



The Break Free From Plastic Communications Cookbook

(for stirring up some beautiful mischief)

CURATED BY THOSE LOVEABLE ROGUES AT
DANCING FOX, ON BEHALF OF THE LOVELY
FOLK AT #BREAKFREEFROMPLASTIC

Asia Edition – April 2021





Introduction

A cookbook is not a blueprint. **It's an invitation to creativity.** The purpose of this one is to lay out some of the best recipes we could find for great communications with a distinctly Asian flavour. To do that, we ran two Playshops bringing together experienced **#BreakFreeFromPlastic** communicators and campaigners, along with some outside voices, to share their **best lessons** and **secret ingredients**..

Whether you're an experienced cook or just learning how to boil water, we hope you'll find some brand new dishes, a couple spices you've not tried before, and some exciting ideas for whipping up **culture-hacking campaigns** that **create transformational change**.



The Big Story





A Way to Talk About the Movement

No movement like this has ever existed in the history of activism.

What catalysed it?

Plastic — a disposable convenience that often gets mere minutes of use but has become an immortal pollutant.

We are a movement dedicated to creating — together — a more beautiful world. **We are “Artists of the Possible”.**

Faced with a world filling up with single-use, disposable, and unnecessary plastics like a bathtub overflowing onto the floor, some of us work to turn off the taps: the **upstream** issues of how plastic is made and marketed. Others of us work to **reduce plastic use** and create **Zero Waste cities**. Others focus on the **downstream** issues: the ways plastic is disposed of and the pollution of our ocean, air, and land. The ones with the mops.



We work in many ways in many parts of the world, pitching our voices and adapting our actions to make them effective in the different cultures in which we live.

Together, we've built an **unprecedented symphony of innovation and solutions.**

We're more than 2500 organisations with a single aim: to **channel human creativity, innovation** and our **profound love of life and our planet** into **solutions** that are helping us all to **#BreakFreeFromPlastic.**





Top 10 Tips





1. Make it Human

The words “hero” and “heroine” can carry a lot of baggage; especially in cultures that value collectivism over individualism. But think of a hero as simply **a template for the behaviour you are trying to encourage**, whether that’s from individuals, CEOs, or legislators.

The trick is to **amplify the human behaviour you want to see**, not what you want to stop.

The natural tendency for an issue specialist is to talk about “the issue.” But what **people crave to hear are stories with a human heart**. Stories of human failure and triumph.

At its core, a hero or heroine is simply **someone who makes a choice — that may be brave, or difficult — which benefits others**.



So find the people making heroic choices and champion them.

Look in unusual places: children, the elderly, the excluded — It is often here that you find the most creative solutions and the most **REMARKable** yet **relatable** change-makers.

To inspire others to take action, we need 3 things:

1. Heroes our audiences can **connect** to
2. Stories that say we're **advancing**, growing, and winning
3. Examples that show that our **choices** do make a difference.



Question:

How can you make your hero or heroine **vulnerable**, **relatable**, or **lovable** in a way that brings them down to **eye-level with your audience**?

Case Study:

In 2021 when Myanmar was cracking down against anti-government demonstrations, protesters came up with a creative way to exploit a loophole in the highly restrictive laws against gathering and expressing opposition. Nothing prevented a group of people from simultaneously stopping to tie their shoes. In Yangon, the hilarious antics of people stopping to tie their shoes in pedestrian crosswalks, stopping traffic and police, was caught on video and **became a brilliant call to action**, that was **both easy and replicable**, using a **humble everyday act**.





2. Be a Hero-Maker

When it comes to building movements, our organisations and staff don't have to be heroes. In fact, it's often better if they're *mentors* — or **hero-makers**.

Think of how **Gandalf** inspired Frodo to greatness, or how **Gandhi** made the hero of his vision the villages and people of India rather than himself, and called up a non-violent army of resistance.

The **greatest movements turn heroes into recruiters** — they bring more heroes into the movement, who bring more heroes into the movement and so on, **widening the circle of inclusion**.

The key to this is something we like to call “**invitational activism**” — making sure that you're **always putting out a call to adventure**, and making it as **magnetic** as possible.



Part of this is **celebrating our victories, celebrating each other, and being unafraid to express the joy and empowerment** we all feel when we act together for a good cause.

Part of it is **lowering the barriers to participation.**

And part of it is about keeping an eye out for **ordinary people** doing **extraordinary things** — **amplifying their actions** and **providing meaningful opportunities** for others to take action in their own unique ways too.



Question:

What **gift** can you give to enable your heroes to not only overcome the monster, but to themselves become mentors, and recruit more heroes?

