

# 1

## Ten Lessons to Look for in Campaign Chronicles

*James R. Bowers and Stephen Daniels*

Given the fact that you're reading *Inside Political Campaigns*, there's a good chance that you're taking a college political science course on campaigns and elections and your professor has assigned this book as one of the required texts. You may be wondering why. More to the point, you may be asking yourself: "What lessons am I likely to learn from reading *Inside Political Campaigns*?" A great deal, we hope. There are many lessons to be learned from these campaign chronicles ranging from the serious to the absurd. We will discuss some of the specific lessons we want you to look for shortly, but first we want to tell you a bit more about the campaign chronicles that follow.

The campaign chronicles are our and our contributors' firsthand accounts of their own involvement and participation in election campaigns. All of us are political scientists much like your own professor, with the exception of two undergraduate political science students. When you read these chronicles, you will see various kinds of campaign functions through a participant's own eyes. You'll vicariously experience what it's like to be inside many different kinds of campaigns—from presidential to congressional, gubernatorial to mayoral, state legislative to city council, and even a local race for district attorney. The contributors show you how their respective campaigns handled (not always successfully) the kinds of challenges that all campaigns face (and traditional textbooks often discuss): the perils of challenging incumbents, the nuances of fund-raising in presidential campaigns, the effective use of free or earned media, the importance of opposition and candidate research, the nightmares of ballot access and campaigning for third-party candidates, the ways to motivate campaign volunteers (including when the candidate is your own father), the use of negative campaigning, and the importance of planning and strategy. Through these chronicles you will also come to appreciate the idea that despite the differences among the various kinds of elections, there are certain universal truths.

We want you to read these campaign chronicles closely and with an eye for detail. They are self-critical stories of defeat as well as victory. In fact, the authors write a lot about losing—the lessons learned from it, how to avoid it, and why you can still lose even when you run well. If you are a political science major or any student sitting in a course on campaigns and elections, you are there because first and foremost you are interested in politics, whether it's because you want to be directly involved in it or want to simply enjoy it as you would any other spectator sport. And don't let the discipline fool you. Politics and campaigns, although important, are sports and they are fun. We actually enjoy this stuff! We appreciate and want to encourage your interest. We understand that you're more inclined to be a political animal than a budding young political scientist. You want real action. You want something you can apply to the "real world"—and in its own way *Inside Political Campaigns* is about political action.

So again the question can be asked: What lessons will you learn by reading *Inside Political Campaigns*? No doubt you will draw some of your own lessons from the chronicles. We're pretty certain that your professor will also point out a number of lessons. Most likely those lessons relate to the larger body of political science or applied literature to which you've been exposed in class. They may also reflect your professor's own experiences if he or she has been active in campaigns. Between the lessons you uncover and those your professor points out, you will have a much better understanding of and appreciation for campaigns after reading *Inside Political Campaigns* than before.

Nevertheless, we'd be remiss in our duty if we didn't take time to preview some key lessons we believe you should look for while reading these campaign chronicles. We've picked ten. Although there is a rough order in these lessons and some are more conducive to a campaign's success than others, you shouldn't regard them as a model that will help predict outcomes or guarantee success. They are simply what they are—ten lessons to consider.

Our purpose in previewing these ten lessons is to help you see the campaign chronicles as more than just the good stories that they are. We want you to also appreciate the chronicles as a series of case studies done by participant observers—participants who are trained to look at campaigns and elections analytically and critically. They are political scientists, and even though they are writing in a distinctly nonacademic way, they do not leave their critical eye behind. Nor should you. Each story makes a useful point or set of points with regard to campaigns. With this in mind, we want you to look at these chronicles collectively and see what you can draw from their deep descriptions of campaigns. But don't go looking for some grand or "unified theory" of campaigns from them. We and our contributors are not sure such a theory can ever exist in a meaningful and useful form. Instead, we want you looking for important patterns, common contextual factors, and shared characteristics that together contribute to a fuller understanding of campaigns.

## Lesson 1: All Campaigns Are Basically Local Affairs

Some ideas seem trite, a few so much so that we no longer take them seriously. Our first lesson may appear to be such a one, but it is deeply and fundamentally true. The late speaker of the US House of Representatives, Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, regularly proclaimed a lesson learned from his father: "All politics is local." The same can be said about campaigns and elections, and this lesson is evident in each of the campaign chronicles. Vladimir Gutman's "Funding Hillary's 2008 Presidential Campaign" (Chapter 4), for instance, drives this point home through its examination of the decentralized nature of fund-raising even in a presidential campaign. It shows the overwhelming importance of state fund-raising organizations for bringing in the dollars and how those organizations rely on even more decentralized and local networks and contacts. It doesn't get much more local than his description of the problems in getting a Chicago alderman to pay up for a block of tickets to a major Clinton fund-raiser the alderman bought for some of his constituents.

