

Conclusion: Winning the Right Way

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From precampaign planning to Election Day GOTV drives, we have provided you with an overview of how to build your campaign for public office. This book gives you the tools and advice you need to begin planning, organizing, fundraising, and developing and delivering your message to voters. Now you are ready to begin the hard work of campaigning.

Key Points to Review before You Start:

- Well before the campaign begins, learn more about the concerns of your community and the demands of public office and successful campaigning. There are many ways to get involved in local politics and local issues before your campaign kicks off—and every effort you make will pay off once the campaign begins.
- Plan your campaign from the beginning, rather than make ad hoc decisions as they arise. Build a winning strategy, complete with a budget and a timeline, and then devote your energies to implementing it.
- Build a competent and motivated organization of paid staff and volunteers. Choose your key staff members and divide responsibilities among them. Identify, recruit, and use a large base of volunteers, and build coalitions with local organizations.
- Develop a compelling and consistent message for your campaign. Give voters a reason to vote for you by articulating your rationale, theme, and issue positions. Select the issues that you will focus on carefully and find a way to differentiate yourself from your fellow candidate(s) without succumbing to attack politics.
- Raise the resources needed to get your message out to voters. Develop a fundraising plan, identify small and large potential donors, and get comfortable asking for money. Use fundraising letters and events to increase your pool of resources.

- **Deliver your message to voters.** Inform voters using earned media, advertising, and public events. Make your campaign accessible to the media and communicate effectively with reporters. Make debates and interactive public forums central to your efforts. Use an effective combination of advertising, which includes direct mail, signs and written materials, the Web and email, and electronic media.
- **Make direct contact with and mobilize as many voters as you can.** Identify your target audience of undecided voters and use phone and door-to-door canvassing to convince them to support your candidacy. Energize your supporters and make sure they get to the polls on Election Day.
- **Comply with all campaign laws.** Pay attention to the legal requirements that you must follow to be an official candidate. Comply with all deadlines and obligations associated with being an official candidate and follow all campaign finance regulations.

Making Sense of All the Advice

In addition to the overview that we have provided, you have read the recommendations of professional political consultants, who are specialists in every major area of campaigning. You have read the advice of those who have been on the “front lines” of campaigning. You even have read about what voters want from campaigns, based on research we and others have collected using public opinion polls and focus groups.

Now it is time for you to develop your own perspective on campaigning by synthesizing these diverse insights and integrating them with your own experiences. As you proceed with your campaign and consider what advice to incorporate and what to leave out, keep in mind that most campaign experts and practitioners agree on a few key points:

- **You can win public office by running an ethical and effective campaign.** You do not have to sacrifice your principles to win. You only have to commit yourself to working hard, following the rules, and taking your obligations as a candidate seriously.

- Successful campaigns are well planned. Think through your message development, organization, fundraising, and message delivery strategies before you begin. Make decisions based on a clear plan of action to achieve your goals, rather than the considerations of the moment.
- Voters will never be as attentive to your campaign as you would like them to be. You have to use your scarce time and resources to create opportunities to interact with voters. Make these interactions count by using a consistent and compelling message to convince voters to support you.
- Most campaigns need to devote significant energy to fundraising. Additional resources, whether they are spent on advertising or contacting voters, allow you to deliver your message to more voters and mobilize more supporters to vote.
- You cannot campaign alone. Successful candidates are backed by effective organizations, including full-time management and motivated volunteers.
- Different voters react to different kinds of campaign communications. Create a diverse communications strategy that includes talking to the media, being active at public events, directly contacting voters, and advertising in different venues.

Your Timeline

Campaigns require advanced planning, action taken on multiple fronts, and the smooth operation of numerous activities often simultaneously. It can be difficult to keep track of how and when to implement all of the components of a successful campaign. Here is a general campaign timeline to follow:

Months or years before the campaign:

- Learn about the people, the problems, and the controversies in your community.
- Get involved in local political and social organizations.
- Develop the expertise and experience to address local concerns.

Before you begin actively campaigning:

- Follow all the rules to ensure your name is on the ballot.
- Develop a plan that addresses all aspects of your campaign; it should include a budget, a finance plan, a media plan, a GOTV plan, and a calendar.
- Build a core organization, including a manager and a treasurer.
- Decide on a basic campaign message and practice talking to voters.
- Gather seed money to get started with your campaign.