Case Study:

The “**Plastic19 Challenge**” in Vietnam took advantage of the Covid19 lockdown to promote a super-positive “Every Day I Choose Joy” video by popular hymnist and singer Jos Thanh Tung and invited people to attach their plastic-reduction pledges and actions and contributions, and to then share with friends with an invitation to make their own pledges.

By sharing the message, their response, and a call to action, the project evoked the snowballing Ice-Bucket Challenge in its viral hero-making, mentor-making, hero-making engine.



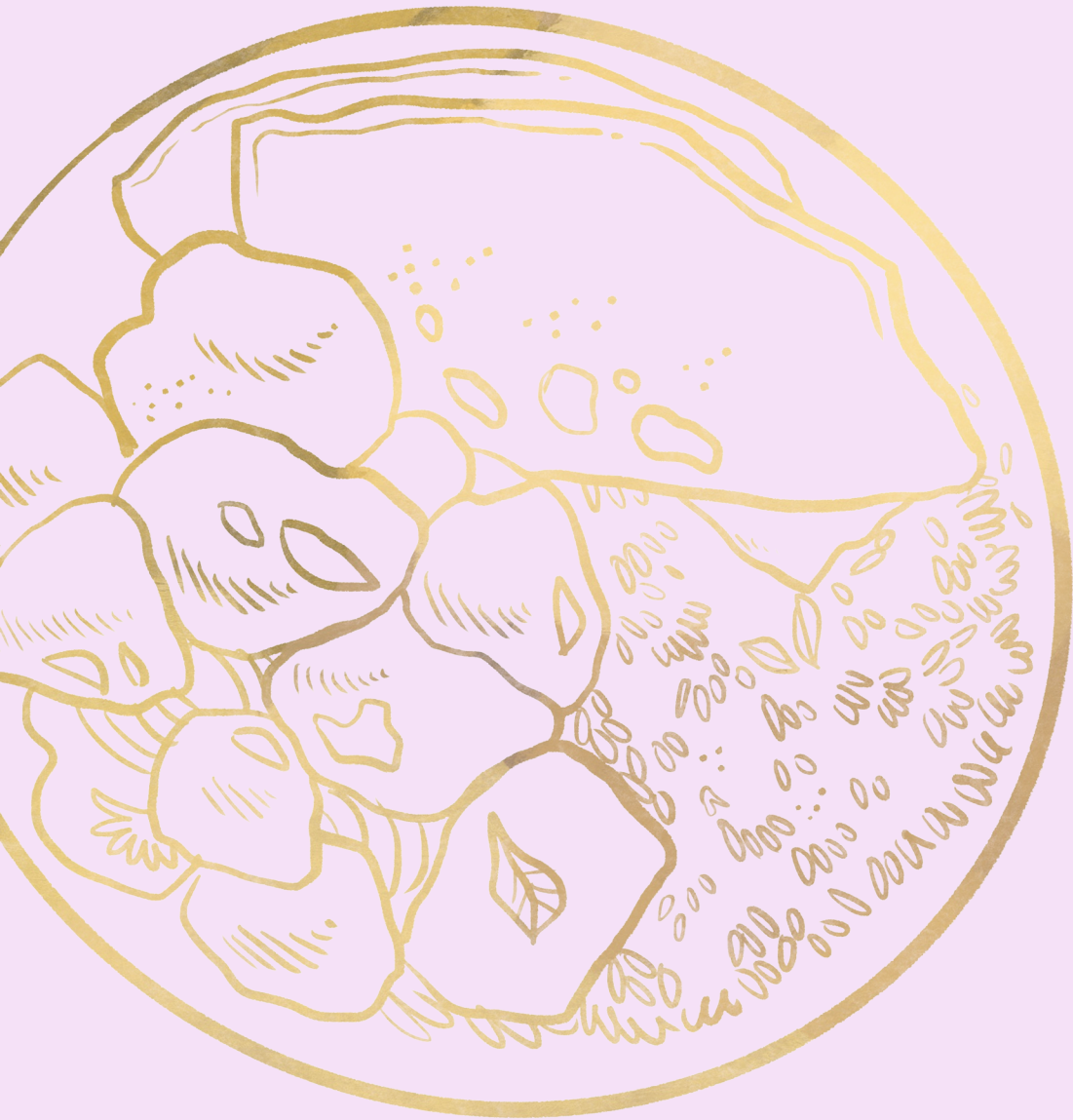


3. Attach to the ordinary (create delicious rituals)

As activists, we think often about tying our issues to “exceptional” events — like the Olympics, Earth Day, or political elections.