The chronicles about running for Congress by Tari Renner and Richard J. Hardy (Chapters 5 and 9, respectively) also underscore the importance of the local. The Renner campaign's allegation concerning the incumbent congressman's real place of residence reflects the importance of localism and how "of their districts" members of the House are expected to be. Similarly, Hardy's use of his former and current students in key campaign positions and as volunteers highlights another aspect of localism in congressional campaigns—in staffing. And Hardy's chronicle reflects still another aspect of localism for campaign staffing—that ties can be personal ones as well—in the death of Maria Bartlett, a volunteer, in a car accident as she was returning from a campaign errand. This tragic accident will underscore the idea that campaigns are local in terms of emotional space and the intimacy that develops among those involved in a campaign.

*Bottom line: All politics is local. Ignore this old cliché at your own peril.*

## Lesson 2: The Rules and Procedures Under Which Campaigns Operate Matter

Almost everything of consequence in politics takes place within some institutional setting or set of rules—and they matter. There's an old saying in legislative politics that goes something like this: "If you let me control the procedures, I'll beat you on substance every time." Within reason, the same can be said about campaigns and elections. The rules and procedures under which they operate affect everything from ballot access to fund-raising to the number of terms an officeholder may serve and more. Michael Munger's chronicle of running for governor of North Carolina as the Libertarian Party candidate (Chapter 11) is a

perfect example. Munger reveals that North Carolina makes it almost impossible for third parties to get their candidates on the ballot. Add to this the rules for candidate debates that only invite “serious candidates,” and you can see the effects procedures and rules have on third-party candidates.

Stephen Daniels’s “Long-Term Strategy in Local Elections” (Chapter 3) gives another perspective on such “threshold rules”—the rules that govern access to a place on the ballot. Munger’s challenge was to get over the high hurdles set in North Carolina to gain his place on the ballot. Similarly, you will read how Daniels’s citizen group—the Community Advocates—used threshold rules to keep things off the ballot. Daniels notes that before the Advocates were formed, he successfully used the rule on the appropriate date for filing a referendum request to keep an issue off the ballot. The Advocates successfully used signature requirements to keep another referendum issue off the ballot but failed in a second attempt when that issue reappeared a year later; they and their allies did manage to defeat that issue at the polls. In addition, the Advocates used the rules on the form and wording of a referendum question to force the incumbent mayor to withdraw his “strong mayor” referendum.

In Chapter 12, Aaron Wicks’s chronicle of multicandidate mayoral primaries shows that government rules are not the only ones that matter. Endorsements by the major political parties are essential for candidates and their campaigns, and each party—even at the local level—will have its own rules and procedures for determining who will be endorsed and receive the party’s support. Wicks’s story clarifies the importance of party rules. In Rochester, New York, where his story takes place, Democrats use a weighted vote rule at the county convention in determining who will be the party’s designated candidate. It means that not all votes cast are equal. Consequently, a candidate receiving the largest raw vote total can actually lose the designation or nomination because his or her opponent had the greatest weighted vote total. This practice is similar to how the Electoral College operates in presidential elections. As Al Gore found out in the 2000 election, winning the popular vote doesn’t win you the presidency. You have to win a clear majority of electoral votes, which are in effect weighted.

Gutman’s “Funding Hillary 2008 Presidential Campaign” provides a different kind of example (see Chapter 4). He highlights how the federal campaign finance rules under which candidates for president operate, particularly the individual and corporate limits on contributions, structure fund-raising. Equally important, he explains the importance of loopholes, or what the rules don’t say. Gutman’s candid discussion of the widespread practice of “bundling”—a foreseeable, yet allowable, way around the federal campaign finance limits—provides a powerful example of the importance of loopholes and how they too can structure campaign fund-raising.

