

**Leslie Mac:** Hi, everyone. Good afternoon. Good morning. Good evening or whenever you are watching this and I'm so happy to be here to present with the Confab, first-ever virtual Confab. My name is Leslie Mac. I'm an organizer, digital strategist, and I'm really happy to be here to speak with you today. My presentation is called "Show vs. Tell: Content Creation for Action." It really is born out of fieldwork that I've been doing over the last 10 years and experiences that I've had, as I'm sure some of you, with what has become a pretty common tool in the world, which is toolkits.

I really hate toolkits and I really have been spending a lot of time thinking about why I don't like them and what is a better way to help communities, individuals, and formations make informed decisions about the action that they want to take together. This presentation is all about that. About how we move people to take action in useful and effective ways that they themselves help to shape. I want to tell a brief story about my own first organizing experience which happened, if you can believe it, when I was very young.

I was just around 10 years old, and my family's from Jamaica. I spent a lot of time there in the summer, spending time with my grandmother. Well, my grandmother was really involved in her community. Did a lot of community service work. She was a justice of the peace and really was seen as a pillar of her community. She also was very well off. When I went to Jamaica, we had lots of help around. We had a gardener, we had a cook, and we had a housekeeper. I got to be really good friends with all the people that were just in the house all of the time.

In particular, the gardener whose name was Egbert. I spent a lot of time just learning from him about gardening, about the different things that he was doing to keep the property looking really amazing. I noticed something really quickly, which is that Egbert was never allowed inside my grandmother's house. Everybody on staff got a meal or two every day depending on how long they were working. I noted that Egbert used to take his meal from the side door of the house. I was really confused about this. It didn't line up with my grandmother's general approach to community service and being there for people.

I inquired with her about it. I said, "Why isn't Edward allowed inside the house?" She said, "Well, he isn't really proper enough to come inside. I love Egbert but it wouldn't be appropriate for him to come inside the house." Ten-year-old me saw this as a huge injustice. I said, "Well, I'm going to do something about it." Which in hindsight is quite a lot of hubris, but let's keep going with my story. I knew that my grandmother was not going to just fold to my own personal whims, and so I decided to enlist an ally.

I enlisted my aunt, Loris, who helped me forge a very loose plan. She was the one who suggested that I talk to our family priest, Fr. Ken, and see if we can get him on board because it's very hard for my grandmother to say no to him. I went up to the church and I talked to Fr. Ken about what I was thinking. What I really wanted to do was have Egbert over to my grandmother's house for dinner on a Friday evening. Fridays were very casual evening dinner. I thought that would be the easiest, least resistant place that we could have this dinner together with Egbert.

Fr. Ken came up with a really great idea when I told him. He said, "Well, why don't I get invited to dinner on Friday? Then I'll have Egbert come as my guest." This was brilliant. I never would have thought of it. Again, this was Fr. Ken thinking about what power he had and what he could do to affect the situation. Off we went. We definitely had Fr. Ken come to dinner Friday night and here came Egbert behind him dressed in the best clothes he had. Freshly pressed shirt. Some beautiful slacks, nice shoes. He was really ready and excited to come to dinner.

My grandmother's face was one of shock. She knew that Fr. Ken was bringing a guest but had no idea who the guest was going to be. Much to my happiness, she acquiesced and Egbert came and we all had dinner together on Friday night. It really changed the dynamic of the relationship between Egbert and my grandmother, and really taught me an important lesson. Which is that if we give people the opportunity to do better, they will. Also, if we work together with other people to work through what we want to have done and help them devise the best plan together, that success is possible.

Let's talk about what our goals are in engaging our audience and targets to action. Of course, the thing we really want to do is empower communities and individuals to take action. We want them to do something. Not just learn about something. Not just read about it. We want them to do something. We want to move them to take action. Then the second thing we want to do is really support them in deciding what they want to do. We are not experts from on high. While we may have a lot of information, we aren't experts in their lives, in their communities, in their experiences.

What we want to really do is support them in deciding what they want to do and making that become a reality. I want to talk about two types of approaches to working with communities. The first is field organizer practice. As I mentioned at the top of the presentation, I'm both a community organizer and a digital strategist. This session also is a little bit of melding of my two worlds. In field organizer practice, there's some just general tenets that we go by. The first is that people are the best judges of both their capacity and their needs.