But how often do we try to bind our issue to a common everyday event like noon, or Thursdays, or mealtime?

Every day we practice “rituals” that can be very culture-specific, like eating breakfast, or brushing our teeth — and when you successfully attach an action to one of those rituals in a meaningful way, **you invite your audience to recall that action every time they interact with that ritual.**



Big brands often do this brilliantly, like **Budweiser’s “wasssuppppp”** meme, connected to the everyday ritual of answering the phone — which became a catchphrase that both recalls the brand, and communicates it further at the same time.

True **“word of mouth”** advertising.

Similarly, it’s no coincidence that dozens of versions of Rebecca Black’s “Friday” were made in Chinese or that it “stuck” as a viral hit long beyond the shelf-life of most pop songs. It attached to a ritual, the last day of the workweek (for many) with all its weekend-anticipation and energy: helping to recall those positive feelings every-time it was played.



Question:

How can we **attach plastic-reducing actions to existing rituals** in ways that are **viral** and **sticky**?

Case Study:

At the world's largest religious gathering, **The Maha Kumbh Mela India**, in 2013, over 100 million people arrived to pray together and eat together. Lifebuoy Soap was running a campaign to stop dysentery, which kills over a million children annually but can be avoided with simple hygiene.

Their message: **always wash your hands with soap before you eat**. Their medium: **the roti served with every meal**.

They created a heat stamp that branded a simple message on more than 5 million roti: "Did you wash your hands...?" **pairing the hand-washing ritual with the bread-eating ritual**. Genius.





4. Choose your Messenger

Different people respond to different types of messengers. Sometimes it might be a teacher, a police-officer, or another authority figure who moves people to action. Other-times, **it might be someone they look up to or aspire to be like** — whether that is a successful business-person, a world-class athlete like Manny Pacquiao, or a Bollywood star like Priyanka Chopra — who can encourage people to **emulate** their behaviour.

What can be really difficult is realising that **you or your organisation may not always be the best messenger.**

When people think they've already decided what side they're on, it doesn't matter what the spokesperson for an opposing view says. As soon as they identify them as “those environmentalists” they switch off. But when the local minister or hairdresser or – as in [this video from Ecoton](#) a 14-year old girl – says exactly the same thing, they may be much more open to listening.

It's all a matter of **who can carry your message to your specific audience in a way that will inspire your target audience to take action.**



Question:

What person, or profile of person, is your target audience most likely to listen to — and how can you **align them with your cause in an authentic way?**

Case Study:

When Animals Asia set about to stop bear bile-farming in Vietnam, they had a spokesperson problem. Their founder was charismatic and photogenic and tremendously well-informed... and British. The last thing Animals Asia wanted was to appear to be a foreign entity lecturing Vietnam on animal rights. Fortunately, Vietnamese-American filmstar and activist Maggie Q was a life-long animal rights activist, and teaming up with Animals Asia was able to **speak passionately about the magical Moon Bears**, their **place in Vietnam's culture and natural history**, and **her joy at seeing bears enjoying a safe and play-filled life** at Animal Asia's bear sanctuary.

Through a combination of Maggie Q's public efforts and careful behind-the-scenes work with farmers and government officials, Animals Asia was able to secure an agreement from the Vietnamese government to **end all bear farming**, and Animals Asia agreed to find new homes for around 1000 bears — together with Maggie's fundraising help.





5. Make Glorious Mistakes (and learn from them)

Nobody likes to be wrong, or look stupid. But how do people get to be smart and right?

Often it is by trial and error: the art of learning.

And that actually requires one skill in particular: **asking questions.**

When we asked Playshop participants what one thing they would tell their younger selves that they'd learned in the course of their work on plastic pollution, this was it, again and again: **To ask questions, no matter if they felt foolish or naive.**

We work in a professional bubble defined by people with extraordinary expertise and years and years of experience. It's easy to forget that knowledge is hard-won, and presume everyone working on the issue has the same level of expertise.



But as change-makers, **we need to be willing to ask what our audiences might ask** — sometimes even when we *know* the answer — just to make sure the **gap between ignorance and awareness gets filled.**

Similarly, when we **treat mistakes as teaching moments**, and celebrate those moments, we create the kind of **learning environment** that makes our movement **smarter, sharper, and better able to adapt** to our fast-moving world.



Question:

How can we **promote the sharing of mistakes** and the **examination of presumptions** to create a “**learning movement**”?

Case Study:

Some wonderful organisations within our movement have adopted a technique borrowed from Beth Kanter of holding “**Friday Fail**” sessions, where staff gather on Friday afternoon to share — with pride — a story of how they messed up, and **what they learned from the experience**.