*Bottom line: Rules and procedures matter—and they’re not necessarily fair.*

### Lesson 3: Planning, Organization, and Strategy Matter

We selected Chapman Rackaway’s and Stephen Daniels’s chronicles as Chapters 2 and 3 because both superbly summarize most elements of the chronicles that follow them. Rackaway ties up in a nicely wrapped package how planning and organization are essential to any campaign’s success. Planning and organization affect every element of a campaign, from developing walking lists to fund-raising to executing a media strategy. For excellent examples of their nitty-gritty importance, you will only need to look at Gutman’s and Kevin Anderson’s chapters. In Chapter 4, Gutman explains how the Hillary Clinton campaign organized donors in tiers and worked out the mechanics of phone calling for donations. But perhaps his best illustration of the importance of organization and planning for fund-raising is his description of how the campaign put together and executed a major fund-raising event in Chicago. In Chapter 6, Anderson explains the organization of Bill Clinton’s research department in the 1992 presidential campaign. It was divided into two main parts: Opposition Research, which looked for information on the candidate’s opponents, and the Arkansas Record, which looked for information to defend the candidate’s record as governor. Anderson worked in the latter, and he describes not only how that part of the research department fit into the larger campaign but also how its daily work was organized.

Good planning and organizing can’t guarantee a win, but the odds of losing are dramatically increased without them. On this note, we suggest a corollary to Lesson 3: Even well-planned and well-run campaigns lose. One thing you should notice in reading these memoirs is that the candidates involved lost as often as they won. In three chronicles—Hardy (Chapter 9), Renner (Chapter 5), and James R. Bowers (Chapter 10)—in which the candidates are all political scientists, each one loses. Nonetheless, all three campaigns were well planned, well organized, and well run. Why is this so? As Daniels shows in Chapter 3, campaigns play out in a given political context that almost always favors one candidate over another. Renner and Hardy were running against incumbents. Bowers had to contend with quasi-incumbency and race-based politics. All that good planning, organizing, and strategy can do is allow you to maximize the management of political circumstances to the best of your or your candidate’s advantage. Daniels also reminds us that planning and organization will not suffice if the campaign lacks a strategy with a clear goal. Good strategy includes a well-communicated narrative that gives voters reasons to vote for candidate Smith rather than candidate Jones. Elections are about the politics of ideas, and the battle can extend beyond a single election. Contemporary grassroots conservatives understand this, as did their movement predecessors. In the 1990s, Newt Gingrich knew it as well. And the Community Advocates in Downers Grove, Illinois, applied this lesson on the

local level effectively between 2004 and 2009 to return good government to their town.

*Bottom line: Plan well and have a good strategy too!*

#### Lesson 4: Campaigns Are About Taking Advantage of Opportunities

Although it is true that planning, organization, and strategy matter, contingency is ever present. As the once ubiquitous bumper sticker said: “S&\*% happens!” Planning, organization, and strategy help a campaign react successfully when the unforeseen event leaves what the bumper sticker refers to. But contingency works in the other direction as well in creating opportunities. Much of what goes on in a campaign involves taking advantage of the opportunities presented to you or that you create.

Several of the campaign chronicles in this book address opportunities surrounding candidates’ decisions to run. At the beginning of Chapter 12, Wicks explains how a split within a party can make the party vulnerable to an insurgent candidate like the mayoral candidate for whom he worked. In his chronicle of volunteering in a state legislative campaign (Chapter 7), Michael Smith reveals his own political ambitions and how Missouri’s term limits for state legislators served those ambitions. He knew well in advance that the seat he coveted would indeed become empty by a certain date and that he could plan accordingly. Jordan McNamara’s chronicle of his father’s campaign for district attorney (Chapter 8) presents a similar use of opportunities. McNamara’s father became Oneida district attorney by taking advantage of the opportunity created by District Attorney Michael Arcuri’s election to Congress and accepting the appointment to finish Arcuri’s term. That allowed him to campaign as the incumbent.

In a slight variation on this theme, you will discover in Chapter 10 how Bowers’s opponent, Lovely Warren, won a seat on city council when Democratic Party leaders and the mayor “created” an opportunity for her to do so by presenting the current council member from that district with an offer that was too good for him to refuse: Take a well-paying job in City Hall or be faced with a possible three-way primary. Likewise, the “Draft Hardy for Congress” movement discussed in Chapter 9 can be seen as a created opportunity that inclined Hardy to run.

Other chronicles point to other uses of opportunities. In Chapter 5, Renner reveals how a candidate can react when his or her opponent gets caught up in a scandal. There you will learn how the incumbent congressman’s engagement to the daughter of a notorious Latin American dictator gave the Renner campaign opportunities to raise much-needed cash and to gain free media attention. Another example is Daniels’s explanation of how the Advocates used the “mistakes” of the incumbent mayor to organize a viable opposition and eventually to help defeat him.