I've never been in a community that doesn't know exactly what they need and exactly what should happen to make the issues that they see before them better. I remember being at a community service meeting or a community meeting one day, and we were just all talking openly about the issues that folks were seeing in their community. This was in Michigan. A little girl, she couldn't have been around seven, older than seven or eight, raised her hand in the back of the room. She said, "I have something." I called on her and I pulled her up to the front so everyone could hear her.

She said, "I really think that our streets are really terrible. They never get fixed. There's potholes and everything is bad with them. Also, the streetlights are never on in the evening time. It's really hard for us to play in these broken streets and with the street lights not working." Now, this little girl doesn't know anything about policy. She doesn't know anything specifically about government but she knew what was wrong in her community and she knew what needed to be done to fix it.

The second is that we don't tell people what to do as organizers. It's not our job. Our job is really to listen more than anything else. It's to listen to what people want to have happen and then support them in making those things a reality. People that are organizers often have this really erroneous impression that community organizers have a stack of things that we think need to be done and we walk into communities, and we tell them all of the answers to the things that ail them. The opposite is actually true. Community organizers are listeners. We're listeners and we're supporters of the people that we are there to serve.

On the flip side, if I do my Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde impression, is digital strategy. Which really is a creation of tools, mostly generated based on case studies and generalized experiences. This is taking a wide net and casting it in digital strategy. Also, it's about tools that are built on, again, a very homogeneous, often assumed user and community needs and capacity and issues. With digital strategy, oftentimes, we're making assumptions. That doesn't mean that they're wrong assumptions. It just means that it's not really rooted in the experiences of those that we intend to use the tools and strategies that we come up with.

Usually, this leads to what I refer to as the toolkit method. What does a toolkit method entail? It's data driven, so it has a lot of information in it. It's handed down usually from an amalgam of a bunch of different sources that have been put together from outside of the community to give to them. Also, as we hand a toolkit over to anybody, we assume that buy-in is already there. Otherwise, why would we be handing them something to do? That's a really big flaw in the toolkit method, which is this assumption that the person or the community you're handing a toolkit to, that they want to do what's in the toolkit.

Lastly, and this is, again, another Achilles' heel to the toolkit method is that once someone completes or uses a toolkit, it's a static resource. It does not have a lot of value once it's been used. What I'm proposing is a shift from the toolkit method to what I call the workbook method, which is a much more interactive process with communities. First of all, it's task-driven. Instead of learning information, we have people complete tasks together and individually to help them decide what they want to do. It's built collectively.

It's not one person or even two or three people deciding, it's really a community process where everybody is involved. Buy-in is created through the process of completing the workbook. I can't state enough about how important this point is. Where buy-in is created, you're talking about people that are now invested in the work that they're going to be doing together, and that is worth its weight in gold. Lastly, because a workbook is something that people can continue to do and can do over and over again, it becomes an ongoing resource.

If somebody wants to revisit this issue, they can see what was done before them and why and they can also glean new information and redo the workbook for themselves as situations shift and change in their communities. What topics and tasks benefit from the workbook method? Now, I'm going to be talking a lot about social justice, because that's

the work that I do, but for all of you that are content creators in various different areas, these are the things that work really well with the workbook method.

Something that you want to move people to take action on. It's not, again, just an information transfer, but something that you want people to do something. Whether it's your own workbook, or a client of yours, or a bunch of different people that are coming together, you want them to do something. Also, again, it's not an information download, so you're just not providing info for them; that won't work with the workbook method. It's a task that you want people to take collective action on. You want everybody to be doing something all together.

Lastly, again, just to reinforce this, it's not a solo act. It's not just one person alone, wolfing it out here trying to do something. These are the criteria that work really well for the workbook method no matter what the topic is. If you are working on a project and it meets this criteria, then the workbook method will work really well for the work that you're doing. There's four basic components that I've developed to the workbook method. The first is education. I have "self" in parentheses, and we'll get to that in a little bit.

The second is introspection. It's a lot about soul searching, and this is the vulnerable piece to the workbook method. The third stage is analysis. Then lastly, is action. Now, you'll know action is at the end because these are building blocks to help make whatever action is taken the most effective and the most useful at achieving the goals that you've set forth for whoever's working through the workbook. Let's start with stage one—the two large questions that we want to answer in stage one is why right now, why are we taking action now.

Two, who's most affected, because that's really what needs to be at the center of the work that we want to do. Here are some prompts that you can help people through the education piece. I put "self" in parentheses because this is not a case of like, "Oh, let's get a bunch of people that are affected by this into a room and just have them talk to us." No. This is about really digging deep and having people do the research on their own and really seek out this information directly.