It’s an opportunity to **practice your storytelling skills**, to bond a team with **humility and empathy**, and to share your **shipwrecks** so they can become **lighthouses** for others.





6. Make it **REMARKable**

The ever-wise Sudha Murty once said “**If you try to please everyone, you will please no one.**”

If you imagine your audience to be “the general public” your message will be diluted, inoffensive, unfrontational, and bland.

What you need is something that’s going to **punch through the noise** of ten thousand Tik-Toks, a whirlwind of We-Chats and infinite Instagram posts.

And to do that, you’re going to need to create content that’s **REMARKable** — in the sense of being something **SO** Cute or Outrageous or Offensive or Beautiful or Funny or Creative that people cannot help but **REMARK** upon it, discuss it, and (ideally) share it with their friends.



Think about your own behaviour for a moment: do you share content with your friends and family that’s “nice” or “good”, or do you tend to share content that will make them smile, or laugh, or cry, or take action?

Because this is what the best content does — it rises above the noise and into the global conversation — by being **noteworthy**.

And that requires something special from us as content creators, to **push our ideas until they become REMARKable** — and that requires **courage**.

Question:

Am I **scared to let this idea out into the world?**

(If not, consider crumpling it up and creating something that pushes you to the edge of your comfort zone)



Case Study:

There are many ways to be **REMARKable**. “Hello Kitty”, for example, has become a global phenomenon worth billions of dollars and inspiring hundreds of “copycat” brands by being **REMARKably "kawaii" (or “cute”)**.

Meanwhile, the Fearless Collective, a movement of artists and activists based in India creates **REMARKable public murals** filled with beauty and fuelled by an abundance of creativity, in order to both empower marginalised communities (including waste-pickers) and to help re-imagine outdated narratives,

And finally, who could forget the video in which a sea turtle has a plastic straw removed from its nose with a pair of pliers?

We’ve all seen it because it’s so **REMARKably disgusting** and **shocking** that millions have shared it. We’ve even met activists who point to that video as the reason they now work full-time as anti-plastic campaigners, while the video has become so well known that the words **“think of the turtle”** are enough to persuade some people to go without a plastic straw.

Truly **REMARKable**.





7. Choose the Frame

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” — Arundhati Roy

It can be easy to fall into the trap of constantly responding to the messages from industry — with their false claims and greenwash — and end up pushing out messages like **“it’s not true that plastic is safe”** or **“actually, only 2% of plastic is recycled.”**

The problem with such an approach is that not only is it exhausting — but it’s also counter-productive. This is because **when we negate a frame, we actually reinforce a frame.** So when we say **“it’s not true that plastic is safe”** we actually reinforce the idea that plastic IS safe (a frame chosen by industry) — because **our brain doesn’t hear the fact, it hears the frame.**

Put simply, as George Lakoff likes to say, **“There is a basic truth about framing. If you accept the other guy’s frame, you lose.”**



Alternatively, when we say “plastic is dangerous” we immediately trigger a different frame: one in which the ideas of “danger” and “plastics” are connected together in our audience’s mind.

And **the more often people hear a frame, the more “true” it becomes.**

Perhaps the biggest challenge we face is not just avoiding the frame set by those who currently hold the power and **actively choosing our own frame** — but **reframing our work not as being *against* unnecessary single-use plastic and its consequences, but by being “for” a more beautiful vision of the world** — a world in which the values of love, creativity and respect for nature are the norm.

