

David Ronquillo

Tape 43 TC 1:30:00:00 CR 38,39 SR 17

1:30:12 David what did you do as field director?

1:30:27 It's a first of all it's kind of an unrecognized honor but yeah it's true. As a field director I was a direct liaison between most of all the church community labor organizations throughout the broader Los Angeles area in the support with the united farm workers

1:30:47 What did you do? What kind of strategies did you implement?

1:30:55 Well the board gave me the flexibility to be able learn how to do corporate reseach, and the way I was able to use a couple of the universities UCLA, USC, Federal Trade Commission, to learn quite a bit about how cooperations operate, in particular the market industry and I was able to provide that information to the board... stop

1:31:21 David you took the boycott into a new direction, new strategies, can you explain what you were doing?

1:31:29 Well in the corporate research that I learned to do through the union I was able to provide information to the executive board, so that through my direct supervisor who was a board member, took the information to the executive board and then set strategy on how we would be boycotting or who we would target as a boycott and a come back with the strategy so that we could develop a program a boycott a local boycott program,

1:31:58 Story - about the strategy developed for Luckys?

1:32:03 What we would do is real basic research go into the central library downtown looking at all the telephone books throughout all southern California and finding our particular market, at that time back in the early 80's we were targeting luckys because they were carrying a particular brand of lettuce called, red coach lettuce and...

1:32:29 How did you target Luckys, what were the strategies?

Yeah, what we did is we found out where Lucky's markets were, specifically in each community throughout southern California, and by doing that we were able to find out exactly how many brands of lettuce what quantity of lettuce um Lucky sold throughout southern California and eventually nationwide so that we could then develop a program based on the amount of lettuce that they were selling which was related back to the ranchers that we were involved in the labor dispute with...

1:33:10 How did you find that out?

1:33:12 By going to the Federal Trade Commission, getting their annual reports getting their quarterly reports, finding out who the subsidiaries were, if the changed market names as you went across the country, because in southern California that'd been a Luckys was a market for southern California but as you went, back East or into the Midwest, you would find that for example luckys in

Chicago was called Gemco and maybe in Florida they were called Memco and so, by doing that we could then target them nationwide.

1:33:31 Instead of using crowds, you used new strategies - tell us about it.

1:34:08 The way we located support for our boycott, was by plotting, first of all, plotting where each of the Lucky stores were located throughout southern California, and once we did that we first looked at the areas where we were, where we had the most support, East Los Angeles, Santa Monica, San Fernando, Long Beach, San Pedro, and for each particular market we would target universities first, we would target senior citizens first, we would target women's groups, then we would go after church groups then we would do labor organizations, and we would visit each organization in the area asking them to endorse the boycott number one, number two to join us in sending delegations of their organizational members to visit their local lucky markets, and then three we would ask them to follow it up with a letter mentioning the number of members that they represented, and within a six week period we could target as many as 30 Lucky markets and have as many as 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, organizations visit each specific Lucky market.

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1:35:43 Well we would go and we would ask some of the students in targetting some of the particular markets, to find out how much of a target brand we're after was being sold at a particular market, and what we would do is we would sent students to all these different markets and ask them to find out what brands you know we'd talked to the produce manager and they're all only too happy to cooperate with us because nobody really talks to them much. And they

would tell us what brands they sold, how many boxes of lettuce they sold a week, so that we could by talking to three or four produce managers we could tell if somebody was being straight forward in the information that were providing and and if they weren't being straight forward we could tell who those were, and we could tell, chain wide exactly how many boxes of lettuce were being sold in a particular week, so we knew how big, then we knew with the help of all these students, how big the task was before us.

1:36:39 Before you had masses of people, now are you hitting corporate heads?

1:36:44 What we were doing was, we were hitting 25-30 markets where before we used to have to put a 100 people everyday in front of a market, we were doing the same type of work and had we not done that work the strat the strategy that we were using to target luckys on a on a kind of a a high tech level wouldn't have worked. Because it was always based on the threat that we could possibly do that, in all their different parking lots, and what we would do is we would have organizations leaders representing, let's say we would have um national organization of women the long beach chapter representing 250 members visit a Lucky and say, with two of the members, say you could have three senior citizens say going and say I'm supporting the United Farm Workers boycott we want you to stop carrying Red Coach lettuce, we appreciate your concern, your response will be reported to 250 of our members, so once they did that visit the seniors, and cause they were real good, 'cause they weren't afraid they would then follow it up with a letter. And emphasize that they were speaking in behalf of 250 members, and when you had organizations, sending delegations throughout southern California you could easily come up with leaderships of different organizations,

representing anywhere from 50 to 100 thousand members from various different organizations, by the time you added up all their memberships.