*Bottom line: “Chance favors the prepared mind” (Louis Pasteur).*

#### Lesson 5: Incumbency, Like Inertia, Is Hard to Overcome

Context matters, and some contextual factors *really* matter. Some might think of campaigns and elections as contests in which each candidate has an equal chance of winning. Although that is true in theory, reality is often quite different. As many of the campaign chronicles make clear, factors such as money or the partisan distribution of the electorate can affect a candidate’s chances and may even tilt an election in favor of one candidate over another. Among such factors, incumbency is perhaps the most important in tilting the scales. This lesson squares with the political science literature on the incumbency advantage, and the chronicles provide unique insights into the various ways incumbency conveys advantage.

Incumbency is nearly impossible for challengers to overcome. Renner couldn’t overcome his incumbent Republican opponent despite the controversy surrounding the latter’s engagement to a notorious dictator’s daughter (see Chapter 5). Hardy wasn’t able to beat his incumbent Democratic opponent either (see Chapter 9). Yet the Hardy chronicle also suggests that a challenger can at least come close to beating an incumbent.

Bowers’s situation was a bit different (see Chapter 10). As you will see, his opponent was a “quasi-incumbent,” having been appointed to the City Council only a few months before the primary. Her appointment was intended to bestow the trappings of incumbency upon her. This status, added to other factors such as the role racial politics played in the campaign, increased the nearly insurmountable odds against Bowers winning. His plight underscores the importance of incumbency, even if it is only a quasi-incumbency. It is enough to convey advantage, which motivates politicians, political parties, and campaign strategists to use appointments to tilt the electoral scales. In Chapter 8, McNamara’s story reinforces this lesson. As his chronicle makes clear, it didn’t hurt his father’s electoral chances that he was appointed to fill the office vacated by his predecessor’s election to Congress.

Clearly, incumbency is difficult to overcome—at least in a single election. But with perseverance and a good strategy, it may be possible, as Daniels indicates in Chapter 3. Here you will read about the stunning defeat of Downers Grove’s two-term and seemingly invincible mayor by a candidate backed by Daniels’s citizen group, the Community Advocates.

*Bottom line: Inertia describes much in politics, and incumbents are the embodiment of this fact of political life.*

#### Lesson 6: Money Matters, and It Matters Most for Challengers

As Lesson 5 attests, it’s very hard for challengers to beat incumbents. But why is it so hard? Money—or the lack of it—is a key part of the answer. To campaign

effectively, to be competitive, and to be taken seriously as a candidate by opinion makers, particularly the media, candidates for major office need money and effective fund-raising machines. For Hillary Clinton in 2008, this was particularly true given the fund-raising juggernaut the Obama campaign turned out to be (see Chapter 4). The Obama campaign raised more money than Clinton, and she was left loaning her own campaign millions of dollars as her own credibility as a candidate began to wane.

The lack of money also negatively affected both Hardy's and Renner's campaigns for Congress against their incumbent rivals. Renner was able to ride a short-lived fund-raising bonanza because of the scandal and controversy surrounding his opponent's engagement to the dictator's daughter (see Chapter 5). The bonanza, though, was never enough to overcome the incumbent's greater name recognition, fund-raising prowess, and the Republican-leaning nature of the congressional district in which he was running. Hardy came closer than Renner to defeating his opponent. But raising only one-third as much money as his opponent was one factor that kept him from crossing the finish line as a winner (see Chapter 9).

In Chapter 3, Daniels takes the same lesson down to the local level. The fund-raising skills of the incumbent mayor were significant enough to deter all challengers in his first reelection race: No one could afford to challenge him. More importantly, the mayor's strategy illustrates all too well why incumbency and money can work synergistically to stymie challengers. Incumbents can and do provide favors that benefit those willing and able to contribute to a campaign fund. As the story shows, the mayor's fund-raising apparatus systematically solicited money from businesses, including those that received some kind of benefit from the village government. Challengers can only promise what incumbents have already delivered.

Of course, it isn't the money itself that matters. It is what money buys—paid staff, political consultants, polling, media, and so on. "The Importance of Planning" (Chapter 2) is a good reminder of this. Rackaway points out that in his first campaign as a college intern, staff made many mistakes because the campaign had no resources and therefore could not effectively plan or run as the candidate may have wished. Renner's story in Chapter 5 will further highlight the problem for a campaign when it has insufficient funds to purchase media for the purpose of responding to a negative attack. The Renner camp had exhausted its campaign funds when the incumbent's campaign undertook a media blitz charging that Renner was soft on drugs and favored their legalization. Without the ability to respond with a media buy of its own, the Renner campaign was left employing a free media strategy at the last debate, centering on a "planned blow-up" by Renner to offset the damage of a negative attack.