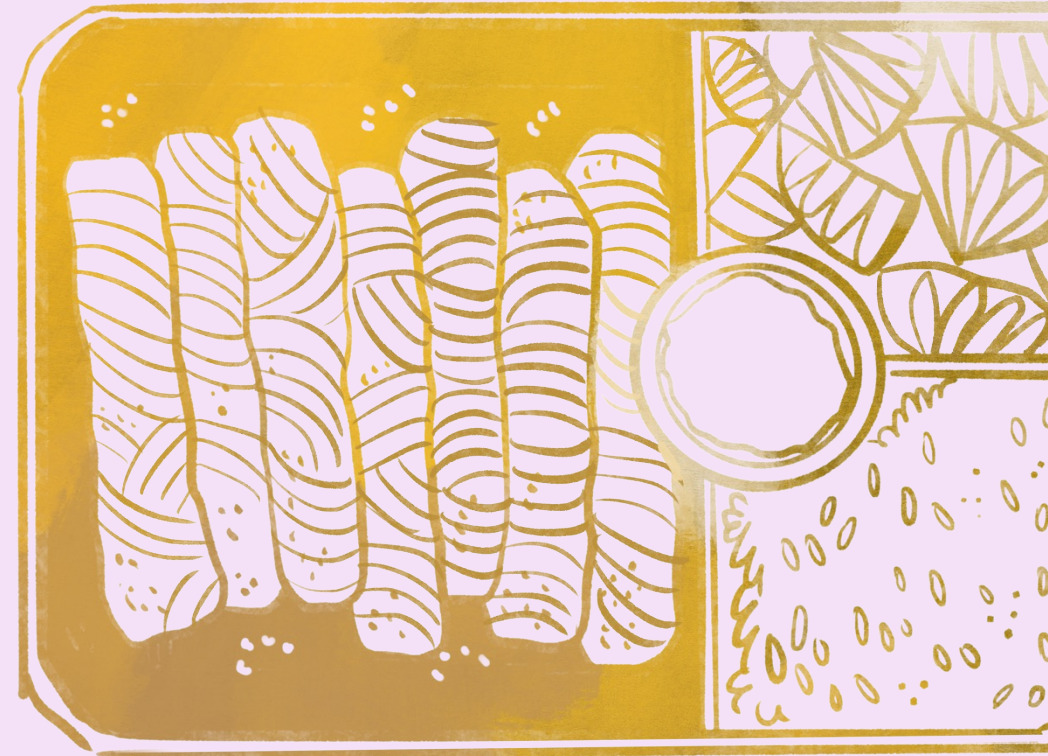
After all, our mission is **far more exciting** if — instead of inviting people to battle the old — **we invite them to join us in creating the new.**

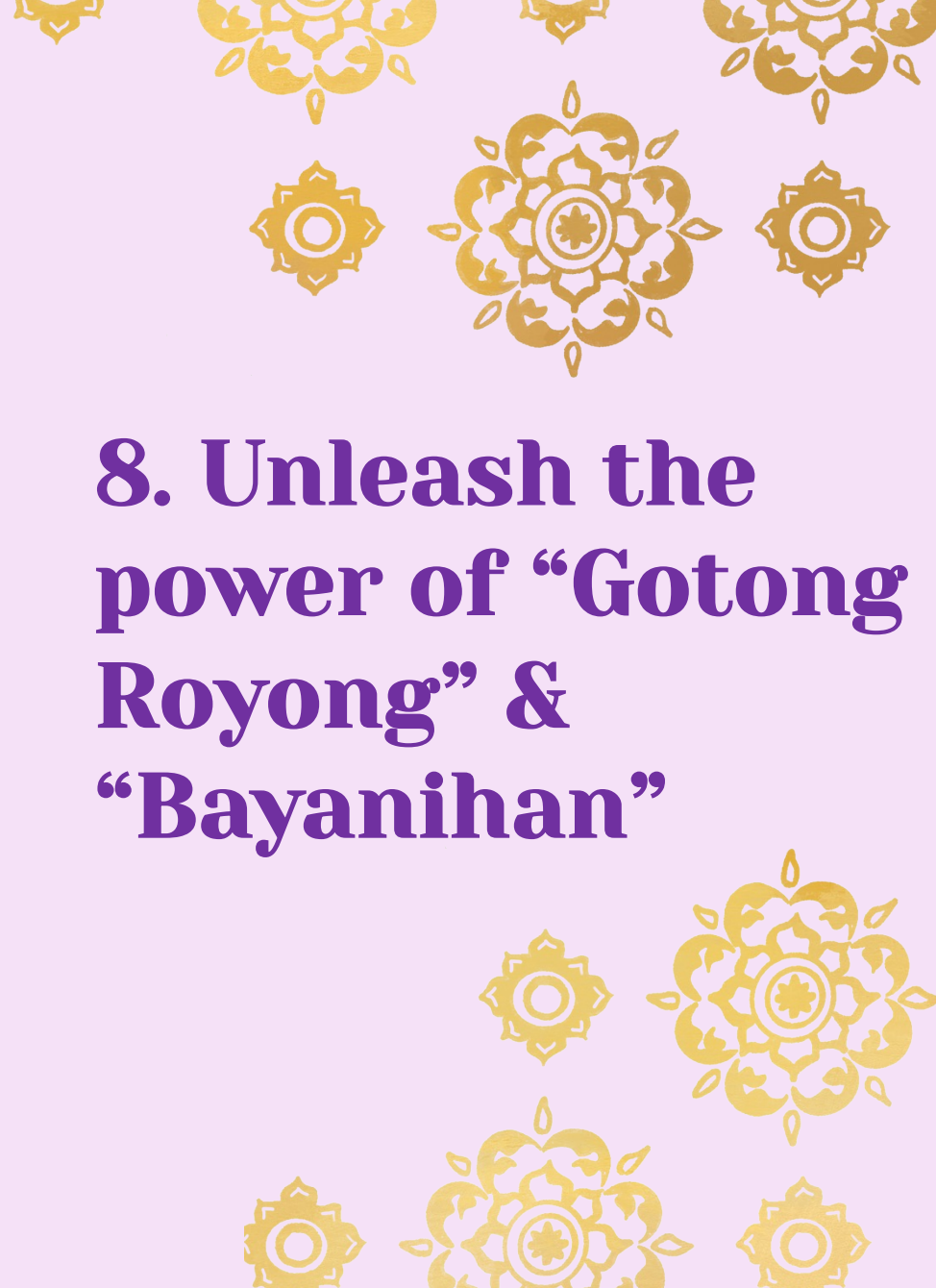
Question:

How can we make sure that **we are the ones who choose how our campaign is framed** — so that both our communications, and those of our detractors — **further our cause** by using **our frame**?

Case Study:

Youth can be a tough audience. Without a positive, engaging frame it can be hard to capture their attention, let alone their imaginations. But in Penang, Malaysia, children as young as those in kindergarten learn the benefits of an Earth-friendly lifestyle thanks to the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP). The kids have run successful campaigns to shift school canteens towards traditional foods with little or no packaging. And in the Philippines, GAIA's Youth Camps have transformed the negative frame of “ban disposables at school” to a positive “we can have fun with reusables” frame through cheeky campaigns such as “**Bring Your Own Baunan (BYOB)**”, and “**Oh my Glass (OMG!)**”, where students are invited to bring their own reusable containers and tumblers for their break times.





8. Unleash the power of “Gotong Royong” & “Bayanihan”

For so many audiences in Asia, the best hero may not be an individual hero or heroine, but **the coordinated efforts of an entire village or collective.**

The idea of “**community building through cooperative doing**” doesn’t even have a sharp English translation - it’s a **uniquely Asian concept**, and a powerful expression of the idea at the core of “people power”, but more **grounded** and **localised.**

Children’s storyteller Mister Rogers used to give comforting advice to children witnessing a disaster: “**Look for the helpers,**” he used to say, “**There are always helpers.**” And during natural disasters is one moment where we see the spirit of “Bayanihan” or “Gotong Royong” most clearly — where there is an **outpouring of support around a common cause**; with **no expectation of reward.**



Our goal, then, as a movement, is to look to **tell more stories where this value is embodied** — both during times of **crisis** and times of **abundance** — and to **design our campaigns** in such a way that they can **only be won through the power of collective action.**

Question:

How can we **tell more stories of communities coming together to create powerful change**, to help celebrate our shared value of **Gotong Royong / Bayanihan**?

Case study:

Filipino Satirical cartoonist Tarantadong Kalbo satirised the “fist-bump” gesture used by President Rodrigo Duterte and his allies by drawing a **single rebellious fist standing up**. Immediately on publication, he was overwhelmed by anti-democracy trolls and shared his frustration with his fellow artists. **Soon another artist reposted the artwork, adding a caricature of themselves in solidarity**. Then another added to that, then another, until the social media space that had previously been dominated by the trolls was bursting with pro-democracy images and messages of solidarity from the artistic community. Kalbo reflected “I guess the message is to not be afraid of speaking out, of standing up for what is right, even if it feels like you’re the only one doing it. **All it takes is one drop to start a ripple.**”