In the first few months of your campaign:

- Kick-off your campaign with a well-publicized event.
- Speak to community groups, build coalitions, and gather endorsements.
- Develop a campaign Web site and email list.
- Create printed campaign materials that emphasize your message.
- Raise funds for your campaign by contacting potential donors with phone calls and fundraising letters.
- Hold several fundraising events and distribute your campaign materials.
- Prepare and submit your campaign finance reporting materials.
- Recruit volunteers and paid staff to expand your organization.
- Identify undecided voters and likely target constituencies.
- Decide on your advertising and voter contact strategy and develop the infrastructure to implement it.

In the middle of your campaign:

- Create and participate in public forums, including debates with other candidates and town-hall meetings on your own.
- Generate news by holding public events, issuing press releases, and giving interviews to reporters.
- Send another round of fundraising letters and call back your supporters.
- Contact undecided voters and set up regular telephone and door-to-door canvassing operations.
- Hold neighborhood events for undecided voters to get to know you, preferably in combination with your efforts to contact voters.
- Distribute signs and materials to increase your name identification.
- Increase your volunteer base and organize your GOTV efforts.

Near the end of your campaign:

- Increase your visibility by participating in public forums and media interviews as well as rallies with supporters.
- Send targeted mail and use electronic media advertising to get your message across to undecided voters.
- Make your final round of fundraising pleas using mail, phone calls, and fundraising events.
- Contact undecided voters through intensified telephone and door-to-door canvassing operations.
- Mobilize supporters with reminders about Election Day and opportunities for early voting.
- Achieve maximum publicity for your candidacy by distributing all of your yard-signs, identifying new large sign locations, and updating your old signs.
- Make regular statements and send regular press releases highlighting your campaign's progress and responding to anticipated or current attacks from your opponent(s).

At the end of your campaign:

- Launch a final round of targeted advertising to convince undecided voters.
- Target undecided voters with a final round of phone and door-to-door canvassing.
- Contact all supporters with a GOTV phone call, direct mail piece, and/or home visit. Include information on your GOTV services.
- Make immediate public statements to respond to all attacks.
- Prepare and submit final disclosure of contributions.

On Election Day:

- Leave a GOTV door-hanger at your supporters' homes.
- Use sign-waving to generate excitement.
- Implement GOTV services and monitor turnout at the polls.
- Call your supporters who have not voted.

Running for Office on the High Road

If you follow the advice in this book, you will be implementing ethical and effective strategies for winning public office. While remembering that voters care more about your substantive positions, character, and experience than the campaign tactics that you adopt, you can use your winning strategy to build a reputation as a candidate who is taking the “high road” to public service and increase your support among voters.

Make sure that the voters know about the best practices adopted by your campaign, such as your openness regarding your fundraising and your willingness to meet with voters and the press, the steps that you have taken to bring additional voters into the process, and the substantive focus of your campaign message—especially if these practices contrast with the strategies of the other candidate(s). If you emphasize only your campaign strategies, however, voters will not hear the central message of your campaign, that is, what you hope to accomplish if elected.

There are several things you can do to take advantage of your high-road strategy without distracting voters from your primary message:

- **Make it clear when you announce your candidacy that you plan to run an ethical campaign and expect the same from the other candidate(s).** Outline the steps you will take to increase voters’ confidence in the process, for example, by disclosing the sources of your campaign funds, mobilizing new voters, and making the issues that matter to voters central to your campaign’s message.
- **Sign a code of conduct or make a public pledge to run an ethical campaign and challenge your opponent(s) to do the same.** Ask the media and community organizations to monitor the degree to which you and your opponent(s) keep your commitments to adopt ethical campaign strategies.
- **Make it known to the media, your fellow candidate(s), and undecided voters that you are willing to debate regularly, that you have planned a schedule of town-hall meetings and get-to-know-the-candidate events, and that you have answered hundreds of voter questions using email, phone, and direct contact.**

- When you make comparisons or speak negatively about your opponent(s), explain why these criticisms are substantive and relevant to the office. Provide documentation of all negative claims to the media and make it available on your Web site.
- When attacks come your way, offer a clear response and back up any explanation you give with documentation. When you respond to an attack, make it clear that you are waging a different kind of campaign and say why voters should reject candidates who launch misleading, irrelevant, or unfair attacks.
- Always remember that you will find an attack on your candidacy or a questionable statement by an opponent more objectionable than the voters. It is important to establish an image as an ethical campaigner and point out clear transgressions by your opponent(s) without jeopardizing your focus on your message. If you make a point about your campaign practices, use it to transition to your qualifications and plans for government.