*Bottom line: "Money, money, money, money. It makes the world go round!" ("Money," Cabaret). And the political world is no different.*

## Lesson 7: Campaigns Need Both Earned and Paid Media to Get Out Their Message

It is a truism that any campaign that hopes to be successful has to have a good paid media plan that defines its candidate positively and the opponent negatively. Again, a campaign needs to engage the battle of ideas with a clear, persuasive narrative, such as the Bowers campaign's extensive use of direct mail to define both its candidate and the opponent (see Chapter 10). The Bowers chronicle underscores the need for a structured message that (1) establishes the positives of the favored candidate, (2) undertakes an aggressive comparison of the candidate to the opponent defining the latter in negative terms, and (3) closes the media campaign with a restated positive on the campaign's candidate. Daniels (Chapter 3) shows that interest groups need such plans too.

A good paid media strategy alone, however, is insufficient. To get the message out, campaigns must also earn a certain level of free media. Few campaigns have enough money to buy all the media exposure they need. Free media can fill the gap and provide other benefits as well. Free media can sometimes be better than paid media because it does not come across as fake, self-serving, or simply purchased. It can help in putting the candidate in a positive light while showing the opponent in a negative light. It is much more powerful if a perceived neutral source delivers the message.

But free media cannot be controlled and shaped the way paid media can. The Renner chronicle about media, money, and mud illustrates both sides of free media (see Chapter 5). The media feeding frenzy centering on the incumbent Republican's engagement allowed Renner to have a short-term fund-raising bonanza of his own. It increased his profile and increased his challenger's negatives. The negative earned media for his opponent was, however, a mixed blessing for Renner. The scandal became the only topic most reporters wanted to talk about, thereby hindering Renner's effort to get out his own message.

Campaigns attract free media in other ways than spreading allegations about an opponent. There are, of course, the ubiquitous press releases, as well as events such as rallies; speeches; town hall meetings; and visits to schools, factories, and other places. Events are—or at least should be—carefully planned to convey the right message about the candidate in addition to simply getting exposure. In Chapter 4, Gutman's description of a major fund-raising event provides an excellent example of a planned event as a media opportunity. He describes in detail the planning of the fund-raiser that, among other things, required a room crowded with supporters. A crowded room says a candidate has a lot of energetic supporters, and that, in turn, could attract contributions. Without a crowded room, Gutman notes, a candidate like Clinton would look weak and unpopular, which would deter contributions. Because it was possible that the number of attendees might be less than expected, the staff used a room

that could be split into smaller rooms. In other words, if too few attendees appeared to ensure the right image, then the staff could shrink the room to create a more positive image.

Gutman's chronicle also demonstrates how intense the concern over the staging of an event can be because of the media coverage. Free media is useful only if it sends the right message. As Gutman illustrates, even something as seemingly straightforward as where to host a fund-raiser can send the wrong message if a campaign is not careful.

*Bottom line: Invisible candidates lose, and media is the key to visibility.*

### Lesson 8: Minor Parties and Minor Candidates Get Minor Attention

There is another form of "incumbency" that is important in framing the context for campaigns—the incumbency of the two major parties. Just as the privileged position of an incumbent derives from the inertia of the political system, so does the privileged position of the two major parties. In fact, the latter is even more important because it basically defines that inertia. Members of the major parties occupy almost all key policymaking positions, and they make the rules for the political system. Not surprisingly, those who write the rules tend to write them in a way that protects their privileged position. This means that independents, party insurgents, and minor or third-party candidates are at a distinct disadvantage.

Two chronicles—by Munger (Chapter 11) and Wicks (Chapter 12)—illustrate this disadvantaged position. Munger ran as a third-party candidate, and Wicks was a second-tier candidate in a primary with two main competitors. Either way, the outcome is likely to be the same—the candidate gets minor attention and loses. Though Munger in his North Carolina gubernatorial campaign as the Libertarian Party candidate got more media and voter attention than many third-party candidates do, he still suffered in comparison to the Republican and Democratic candidates. For instance, you will read how his minor-party status meant that he wasn't invited to all the gubernatorial debates. In addition, given the structural barriers protecting two-party electoral domination and the low probability that a third-party candidate could win, Munger couldn't attract sufficient financial backing. As a result, he didn't have the resources to effectively increase his visibility. Ultimately, his campaign had no choice but to focus on the goal of drawing enough electoral attention to keep the Libertarian Party on the North Carolina ballot as a legally recognized political party—in other words, keeping the dream alive.