9. Embrace Humour as a Superpower

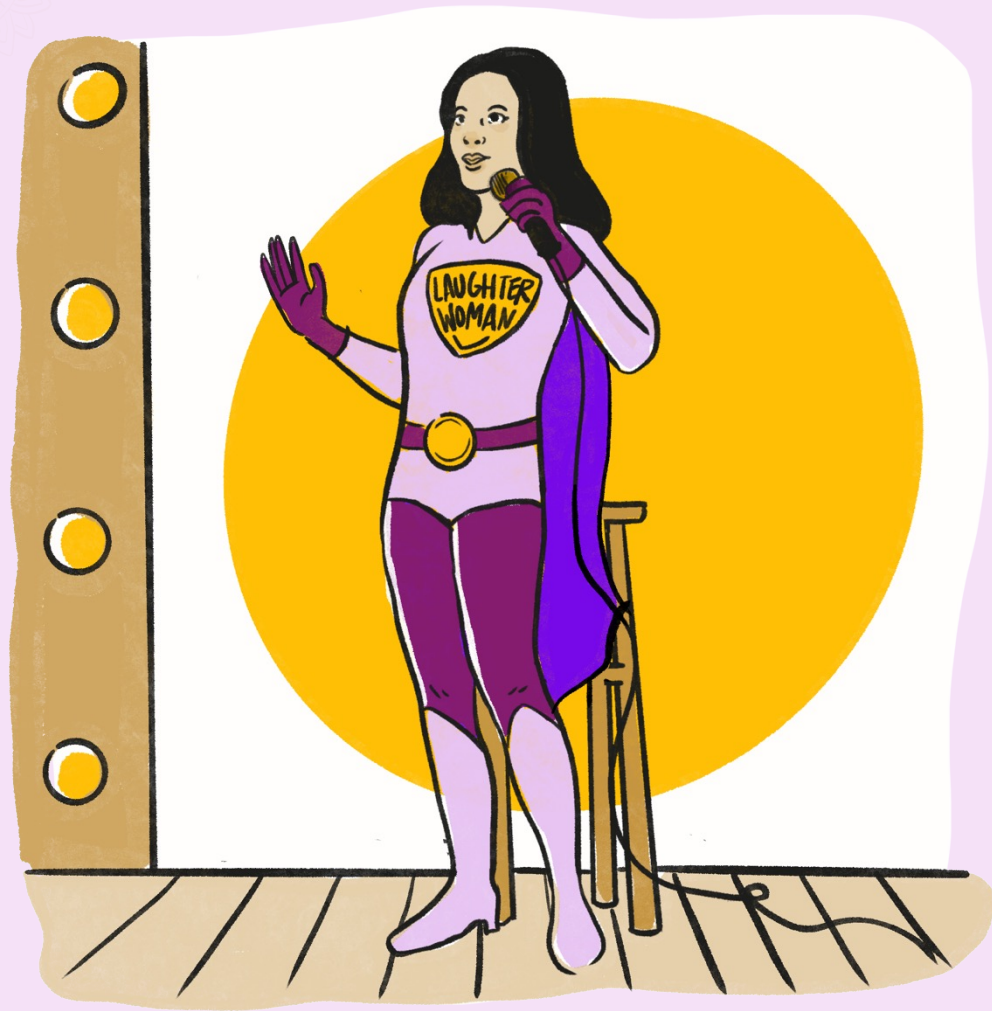
“The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that is laughter”
— Mark Twain

Humour can literally be **“disarming”** — it can **strip evil of its armour** and **reduce it to a joke.**

Research shows that humour can **lower our defences** and make hard truths easier to hear. It can **play a surprisingly powerful role in how people perceive what’s right and what’s normal.**

What’s more, it can **make your message go viral** since it travels better than anger: a study of 777 million (yes, 777 MILLION) Facebook posts ranked the most engaging content as that which was **inspirational, funny, or practical.**

Many activists reject humour as an appropriate emotion to associate with serious issues that have life and death consequences, and that’s understandable. But used wisely, **laughter can be an incredibly powerful tool.**



One way to use it wisely is to **make sure you're punching up, not down**: humour can belittle, which is exactly what you want if your target is Unilever or the government. But don't use it on waste-pickers.

Humour can be a wonderful way to redress power imbalances.

You also need to **know your audience**, since humour can be incredibly culturally sensitive. One of the best ways to account for this is to bring in diverse voices, and to **involve your intended audience in your creative team**. Not only will this help you to create content that actually lands — but it also gives you a head-start when it comes to promoting the content, since **those who were involved in its development will be keen to share it within their networks**.

And those networks are exactly who you are aiming to reach!



Question:

How can we use the **power of humour** to help ensure that our “hard truths” land, and how can we **imbue our creative process** with more **laughter** and **joy** — knowing that this **will ripple out into the world**?

Case Study:

Green Vientiane decided to fight single use plastic water bottles in Laos, they launched with the absurd image of a hunky shirtless youth walking into a restaurant wearing boxing shorts and gloves, and made an **amusing mock kung-fu film**, in which the boxer punches away every disposable water bottle he’s served, until our **hero-waitress** serves him water in a reusable glass.

It’s a nice example of taking the “normal” — plastic bottles — and using our empathy with the hero to make it disgusting and weird, helping to **push it away from the accepted mainstream, and into the fringes of culture**.





10. Jam-Culture

Culture-Jamming is a form of campaigning jiu-jitsu designed to **disrupt mainstream cultural opinions and behaviour** by **subverting the most powerful products of mainstream media**.

It's a **form of superpowered communications**, in part because it attaches itself to something that **people are already paying attention to**: whether that's a hugely successful film, a popular song, or memorable advertisement.

