

Introduction: Tapes of Fred Ross Training Sessions 1975  
By LeRoy Chatfield

In the 1950s, Fred Ross, Sr., recruited Cesar Chavez into the Community Service Organization (CSO) and trained him to be an organizer. Chavez took it from there: he became the most gifted and successful organizer in its history; he resigned in 1962 to found the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), which in 1966 merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) to become the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) with Cesar Chavez as its president.

And what did Chavez do after he founded the farmworker movement? Of course, he recruited Fred Ross, Sr. to train the hundreds of volunteers who flocked to the cause of the farmworkers to become organizers, especially for the grape and lettuce boycotts being waged in the cities of the United States and Canada.

There is no mystery to the organizing philosophy of Fred Ross, Sr. – you have to be motivated, you need a plan, you have to follow the method to implement that plan, you follow-up continuously, and you are held accountable to produce positive results – and yes, you are required to work your butt off!

These particular tapes of Fred Ross training sessions were made in January 1975 at La Paz, the national headquarters of the United Farm Workers. The recordings are not professionally made so it is sometimes difficult to clearly hear some of the participants in the training workshops, but the listener will have no difficulty hearing Fred Ross, probably because he was the closest to the microphone, but also because he spoke in a clear and commanding voice.

I have kept the original identifications on the tapes taken from the the reel boxes in the event that a research academic might want/need to tie it back to the original recordings, which are maintained at the UFW Archives at Wayne State University.

In general, these training sessions feature Fred Ross giving a “lecture” to the group, followed by role playing, and finally, a critique from Fred and the audience about each performance. The core method of Fred’s training was teaching the wannabe organizer the nuts and bolts of how to conduct a “house meeting.”

I have included in this section an essay about Fred Ross written for the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project by Larry Tramutola, it will give you a first-hand look at the meticulousness of the Fred Ross method of organizing.