

A single inspired teacher in a classroom, a single picture worth a thousand words, the single step beginning the longest journey, a single sunny break in the clouds after a dark rainy night, one sincere warm smile on a day when many are cold and indifferent, the bright idea of one person in a world-changing innovation: we call this "the power of one."

For the past two and a half years of building a sophisticated organizational advocacy program, we have tried to reassure teachers that they are not alone in the fight to defend their programs. We have called on collective efforts, collective information, collective memory, and collective wisdom to avoid a reinvention of the wheel with every parent organization and school-board showdown. We have portrayed advocacy as a complex art, requiring us to use the strength we know exists in numbers, and cautioning us to avoid becoming a one-man band with a fast burn-out rate.

The number of useful databases linked from our national advocacy site, the number of state fact packs, advocacy coordinators and associates will do nothing by themselves to save a single French program. So very often a happy resolution to a challenge can be traced to a single timely gesture of one individual, even though that person may have had the backing of many.

So what can one person do? Of course the adage "A stitch in time saves nine" applies to appropriate and timely promotion of French among your students and out in your community. Doing this will make it less likely that you will have to be an advocate for your own program. You should also, however, be aware that certain promotional activities actually help build foundations for future advocacy. Let me give you some examples.

Does your town have some French historical influence (explorers, evolution from a French fur trading post, a group of French settlers, etc.)? If the tie is of some significance, contact your local historical society and library to see if you could partner in an essay or presentation contest. Invite an associated historian or librarian to your class to make a relevant presentation. Make sure the event gets coverage in the local newspaper or air time in radio public announcements. Make sure someone talks about it at a parent or school board meeting. You have just made some important potential allies, since the newspaper article and other announcements promoted the work of the historical society and the local public library. In addition, you have brought

public attention to your program for its sensitivity to local cultural heritage.

Does your town, county, or region have a French- or Francophone-owned company? Or perhaps there is a company that is export-dependent on countries in the Francophone world. Invite an informed company representative to speak about this to your students. Partner with a chamber of commerce for an essay or presentation contest, and make sure the news finds media channels. Now count your allies. You have potential support from the chamber of commerce and from the company, both of whose names have been given a rare media halo. And of course, your program gets exposure for bringing highly practical real-world knowledge to students.

How good are your graduates? Do you have alumnae who have received some kind of recognition because of their knowledge of French? If you have outstanding alums, partner with your local guidance counselor to write an interest article for the newspaper, showing what one can do with French. Now you have guidance counselors, parents, and alumnae in your camp.

Do you have some really talented junior and senior students and a local elementary school which is looking for enrichment activities? Get together with the service learning people in your school district to provide appropriate activities. You might also find ideas at the National Service Learning Clearinghouse Web site [www.servicelearning.org].

Make sure there is media coverage. You now have allies among elementary-school students, teachers, administrators, and parents. You have given your students an opportunity for service-learning credit, and the media knows you can give them a newsworthy story.

What can one person do when a need for advocacy arises? Try to spot it before it becomes an emergency. Timing is everything.

Do you remember that great French program at Acmetown High School? It seemed like Mme Dufour's students took all the prizes, had lots of guest speakers, and went on frequent field trips, even though there were so many students. She retired three years ago, and now you see a French position open at AHS. Unless that program has expanded by one position under new leadership, it may be in deep trouble. Better check it out, or contact someone who can. Your action might be what is needed to save French for the kids in Acmetown.

Did you read recently about Paupertown,

where they are having a huge budget shortfall? Isn't that the place where they were boycotting French imports two years ago? You know they have a French program, but you don't know the teacher's name. Find out, and check on the French program? It likely has a reduced enrollment and is sure to be on the chopping block as they calculate the new budget. You might be in time to intervene.

Here are other actions that could make a difference: (*continued on page 43*)