Wicks's chronicle presents a different dilemma: His candidate for mayor was virtually ignored by the media or treated as an afterthought. Even though Wicks's candidate had a strong resume, the two other candidates were seen as

the serious contenders by the media because they had more compelling narratives in the local political environment. Wicks's candidate was a twenty-year incumbent city councilman, a long-serving chair of the council's Finance Committee, and the first openly gay elected official in New York State. None of this, however, was a match for the drama unfolding between the other two mayoral contenders. As Wicks points out, one candidate—a black city council member—was the onetime heir apparent who eventually fell out of favor with the retiring mayor, the first African American mayor in Rochester, New York. This candidate also was a staff to and the protégé of a powerful New York state assemblyman, who was widely recognized as the real political boss of Rochester politics. The second candidate was a six-foot-six former police chief with an "aw-shucks" Huck Finn persona who came into the mayoral race after months of speculation he would run and a "staged draft" to convince him to do so. Widely popular and perceived to be more independent and reform-minded than the first candidate, you will read how this cop-turned-candidate rode into the race like Marshal Matt Dillon wearing Ronald Reagan's Teflon coating. As Wicks explains, with this narrative unfolding, his mayoral candidate never had a chance, despite being probably the most talented and qualified of the three. The narrative of the contest between the other two was just too strong, and Tim Mains became an "also-ran."

*Bottom line: The two major parties and their candidates play in the major leagues; everyone else plays in the minors.*

### Lesson 9: Campaigning Is a Contact Sport, Sometimes Played Dirty

In Chapter 3, Daniels notes that civic pride and good citizenship don't move elections. Self-interest does—people will pursue their interests through a wide variety of rough-and-tumble means. Not all of them are openly discussed in polite company. Call it what you will—negative campaigning, aggressive campaigning, or comparative campaigning—all campaigns do it. Be prepared to respond to it and to do it. Campaigns, after all, are about winning.

The most obvious example of the rougher side of campaigns is, for lack of a better word, mudslinging. Sometimes mud is slung out in the open as part of a campaign's paid media strategy, as in Chapter 5, in which the incumbent's campaign accused Renner in campaign commercials of wanting to legalize drugs. Renner's own use of the incumbent's engagement to the dictator's daughter can also be seen as illustrating this lesson. Smith's description in his chronicle about using his candidate's opponent's check-kiting conviction against him (see Chapter 7) or Daniels's description of the use of the mayor's campaign fund-raising and spending record (see Chapter 3) provide additional examples. Or for another example (in Chapter 10), take any of the direct mail

pieces Bowers describes sending out against his opponent in his 2007 campaign for city council.

However, you will also learn that at times mud is slung below the radar (and below the belt), through the rumor mill, anonymous phone calls, and mailings. Increasingly, mud is now slung anonymously on blogs and websites. In Chapter 10, Bowers shows how supporters of his opponent spread unfounded rumors through African American churches and media blogs. In reading this account, you may even find yourself a bit taken aback at how these off-the-radar attacks portrayed him.

Whether out in the open or off the radar, mudslinging is used for one purpose and one purpose only: to push your campaign narrative and win the battle of ideas by driving up your opponent's negatives among voters. It's part of the contact sport of campaigning. Beyond the few restrictions imposed by the law—and they are few—there are no formal rules for this sport, but there are pragmatic judgments that may impose some limits. Like any contact sport, what kind of hit you make on your opponent matters. Is it a “clean hit” or a “dirty hit”? Does it involve “clean mud” or “dirty mud”? Dirty hits may backfire and hurt you rather than your opponent.

How does a campaign or a candidate distinguish between the two? Unscrupulous candidates, campaign managers, and campaign strategists probably won't. Nonetheless, there is a line that can be drawn. The late Republican strategist Lee Atwater, who orchestrated George H. W. Bush's 1988 election as president, had a simple rule: Is it a fact? If so, it is fair game and can be used. Clearly, it is not a perfect rule, and it is one with which some may not be comfortable. But it's a workable one that allows for the maximum use of information. Does the Atwater rule mean any negative fact can be used against your opponent? That is a matter of judgment, requiring you to balance the relevance of the fact for the campaign and the likely downside or collateral damage. Something may be factually true and in the public record and still backfire.

So mud is a part of campaigns—whether Atwater's rule is followed or not. Though it may be best left unsaid in polite company or in a room full of naïve campaign reformers who want us to follow the advice of the “better angels” in us, mudslinging is a part of the fun of campaigns. It's done because, if it is done well, it works. That's why almost every campaign today tries to employ some kind of rapid-response team. Anderson's chronicle in Chapter 6 about his time on the 1992 Clinton presidential campaign research staff provides a wonderful example. During that campaign, Anderson worked in the Arkansas Record section of the research department. As noted earlier, this part of the campaign was responsible for knowing not only Governor Clinton's government record in Little Rock but also the skeletons in his closet.