What kind of data and information should they be looking for? That's a really good prompt to give them. Where should they be looking for this expertise? What types of places can they look? What kind of periodicals can they read? What kind of books should they be looking at? Are there podcasts that would be helpful for them to look and to listen to? How should the research be divided amongst the group? Again, this is a collaborative effort. Maybe these three people are going to listen to podcasts and report back on what they learned.

These two people are going to read some articles, these three people are going to do some one-to-one interviews with some folks, and then they're going to come together and share their information. The last two are about that. First is that, how will the findings be recorded and shared? Are we going to meet together? Are we going to have

a shared Google Doc that we're going to put our findings in? How are we going to share and record this information? Lastly, for the education stage, you have to have a timeline.

There has to be a deadline by which people have to complete this portion of the workbook. All right, moving on to introspection. With introspection, we really want to be super vulnerable on this point and I want to talk a little bit more about that. All the work that we do tends to be vulnerable, but I also know that it's hard for that to happen. This piece of the workbook is really meant to help people break down their walls a little bit and open themselves up, not just for critique because that's not what we're doing, but really talking about their experiences.

Really talking about the things that they have seen in the world and how it affects these issues that they're hoping to address as a group. The prompts that go into the introspection piece need to be discussion generative. We want a lot of conversation to come from this. We want people to really be talking to each other and really be open to listening to what everybody has to say. What are some examples? What work has already been done on this issue by a group, by organization, by individuals.

Really talking through like, "Have you already done some work on this? Have you had experiences with this issue?" What made them interested in this in the first place? Was it a personal connection? Was a family member affected? Were they just tired of seeing this thing on the news over and over again? What got them ready to take a step and do this work as a collective? Lastly, how do they contribute to tolerate or allow this issue in their community? Now, this part is the really, really vulnerable piece and I want to talk about why it's really important.

We all contribute in a capitalistic, patriarchal, cis/hetero-normative society, to all of the issues that we hope to address. None of us are immune. It's really important to get down to that base level of understanding with ourselves: "These are the ways in which I benefit from this issue. These are the ways in which I contribute to it. These are the ways in which I've turned a blind eye either now or in the past. This is how we really are able to get to useful and effective actions."

This vulnerability, while it can be difficult in the moment, has a really big payoff, and I can't emphasize enough how important it is to really foster an environment when going through the workbook as a community, that vulnerability is not liability. It's actually one of the biggest assets that we have and taking action. All right, we're going to move on to the analysis aid, which I like to call the oppression puzzle.

What this means is, how does this work connect to the work that they've done in the past both collectively and individually, and what other forms of oppression are connected to or are affected by this? If you're not working on an oppression issue, let's say you're talking about data collection, how do the other issues related to data collection fit into this issue or puzzle that you're trying to put together and affect. This is really about taking a step back and looking at things from a high-level view. This is really critical.

Again, we want to affect things both at the personal level and at the macro level. Both of those things need to come together in order for the action that is developed to be both effective and useful. All right, now we've come to the nitty-gritty, which is the action. I like to also make a key point that in the action piece, this is about helping people decide what they want to do. We can't come into these situations with a preconceived notion of what we want folks to do; that actually almost never works.

What works is empowering people to make informed decisions and make a collective decision about what action they want to take. This is where we see the most effective work happening around the world, around the country, and in communities all over the United States. The prompts in this section should heavily refer back to the work that they've already done in the first three sections. The idea is that their education, their introspection, and their analysis is what helps inform the action that they want to take.

These prompts are going to really help them go back and think through the things that they've learned about themselves, about the work that they want to do and about the world around them in order to take effective action. Their plan that they put together needs to be justified by the education introspection and analysis work that they've done. If action that they want to take is actually out of alignment with the introspection that they've done, then it's not a good action to take. This is really helpful in helping them assess what will work, what won't, what's useful, and what isn't.

Let's talk through some of the action plan prompts. If they've put together an action plan, these are the things they want to ask as a group and talk through together. Why did they choose this goal and action target? How does their education research support this goal? Does this actually tie back to the information that they've learned? How does their introspection work make this an attainable goal? Attainability is really about, if I know how I fit into something, then my action should be specific to the way that I can affect it. That's what makes it attainable.

