



# Strategic Effectiveness Method

## Overview and Rationale

New Tactics in Human Rights emerged from The Center for Victims of Torture’s own experience as a creator of new tactics, a leader of coalitions, and as a center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position – one of healing and of reclaiming civic leadership.

Since 1999, New Tactics in Human Rights has created unique resources – organized around the analysis of potential solutions rather than that of specific issues, geographic regions, or target groups – that allow advocates to clearly recognize the unique elements of their situation, and to seek promising approaches that have worked elsewhere in order to apply them to new regions or issues. New Tactics has developed a 5 Steps to ***Strategic Effectiveness Method***. It provides a framework, tools and resources to improve advocates’ ability to combine diverse tactics into complex strategies.

Local human rights activists throughout the world struggle with a sense of isolation, feeling as if they are forced to start from zero, to choose tactics not because they are the best fit for the strategic situation, but because they are the only tactics they know. At the same time, innovative practitioners have devised a wide range of creative approaches for promoting human rights, but these successful tactics are too often known only by their closest allies.

There is nothing mysterious about strategy, though it is often difficult to think strategically. Strategy is not a single decision, but rather a coming together of decisions: the selection of key objectives and appropriate targets, an understanding of needed resources and allies, and decisions on which tactics to use and when.

While a focus on tactics is essential, it is not an organization’s first priority. An organization must first set broad goals that reflect the values and beliefs of its founders, leaders, or members, and that incorporate its mission and purposes. These goals must be clear in order to focus planning. An organization will also need to establish short and intermediate term goals that more closely state what it will accomplish over time, and that embed a strategic vision of what is feasible to accomplish.

***Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.***

***Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.***

***– Sun Tzu***

New Tactics in Human Rights has based its 5 Steps to ***Strategic Effectiveness Method*** on the philosophy and teaching of Sun Tzu – who lived over 2,000 years ago in China.

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Sun Tzu said that good strategy is based on **three sources of knowledge**:

- **Know Yourself** (goals, resources, strengths and limits, allies)
- **Know Your Opponent** (goals, resources, tactics, strengths and weaknesses, allies)
- **Know the Terrain** (social, political, cultural relationships, institutions and structures – where the “battle” will be fought).

The components of the 5 Steps to **Strategic Effectiveness Method** include:

### ?? 1 – Identify the Problem

This step begins the process of exploring Sun Tzu’s three important sources of knowledge for making good strategic decisions. This step assists participants to “Know Yourself” through the exploration of the issues and problems they believe are significant in order to narrow their focus for taking effective action.

### 👁️ 2 – Create a Vision

This step continues Sun Tzu’s directive to “Know Yourself” through the process of envisioning a future without the identified problem or issue. It is essential to have a vision about the end goal of what you want to accomplish. If you do not know where you want to go, it is not only difficult to get there but it is also hard to know if you have arrived.

### 📄 3 – Map the Terrain

The “Define the Terrain” step provides two tools for understanding Sun Tzu’s three directives, beginning with “Know the Terrain” (using the Tactical Map tool) and then understanding how to use this knowledge of the terrain through the directives of “Know Yourself” and “Know your Opponent” (using the Spectrum of Allies tool). New Tactics method focuses on the examination of the human relationship “terrain” – the people, groups, organizations and institutions involved in maintaining abuses or the status quo, as well as those seeking to make change. In this step, participants will use these tools to aid them in the process of identifying and tactically approaching this network of relationships.

### 🔍 4 – Explore Tactics

This step begins to consolidate the information participants are learning from Sun Tzu’s three directives by taking the identified problem, the vision for the future, and the understanding of the terrain that has been developed to prepare the participants for action. This step explores the differences between strategy and tactics to help participants to determine a strategic path,



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analyze case studies for tactic ideas, and help them choose tactics that will be most effective in moving forward a strategic goal for their work.



## 5 – Take Action

This step of the Strategic Effectiveness Method assists participants to create a plan to take action for implementing their strategic goals to help realize their long-term vision. All the work done in the previous exercises comes together to develop a *plan to take action* to move a strategic goal forward. This is how participants will take a step toward making their vision a reality.