What effect did that have on the corporate?

1:38:16 Well it was a threat that all these organizations said stop carrying Red Coach lettuce or we're gonna tell our members to stop buying at your market, until you've done that and when you have the threat of all these different organizations in particular, senior citizens groups, you have women's groups who don't do most of the shopping most of the buying and they're at the head of the support for our boycott, you know you get these board members from Lucky I think, our strategy was to make them think but more importantly our strategy was to position our leadership. Cesar Chavez the executive board members, my direct supervisor who would position them to be able to meet with us, because by the time Cesar asked them for a meeting to sit down with us to discuss the boycott he wasn't there just asking for a handout, he was there under the threat that the boycott would broaden, and that it would go nationwide. And that was the biggest threat to that they had because once

1:39:20 Why was there a change in strategies?

1:39:27 Well you know the the markets became more sophisticated so we had to change with the times, we had work more efficiently and we had to become more sophisticated. And one of the ways we did that is once we won with lucky's we then pursued other mayor chains throughout the country, and one of the ways that we did that was, doing the same type of research with different market called jewel I think from Chicago their headquarter in Chicago and what we did is we got

a a a volunteer of the union that was that was a stock holder to transfer about 25-30 shares of stock to individual members of our support staff here, excuse me of our volunteer staff here and...

1:40:31 Story about the Lucky shares

1:40:36 Yeah we were well we're following the market industry from the streets to the corporate rooms, the corporate board rooms and one of the ways we did that was, we had a market jewel after we won against lucky's we got them to stop carrying this brand of lettuce we went nationwide to the other chains that were carrying the same brand of lettuce and we... stockholder, we did some research and we found that we had a friend in Chicago who was a stockholder introduced what it was called an ethics resolution that they not sell produce that come from a ranch that had been found guilty of unfair labor practices and what we did was...

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1:41:25 We had a friend that introduced an ethics resolution that asking the particular market jewel to not carry red coach lettuce because the ranch that it came from had been found guilty of unfair labor practices. And but what it did was it provided a forum they thought since we were boycotting them in Chicago they thought they could move their stockholders meeting in LA, and and have it here in La and it was a big mistake because what we did is we put 10, yeah we put 25 stockholders with one share of stock to go into the stockholders meeting and they allowed us ten different stockholders who were friends to address the resolution. Now the resolution lost ,but it set precedent for other organizations down the line

to do the same thing. And it was one of the first times that that I had heard of it and since then have seen it quite a bit.

1:42:22 Did this set a precedent for corporate responsibility?

1:42:25 Yes, most definitely, most definitely it it it forced corporations to look at or look into the eyes of the consumers, you know, that's what it did it forced a stockholders of these large corporations to look at the people who were addressing the resolutions. And it provided legitimacy for a lot of organizations who other wise would not even be heard.

Previous question, repeated...

1:43:08 It it yeah it started to set a precedent of corporate responsibility... by approaching corporations in their board rooms in their stockholder's meetings it it put corporations on notice that they would have to listen more carefully to the consumers from a social stand point of view and that they would have to look into the eyes of the people they were making decisions about.

1:43:41 What is your recollection of Cesar?

1:43:45 The first the first impression that I have of Cesar when I when I first saw him, was...

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1:44:00 When I first met Cesar, it was in La Paz in 1978 and the first thought I had of him when I stood up and shook his hand is, how short he was, ok I'm 6'1 he's probably like 5'2, 5'3 yeah, but it size for reason I never ,I never thought of him as being short after that.

Why?

1:44:29 Because, he was such a nice person, just a really nice human being and he, he was just so basic so simple and so clear in his thought, that it was really disarming it made you feel comfortable, and it made you want to talk him and share with him, and it was easy...

Did you think he was tough?

1:45:10 Did I think Cesar was tough? I think that Cesar is probably one of the bravest human beings that I have ever seen, that I've ever met, that I've ever worked close to. I mean just I've seen Cesar go into, where I was personally present, I've seen him meet with Jackie Presser at a time when the Teamsters were threatening to come back into the fields, and I escorted one of the few times that I was asked to do security, for him and I did security with other two staff members, and he walked into a meeting with Jackie Presser, and Jackie Presser is probably like around 6'5 maybe 6'7 big huge man and, they were having a conference of all these Teamster members and he made us stay outside he went in with Ellen Agers our attorney at the time, just himself and Ellen Agers met with Jackie Presser and we were outside, and somehow all the little hairs on my arms and the chills started coming to me and I started thinking about all these men that I was standing around talking to, and somehow thinking that these men reminded me more of gangsters

of thugs than of farm workers and it scared me, it scared me that he went in there, it scared me that made us stay outside. While we were supposed to be securing him or being his body guards but he went in there and it frightened me to death, but he went in there and I'll never forget that.