Lastly, how does their analysis work to make this goal useful to all the other pieces of the puzzle that are part of oppression or part of whatever issue that you're working on? Now, this is really critical because you can put an action plan together that addresses one little tiny part of this issue but detrimentally affects the larger picture that is not useful in the world. We want to make sure that this is not something that's going to feed into oppression that's happening to other people as well.

Again, we're going to refer back to the earlier stages, and there's some practical decisions that we should think through when putting together this action plan. We want to identify potential key partners. This should come directly out of your education and your interest actions. Who are the different players that are affected and involved in this issue? They want to have a list of available and potential resources. Again, this should be at our fingertips through that education process.

We want to make sure that roles and areas of responsibility are defined, and we should include examples. What exactly does it mean when we say someone is going to be a recorder? Does that mean that they're going to videotape, that they're going to take

notes, that they're going to have notes shareable via a Google Doc or some other shared document? We want to make sure that we define that very specifically.

Again, a timeline—we want to have a timeline for whatever our proposed action plan is, and this can be in stages. It doesn't just have to be one time. We want to make sure, "Okay, this is the point where we want to have a stop gap and check back on the things that we're doing, make sure we're on the right track and then continue to move on." You should have several pieces to the timeline of your proposed action plan.

Lastly, we want to put together a basic communication strategy. Who do they need to reach and how can they reach them? This needs to be an integral part of your action plan, because if you don't reach the people that need to actually get this information, or that this action is meant to support, it's pretty useless. We've gone through, we have our action plan in place now, and we are ready to take action. Now, there's this ongoing work piece that needs to be included also in all of your workbooks. This final piece should really be prompts for users to report back.

There are four things that we want to make sure are included in this ongoing work part. This is what makes a workbook an ongoing resource because these report-back pieces are things that would be useful to people in the future doing this work, doing similar work or even just doing work in the same community to see what happened and really understand the outcomes of the action plan that was put together. Even if it wasn't successful, these lessons are useful for people to know.

The first is just to record. What happened? When you executed your action plan, what actually occurred? The second is to glean some lessons learned, and this is a great community discussion to have. What did they learn not only from the action plan itself, but the process of deciding what they wanted to do together as a collective? The third is what worked and why. We want to really lean into the things that went really well. Even if the ultimate goal wasn't reached, there were pieces of this action plan and pieces of this process that worked really well, made people feel good and had a positive effect on those that were involved.

Lastly, we want to glean best practices. What are the best practices that we would suggest after doing this entire process that other people continually do and support and continue to work into the work that they're going to do in the future, that's the last piece. This is what again makes your workbook completely useful and become a resource in a library, in a community center, in an office setting. Wherever it's being used, it's completely going to be something that people can refer to over and over again to support the work that they want to do in the future.

Well, that's the end of my presentation. I'm so glad that you were able to watch it. I'm happy to talk with people more at a later date. You can find me online at [lesliemac.com](http://lesliemac.com), where you can contact me directly and I can even help do a direct workshop with you around how to create a workbook plan for other work that you're doing. You can also support me on Patreon at [patreon.com/lesliemacstyle](http://patreon.com/lesliemacstyle). On social media you can

follow me @LeslieMac. Twitter's where I do most of my talking, so that's a great place to follow me.

I really want to thank everyone at Confab for giving me this opportunity to talk to all of you and share this method of working that has been an integral part of my work for the last couple of years. I've been developing this process for a while. I've used it for things like bailing out moms as part of the national bailout. I've used it to help organizers make a decision about a direction that they want their organization to go in. I've used it with clients to help them make a decision about what platform and programs that they want to push forth. It is a very useful tool.

Again, I just want to emphasize that the greatest thing that we can do for our clients, for our communities, for anybody that we work for is empower them to make decisions for themselves. Having buy-in, having it come directly from them, and having them make decisions, informed decisions, together, builds community, ensures that the action plans that are put together are in alignment with the things that people want to and are able to do. Three, it makes sure that we aren't seen as the enemy. We're not seen as people that are coming into a community or into a company or into a group and telling them what to do.

We're there to support them. We are a resource and using the workbook method makes it very clear to people that that's what we're there for, which is to support the work that they want to do in their worlds, and to help them be as successful as they possibly can. Have a really great rest of Confab, I'm so excited that we were able to continue to do this work together. I'm excited to see all of the other sessions and I hope that you are. Thanks so much and have a wonderful day, evening, night, whenever you're listening to this.

**[00:27:53] [END OF AUDIO]**