Throughout the New Tactics in Human Rights’ **5 Steps to Strategic Effectiveness Method**, it is important to note that Sun Tzu’s directive to “Know Yourself” is not limited to reflection on our organizations’ goals, resources, strengths and limits, allies, etc. We must pay attention to our most valuable resource – ourselves. In doing the difficult work of advancing and protecting human rights you may work long hours in dangerous situations. You may be exposed to sights and sounds and stories that are very hard to bear. What you are doing could be traumatizing or stressful for you, whether you are experiencing it firsthand or through others. To maintain your strength, your commitment and your joy in doing this work you need to learn to recognize and manage un-healthy stress. It can be very helpful for your organization to take time to discuss and reflect with each other on the ways in which individually and collectively you are dealing with the stress of doing human rights work. All the work you do to create a better society will have little meaning if you don’t experience positive and healthy connections along the way to this better place. Becoming aware of when you are losing connection with people important to you provides you with an opportunity to think and take action that will bring more balance back into your life.<sup>1</sup>

The 5 Steps to **Strategic Effectiveness Method** is meant to be revisited frequently throughout your group’s activism. As you move forward with your advocacy work, it is necessary to revisit each step and review the tools – such as the Tactical Map and the Spectrum of Allies – to see how the plan developed to take action impacts the target, the relationships surrounding the target, and the problem itself. It is necessary to add new relationships as more information is gathered or to see where the tactics have created shifts or changes.

Use this step-by-step method to continually identify the ever-changing relationships and context regarding your human rights issue. This reflection and examination will help to provide new information and insights for choosing new immediate goals on the strategic path, new targets and tactics that respond to the changing needs and demands of the terrain, in order to develop a new plan to take action for implementation. It is important to continually assess the results, apply the lessons you learn, and evaluate your progress in order to make adjustments to your strategy and better enhance your chances of creating the change you are working toward.

<sup>1</sup> Resource: “Tools for Developing Creative Tactics and Strategies – Self-Care: Caring for Your Most Valuable Resource,” Pages 164-165, [New Tactics in Human Rights: A Resource for Practitioners](#).

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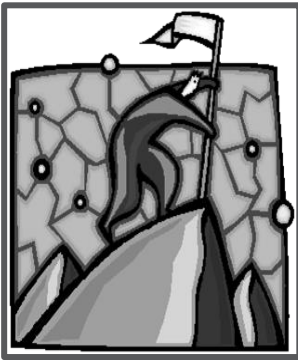
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## Benefits of Tactical Thinking - The Need for New Tactics

Source: Adapted from [New Tactics in Human Rights: A Resource for Practitioners](#)<sup>2</sup>, pages 12-18

### The Modern Human Rights Movement



The modern human rights movement has made enormous strides in the past few decades in the advancement of the human rights ideal and the establishment of specific protections. Some examples include:

- condemning torture
- protecting the rights of women and children
- defining legitimate political activities
- protecting and freeing political prisoners
- the following of human rights standards

We cannot overstate how important these accomplishments are or how difficult they were to achieve.

### Tactics in the Human Rights Movement

Three tactics led to these advancements:

1. Setting international norms that created a body of conventions, treaties and standards
2. Monitoring compliance to these standards
3. Denouncing or shaming government actions and inaction when the standards were violated



### Limitations

It is clear that these tactics have brought about tremendous advances and thus should continue to be supported and pursued. It is equally clear that there are great limits to what we can accomplish in this way and that these approaches are not enough to solve seemingly inflexible human rights problems.

### Expanding the Movement

It is the contention of New Tactics in Human Rights that advancing human rights requires the creation of a broader human rights field, one that incorporates many more people and sectors of society than are currently engaged. It also requires the development of more comprehensive strategic approaches that can only be accomplished by using a far broader array of tactics than are currently in use.

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<sup>2</sup> *New Tactics in Human Rights: A Resource for Practitioners* is an award winning book featuring a collection of 80 tactics from around the world. The full book has been translated into 13 languages.

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## A Vision for New Tactics in Human Rights

To support human rights efforts around the world to be more effective through the use of innovative tactics and well-conceived strategies.

All over the world dedicated human rights practitioners have begun this work:

- developing innovative approaches
- building unexpected strategic alliances
- learning from unexpected sectors

New Tactics in Human Rights aims to bring together these innovators and inspire others with their work. Individually these stories are inspiring. Together, they represent a vision of what can be accomplished in human rights.

## Benefits of Tactical Thinking

We outline six reasons we believe tactical thinking is necessary to improving the effectiveness of the human rights movement (links are provided to examples for each of the six reasons listed below, and also see “*Explore Tactics – Methodology Overview*”):

1. [Tactics open new possibilities](#) – what we know how to do influences what we think is possible to do; tactics help determine strategy.
2. Different tactics are effective against [different targets and in different contexts](#).
3. Different tactics appeal to [different constituencies](#).
4. [Tactical flexibility](#) is the source of surprise.
5. [Tactics teach participants](#) and observers how to engage in the world.
6. [Tactics are the training systems](#) for engaging participants and allies in the organization’s work.



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