1:46:48 Was security really an issue with Cesar?

1:46:56 Yeah it had to be, it had to be, it was, we had to have security for Cesar only because of the many types of people that we worked with I mean, been very public being very accessible, Cesar was always accessible to people, I mean, anybody could go up to him and say hello to him, and he'd stop and he'd say hello he'd chit chat people I would see people that you never even thought would go up to him and say do you remember my uncle, and Cesar would say, who is he in the strangest... we could be in church, we could be in a parking lot, we might be stopping at a chinese restaurant, you know in the middle of Phoenix in the desert out in the middle of Phoenix somewhere and people would approach him and he was always very nice he was always real comfortable to be with.

1:47:50 How was he with farm workers, with Mexicanos?

1:48:01 Cesar, Cesar did not tailor his conversations or his demeanor to a particular group to solicit a certain response, he was consistant in how he he directed himself to anybody. I mean he he pursued something that was true something that was good and and it carried wherever he went. So that if he was speaking to farm workers, he could be speaking to corporate heads and in just the same clear language. You know there was nothing pretentious about him, and the workers I mean one day I was at a in Imperial Valley and he was talking about 25

workers who wanted to have the benefits of the union, and he went into a dialogue with the workers and I remember I'll never forget that either, that he started to tell the workers or explain to the workers how through time through history farm workers no matter where in the world were always mistreated, always the lowest paid, had the worst working conditions, and as he was doing that and saying that it's the same here in Imperial Valley I saw tears coming down from his eyes, I saw Cesar crying as he did that, and a and a there was a compassion there was just that basic compassion the truth the goodness that Cesar felt for people in general started with the workers but it didn't stop with the workers it carried on to all the different areas of people that he worked with.

Tape 44 TC 2:30:00:00 CR 40,41 SR 17

Back to the Jackie Presser story -

Well on one of the few times...

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2:30:32 Well one of the few times that I was that I did security for Cesar they asked us to meet Cesar at the Phoenix airport we had droven in from Calexico and we met them there we transported them to ah hotel on the these fancy hotels probably the best one in Phoenix,

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Well one of the few times that I was that I did security we were to meet Cesar I drove from Calexico...

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2:31:22 One time I was asked to do security one of the few times and I met Cesar along with two other staff people at the Phoenix airport and we went to real fancy probably the fanciest hotel in Phoenix where the Teamsters were having a conference, and Cesar arrived with our attorney Ellen Agers at the time and we were outside with about 25-30 Teamster members, and I thought that we were there to be body guards and Cesar had us wait outside and this great big huge man who I later found out was Jackie Presser received him and our attorney, and he went in and I thought my gosh this guy is a real real ah brave or I didn't know what else to equate it with, but it wa a real scary situation I mean there were these guys out there that were Teamster members that wanted to come back in the fields they were meeting all the locals, were meeting Teamsters Union locals were meeting to see if when they were gonna come back into the fields and try organize farm workers again, and he went and met with Jackie Presser and these guys were scary they were very scary I could feel all the chills in my body and the hairs on my arms standing up it was just frightening. And a that's probably one of the scariest experiences that I ever had in my life and everything was wrong but Cesar went in he went in calm and came out just as calm and I remember the only thing he said from the meeting was we have a lot of work to do you know we've got a lot of work to do ahead of us. And that was it, we had lunch and...

2:33:05 Did you see Cesar as being fearless or tough?

2:33:11 Focused focused Cesar was very focused and and if he was fearless if he was tough it was a consequence of being focused you know I mean it's either, Cesar if he said it's planned if we he set the union on a course we were going to stay on that course, and a and we did often time with the adversity of having people that were people that were better skilled than better skilled you know but what we lacked in experience and what we lacked in in knowledge because we were young and he was developing us as leaders we made up for with long hours of work and real real hard work and he kept us working and focused.

2:34:06 Story about Cesar being a handball player?

2:34:12 Well I play a little handball, not an avid handball player but I play a little handball and a but we of the you know we would a all of the UFW staff the boycott staff would meet every so often and in one particular day weekend actually it was a whole week we met at St Michael's Seminary. And we we paired off Cesar always played handball he loved to play hand ball that's one of the few things that I always saw him doing you know any chance that he had was to play handball and the last time that I that I think I played hadball was with Cesar, and we paired off and it just so happened as if paired off, and he was playing at five feet whatever two inches or whatever he stood he played the front I played the back and on that they I'll never forget it we beat everybody on staff and there was about 25- of us 30, 30, 30 different pairs and we just had fun and nobody could beat us that day he played the front nothing got by him and I played the back and nothing could get above me and it was great it was nice.