*Bottom line: It's not about how you play the game—winning really is the only thing.*

## Lesson 10: Being Prepared to Lose Is Easier Than Being Prepared to Win

This lesson isn't directly addressed in the chronicles you're about to read, but all involved in campaigns in any capacity, especially candidates, need to learn it. The basic lesson here is that despite the emotional turmoil losing can inflict on candidates and their supporters, it is always easier than winning, at least for a candidate running for office for the first time. “No, winning is what counts. It hurts more to lose,” you may counter. But think about it. Losing, for first-time candidates, leaves them in no worse position than they were before. They're still who they were before the election began. Yes, there's a letdown, even an anxiousness as they go through the adrenaline withdrawal that comes with the end of the campaign. But most get over it and go back to being professors, accountants, nurses, husbands, mothers, or whatever they were before the campaign began. In short, their lives go back to normal. And they learn a lot along the way, lessons that can be applied in their next campaign.

Now look at winning. Sure, winning is great. It's exhilarating. There's a big election night party and victory speeches. Supporters cheer and cry tears of joy. Candidates hug and are hugged by everyone in sight and are told this win is the start of a great future in politics. But the next day, maybe even late on election night, the hangover kicks in—and that hangover is called governing. At some point shortly after their victory, exuberant candidates are hit and hit hard with a new reality. They now have to govern, and governing and campaigning aren't the same things (despite contemporary politicians trying to make them seem so). Many victorious candidates end up feeling like Robert Redford's character in the classic campaign movie *The Candidate*. His character was recruited to run for a US Senate seat because he was young, idealistic, and photogenic. His handlers felt they could manage and direct him. He wasn't supposed to win. But then his campaign catches on, and he beats the incumbent senator. At the end of the movie, Redford's character is seen sitting in a hotel room with a loud and happy crowd of supporters around him. Over the crowd's noise, he yells out to his campaign manager: “Marvin . . . What do we do now?”

As the movie's ending suggests, it's harder to be prepared for winning. Whether they are willing to admit it or not, candidates elected for the first time to office are generally ignorant about the position they have just won and are not really prepared to govern. Why? Part of the answer is that first-time candidates for any office don't really know the institution to which they have just been elected. Every elected office, be it the executive, legislative, or judicial branch, has its own culture, its own rhythm, its own rituals that need to be learned and internalized in order to be effective. Ideally, “newbies” should learn these things beforehand. But campaigns aren't conducted to learn about the office for which candidates are running. They're organized to win. Any learning about governing

is likely to come after winning. The best that can be expected from those newly elected to an office is that they come to their position with a willingness to learn and, hopefully, some parallel experiences that facilitate learning.

A certain degree of ignorance about governing might explain why so many first-time candidates are willing to take the plunge and actually run. They simply don't know what they're in for if they win. It may also help explain, in part, why an officeholder who has left a particular office rarely seeks to run for it again at some later time. Admittedly, a professional politician never wants to look back. Progressive ambition points toward the next bigger and better prize, not that which has already been won. It's the politician's version of "been there, done that." But amateur or citizen politicians also seldom go back to an office they have left. Why? Having served in an office and left it, they know the perils of governing from it. For them, firsthand knowledge of the office may keep them from actually being prepared to win.

Finally, Daniels's story in Chapter 3 provides a related yet sobering message about governing. He explains that the mayor the Community Advocates help to defeat initially won his office and then ran unopposed in his first reelection campaign because of a superior, long-term political strategy. Despite his campaign successes, the mayor proved to be utterly incapable of governing. The mayor's shortcomings were substantial enough to more than cancel out the benefits of his political strategy and eventually led to his stunning defeat at the polls in his second reelection race. This is a reminder that campaigns are indeed about winning elections and not about governing. Success with one does not guarantee success with the other.

*Bottom line: "Marvin . . . What do we do now?"*

Marvin, the campaign manager, never answered this question for the candidate and then senator-elect. However, we can give you an answer as to what we want you to do now: Read, learn, and try to have some fun along the way. Look for and learn the lessons we have noted here, but also look for other lessons as well—lessons the authors of the chronicles suggest and lessons you find on your own.

## PART 1

# Planning and Strategy

---



# 2

## The Importance of Planning

*Chapman Rackaway*

Type of campaign: Various

Role of author: Campaign planner, strategist, campaign manager

Lessons to look for:

- Planning, organization, and strategy matter.
- The “5P Rule”: Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.
- Planning affects all parts and phases of a campaign: fund-raising, media, opposition research, and relationships within a campaign.
- A good campaigner goes through the same planning process as a good coach.