After You Are Elected: Succeeding in Governance

Getting elected to office is only the first challenge you will face as a public servant. Do not assume that you will know how to govern based on your campaign experience. On the other hand, do not forget what you learned once you get elected. Many of the same principles of campaigning apply to governance, but keep the similarities and the differences in mind.

Most public officials run for office more than once and your next campaign is never very far away. After the campaign is over, however, fulfilling your role as a public servant will entail many of the same practices and skills you relied upon as a candidate.

First, you will need to communicate regularly with the public and the media. Your skill at making succinct points and delivering coherent messages will come in handy when you attempt to make law or implement policy. Making yourself available to reporters and preparing for your interactions with the media should also remain a priority.

Second, just as in your campaign, you will need to rely on a broad organization, rather than doing everything yourself. Building a strong

staff (if you have one) and fostering a good relationship with agency staff along with developing an organization of supporters to help you govern should remain a priority. As in campaigns, you will need to form coalitions with other organizations and elected officials.

Third, planning your strategies, budgeting carefully, and making the best use of your time and resources are all skills needed to govern effectively. Finally, you will need to maintain openness and accountability while in office. Follow all ethics rules that govern elected officials and disclose any conflicts of interest you may have. Make yourself available to constituents by holding regular town-hall meetings and by maintaining an office with a staff that is accessible and responsive to constituent concerns.

Governing is not one big campaign, however. You will need to adapt to several new realities once in office. First, accomplishing legislative or administrative initiatives often requires working across ideological lines with those who may not have supported your candidacy. Do not lose potential supporters for your efforts by holding grudges against those who were not with you on Election Day.

Second, voters expect more civility and less conflict in public office than in campaigns. They recognize that substantive comparative discussions can take place in campaigns but are more wary of open conflict once you are in office. Third, you will have to pay more attention to the details of policy and administration, including issues that will not be of concern to voters. It will also be more difficult to please everyone when you implement policy than when you make public statements about it.

Finally, it is likely that you will spend more time talking to particular stakeholders than to the public at large. While your responsibility is to a broad constituency, only a small minority will be actively involved in influencing decisions. Even so, make every effort to take a broad set of ideas and interests into consideration when making decisions.

To make your transition to governing run smoothly, the best idea is to talk to those who have held the office before you and to other elected and appointed officials who you will need to work with while in office. Even if they did not support your candidacy, try to remain open to their advice. You may want to change how the office is run, but be respectful of the person you are replacing and ask him or her to share what he or she has

learned while in office. You can always choose to change directions later, but your first priority in office should be to learn how the system works.

As you enter office, do not forget about the promises you made as a candidate and the priorities that you set in the campaign. Voters will be counting on you to act on these. If you change your mind or cannot implement something you proposed, apologize and explain why. If you set goals during the campaign, regularly ask yourself if you are meeting those goals.

Problems that you did not anticipate as a candidate are likely to arise, and it is wise to change focus as events or new information necessitate. The important point is that you gain a reputation as an effective leader by setting your priorities and working toward them. Remember, your next campaign will be built upon your achievements in office.

Building a Career, Not Just a Campaign

Candidates and campaign advisors often get caught up in the excitement and the daily events of the campaign. They have their eyes on winning the election and see it as the only priority. This kind of focus is useful for winning elections as long as it is tempered by the realization that this is not your final competition, your only challenge, or an isolated event. Your campaign will likely set the stage for your career in public life.

You will be convincing voters to support your goals, mobilizing the electorate to vote for you, and planning your issue positions and strategies for more than just one campaign. You may be working with the same reporters, organizational leaders, and voters for many years. If you develop a reputation early in your career as an unethical politician who bends the rules and stretches the truth, that reputation is likely to stay with you. If you make decisions that reflect your true values with an eye toward your ethical responsibilities and long-term interests, you can build a reputation as an effective leader and a rising star in local politics.

The American public's current view of politics and politicians is quite negative. Voters are disdainful of a politician's promises and constituents rarely believe that an elected official is looking out for their interests. Politics does not have to be this way. As an aspiring participant

in public life, you can choose to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

We commend you for taking an active role in the concerns of your community and we encourage you to work toward improving the political climate in your area by taking your campaign decisions seriously. By running an ethical and effective campaign that is open and accountable and by using your campaign to inform and mobilize voters, you can make a contribution before you are ever elected to office. Good luck in your campaign and thank you for assuming this responsibility that a democracy demands.

