

How to make something happen

by Dougald Hine

It was June 2005, a few weeks before the Gleneagles summit, and the G8 justice ministers were coming to Sheffield. I decided to invite them for a picnic. They didn't come, but lots of other people did. It was my first experience of "making something happen" and this is an article I wrote for Pick Me Up shortly afterwards.

- 1. START WITH A GOOD IDEA** – try it out on a few people. It's got to catch their imagination or it won't work, whatever you do.
- 2. CLEAR YOUR DIARY** – a lot of work in a short time generates more energy than a little over a long time. With a good idea, lots of people are going to help you out – but mostly in between their other commitments. Someone needs to be committed to it 24/7. That's you.
- 3. FIND YOUR ALLIES** – your idea should be big enough to catch the imaginations of people who don't think they have much in common. In my case, middle-aged Methodists, militant anti-capitalists and a Dutch entrepreneur with philanthropic tendencies. You don't have to get them to trust each other – you just have to get them to trust you. And they need to find the story you're inviting them to take part in more interesting than the things they disagree over.
- 4. RAISE THE STAKES** – make sure you can't afford for it not to happen. Talk to everyone about it - telling people what you're going to do ties you in. So does spending your own money on printing 10,000 fliers. When I lugged those back from the printers, I knew there was no escape.
- 5. HAVE A LAUNCH** – ten days beforehand, six of us turned up outside the town hall with a giant invitation and some bowls of rice. This got us our first hit of media coverage – all the local and regional papers, radio and TV.
- 6. WRITE GOOD PRESS RELEASES** – read the last article your target newspaper ran on the subject and use similar phrases. Write it so a lazy journalist can cut and paste it – they probably will. Try and

find a headline that makes them do a double-take. Keep the rest short and include quotes from you and your friends with emotive soundbites.

7. MAKE IT UP AS YOU GO ALONG – keep checking what you've forgotten to do and listing where you need to be when, but don't map it out like you're invading Normandy. When someone comes to you with a problem, get her to solve it herself. If the idea's good and you're throwing all your energy at it, everything else will be OK.

8. STOP AND LOOK AROUND – when it's all going crazy and you've got two samba bands arguing over who should go on stage, three hundred people queuing for a bowl of rice at an army mess tent and a group of anarchist clowns having a party in the 'VIP area' – stop for ten seconds and remind yourself where all this started – before you rush off to locate the silver candlesticks you borrowed from the landlord of the Rutland Arms.

9. REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN! – some days in those three weeks I didn't want to get out of bed, I just wanted the whole thing to go away. But it was worth it when I heard someone say about an idea I came out with the other night, "If Dougald says it'll happen, he'll make it happen." And the party afterwards was good, too...