When Indian rapper Sofia Ashraf used Nicki Minaj's Anaconda beat for a protest rap against Unilever, she was culture jamming.

When Thai protesters, forbidden from being derogatory of the monarchy, used images of Voldemort in protests against "he-who-shall-not-be-named", everybody knew exactly who they were talking about.



Culture-jamming works because it **mimics what is familiar** — and then **disrupts** it, **capturing our attention** in the process.

It's a form of “**piggy-backing**” on something that has already gained a lot of traction within culture (saving us lots of time, energy and money) and culture-jamming communications and campaigns are often highly appreciated by a wide-spectrum of people because of the **inherent creativity and mischief** involved in such an act — earning you even more **love** and **an even greater chance of going viral**.



Question:

What's **popping** in the cultural mainstream right now, and how can we **meaningfully attach** our cause to it?

Case Study:

Myanmar's protests, hashtag #TrollTheCoups featured an outpouring of creativity and culture jamming. **Easter Eggs** were used as Instagram protests instead of banners. The **three-fingered salute from Hunger Games** was used as a protest against authoritarianism. They added the **Black Lives Matter movement hashtags** to their communications in outreach and solidarity.

When the military used flash-bang incendiaries to break up crowds, the protestors released videos of everyone oohing and ahing and shouting "Happy New Year" as if it were a **fireworks** show. Cheeky.





Final Thoughts



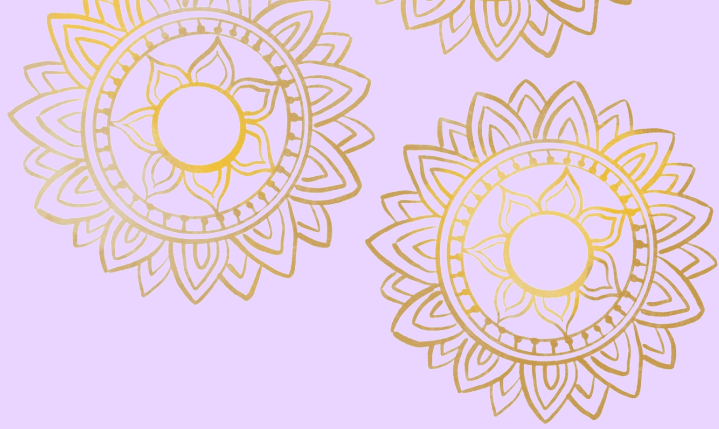
Conclusion

Like all the best stories, this one is not written in stone, but is constantly **unfolding** and **evolving**.

This is a **living document**, and we encourage you to push and pull at these ideas, mash them up, add your own spice, and see **what your audiences gobble up** and what **leaves them hungry for more**.

If you have suggestions or additions, **please share**, especially with case studies built on its lessons.

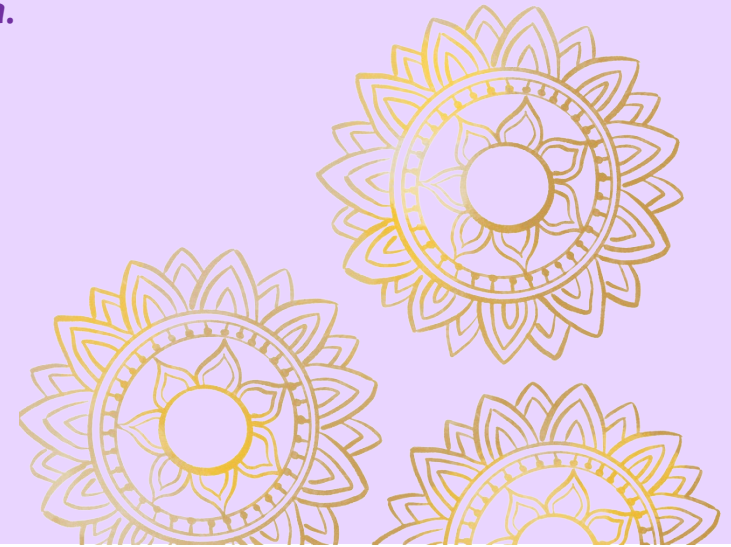
Celebrating our successes is a big part of how movements win. And together, we stand on the cusp of vast, and beautiful changes that have the power to echo down through history: **helping to write a new story of humanity**.



Gratitude

A hundred thousand thank yous to the wonderful human beings who shared stories and Case Studies, played with us, asked beautiful questions, and who made the making of this guide such a great example of the collaborative spirit of the **#BreakFreeFromPlastic** movement.

The process and the outcome truly were a living example of the moral of the movement's story, that ***there's a better way that's way more fun.***



Thank You

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