line of march: Getting where we want to go



If we keep our eye on the prize (emancipation, liberation, classless society, ending all oppression) and if we evaluate proposals and strategies in terms of whether they will help get us where we need to go, then we will have armed wider and wider circles (meaning both communists and the awakening among the people) to act consciously in all the chops and swirls the life brings.

# Discussion

# Five quick strategic lessons

Adapted from “Preface” to Robert Greene’s *33 Strategies of War*



Try to look at things as they are, not as your  
emotions color them

Judge people by their actions, not merely what they  
say

# Rely primarily upon your own abilities

Rely primarily upon your own abilities (yours and your comrades) rather than resources or what others can do for you. When the chips are down you have only your own abilities to rely on.

# Look for the indirect approach

“Opposition to the truth is inevitable, especially if it takes the form of a new idea, but the degree of resistance can be diminished - by giving thought not only to the aim but to the method of approach. Avoid a frontal attack on a long established position; instead, seek to turn it by flank movement, so that a more penetrable side is exposed to the thrust of truth. But, in any such indirect approach, take care not to diverge from the truth - for nothing is more fatal to its real advancement than to lapse into untruth.”

- B. Liddell Hart, Strategy

Elevate your mind's eye above the battlefield



# The greatest battle is against yourself

Overcoming your own apathy, your fear, your hesitancy, your lack of confidence. Overcoming your own indecisiveness, your own lack of urgency, etc. is many times more important (and more difficult) than overcoming your opponents.

We usually fail due to internal causes (we didn't put in enough effort, we had a mistaken strategy, etc.) rather than external causes (our enemies were too powerful, etc.). Remember: "external causes become operative through internal causes"