2:35:17 How did you meet Helen and what were your personal thoughts?

2:35:24 Well one of the first things when I graduated from college one of the first things, you know here was this young guy college intellectual going to work for the United Farm Workers, and one of the I needed some humbling so they put me in the kitchen working, and Helen did a lot of the food preparation for our staff in farm workers headquarters, and she had me working right along side of her scrubbing pots and pans, and preparing food, and serving food, and I hated it but in the process I never realized that I would get to know Helen as well as I did. and I was pretty fortunate for that.

2:36:00 What was your impression of Helen?

2:36:06 Probably like Cesar, she could be my aunt, she could be my mother, you know she just real comfortable, nothing pretentious about her you know just real friendly, you know and and real straight faced...

Was Cesar much of a handball player?

2:36:29 Cesar was pretty good, Cesar was pretty good handball player upfront upfront he could move yeah,

What about ...?

2:36:39 Well, you know usually the when you play in teams you're trying to get the ball from bouncing a second time off the wall and, you develop a skill for getting it as close to ground as possible, and if you're a little bit short in stature you can get those low balls and he was real good at that, and real good at that he'd have

you going in one direction and then put the ball in a complete different direction, so he was very competitive, he was very competitive.

37:03 Was he as competitive in the court as he was with dealing with the unions?

2:37:07 Yes, yes he's very competitive, Cesar's very he's very forceful you know. I mean I saw him in in different settings and he was normally three four steps ahead of most people, and he was and he dealt with people's feelings that way ah you know, I remember one time they couldn't find somebody to be a master of ceremonies, so they threw me in and I'd never done anything public like that before, and but I did it but I did it and after the event was over he approached me, and he said, you know David he said you did a good job you've got a lot of class. And that's all I needed for it to make everything worthwhile, you know and and but he could see, you know and he just touched on that feeling that I had you know of being neervour and not knowing what kind of job I had done so, yeah and he'd tease me occassionally he'd tease me he would be, one day we were in Cincinatti and he was cutting his birthday cake, it was his bithday and we were at a boycott conference huge staff and he was cutting the cake and he went ahh he went like this and he said did you see everybody jump back except for David because he's from east LA. And he'd pick on me a little bit about it but you know when you think of, when I think of Cesar it it's very personal because we've got Cesar Chavez avenue now in east LA and I used to shine shoes on what is today Cesar Chavez avenue in east LA and so when I drive down here, you know when I drive down east LA people ask me did you know Cesar and I say yeah. And it's like you feel it's such an honor yet, there's nothing really to brag about 'cause he was just an average human being with a superb mind and a heart of an elephant. You know

and his leadership, the leadership that he played in the UFW in the farm workers movement, but over all in social justice was such that he always let us do things or or take risk, he'd tell us take risks don't be afraid if in the process of doing something good you've got to take a risk and if you make a mistake it's ok, because it's in the process of doing something good something right, and and his leadership reflected that attitude and it came down from his leadership through the board through our immediate supervisors, and so we weren't constantly told don't do this don't do that don't do this you can't do, that they were we were told be creative don't be afraid do it try it and and so we learned to take risks...

40:11 How was the work that you did with the farm workers, how does it affect you now?

um it the work that I did with the union um

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2:40:35 It it the work that I do with the united farm workers probably touched every aspect of my life and it probably stayed probably the rest of my life, and probably one simple approach that Cesar taught all of us just through example is to be an organizer, not a do gooder not a somebody who can solve everybody's problems Cesar wasn't about, that Cesar was about working with people to teach them to solve their own problems...

(PIC ROLL OFF; WILD ONLY HERE)

th... farm workers it was to teach them to organize so tha they could make enough money to feed their own families without having to rely on charity or turkeys or toys for christmas, and that way he always gave people options you know, you can

do it this way, you can do it this, way or you can do it this way, and these are your options now what do you wanna do? And that was the challenge that he placed in front of people, what would you do? you know what can you do? and in my life I still operate in that basic philosophy of being and organizer of working with families working with individuals, and asking them what can I do how, can I help, what is your problem, and then this is what I see, and these are your possible options now what do you wanna do how can I help you to solve your what can I do to help you solve your own problem. Rather than me solving your problem for you because if I solve your problem I take your dignity if you solve your problem you keep your dignity and you learn how to do it yourself without relying on anyone else.

END OF INTERVIEW