There’s a gospel song titled “It Wasn’t Raining When Noah Built the Ark.” I’ve always thought that the song was actually written about my career as a political consultant. If there is any lesson that I learned on the job, it is to plan ahead. If there’s any lesson that I can offer from my own political adventures, it is to plan before you act. In politics, as in acting, improvisation is only for the most naturally talented. And if you think you’re talented enough to improvise, you’re probably not. I didn’t realize how much planning I needed to do until it was too late.

I started out in politics by volunteering for some local campaigns my freshman year of college. Like anyone, I suppose, I didn’t know what I was doing. I assumed that I would go out and tell the world what I believed about my candidate and that somehow that would be enough. When I was just a cog in the wheel, I did just fine. I was able to deliver yard signs and attend rallies, but I didn’t expect that two years later I’d be the communications director for a congressional campaign. Maybe it was the rapid rise up the organizational ranks of a campaign, or maybe it was my own overconfidence, but I was terribly unprepared. And the campaign paid for it. Why? Because I had yet to learn the importance to all campaigns of the “5P Rule.”

The 5P Rule stands for Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance. The 5P Rule applies to almost anything in life, but it's especially true in campaigns. If you look at successful campaigns, you never see the elements of success publicly other than, perhaps at the end of it all, winning. Most successful campaigns, as well as the competitive losing ones, have done an extensive amount of preparation that isn't detectable by the naked eye. No news reports get written about one candidate's direct mail pieces going out earlier than another's or one candidate's more aggressive door-to-door approach. But winning, or the possibility of winning, first takes hold with the five Ps. So you must first learn and understand the rule. That is what the rest of my chapter is about. It begins with the story of how I learned the 5P Rule: the hard way.

### **A Baptism by Fire**

My real campaign education and how to prepare for running one came when I was in college. I was thrust prematurely into leadership in the congressional campaign of Douglas Lee, who in 1992 was running in the Nineteenth Congressional District of Illinois. I was originally brought on to Lee's campaign when my initial college-required political science internship fell apart. I was supposed to be doing very low-level local organizational work for Illinois senator Alan Dixon's reelection campaign. Dixon was, at the time, Illinois's junior US senator, the incumbent, and a moderate, so his renomination and reelection seemed safe. I had no idea when I took the Dixon campaign internship that I wouldn't have it for long. Dixon lost a three-way primary fight and when he lost his Senate seat, I lost my internship. I landed on my feet as a plain-Jane volunteer intern for the Lee campaign. I was quickly promoted to campaign communications coordinator, however, and from there it was baptism by fire. I went from being a cog in a wheel to being one of the busted spokes.

Lee was a first-time candidate, a moderate Republican running for a congressional seat in a district that had been redrawn so as to combine two Democratic seats into one. Lee hoped that the two Democratic incumbents, Congressmen Glenn Poshard and Terry Bruce, would beat each other up so badly during their primary that he could emerge as the winner in November. The Lee campaign also had a challenger in the primary, though he campaigned very little. We squeaked by in the primary but got killed in the general election. What we lacked, across the board, was experience. Lee was a good man, and I was proud to campaign for him. I just wish I wouldn't have had to learn on the job so I could have served his campaign better.

You might ask yourself why I was promoted from intern to a senior campaign staffer so quickly. Was I a gifted politico who adapted to the demands of the job so swiftly that I rose meteorically through the ranks? No. I wish. The reason I got the job and the title was much simpler: There was nobody else around.

There are plenty of opportunities to be a high-level official on a local campaign, and most of those opportunities exist because there are ever-fewer people who are willing to get involved than you might think. If you're the kind of person, like me, who does not automatically reject requests for help on a project, you'll find that you can rise through the ranks in a dramatic fashion, even in a few days. You can move up the structure quickly just by showing up. Therein lies the problem, particularly as it relates to a lack of experience, organization, and planning.

Unlike bureaucracies, corporations, or colleges for that matter, campaign organizations have no set structure. In a local or low-level campaign, you're making it up as you go along. If you have no experience, you're really designing a structure haphazardly. The Lee campaign was definitely guilty of that random approach to organizing. We had no full-time paid staff. We had a campaign manager, the candidate, the candidate's wife, and me. Except for the campaign manager, none of us had ever led a campaign before.

The campaign manager and candidate handled strategy. As a result, the candidate was torn between the administrative tasks the campaign needed and the campaigning activities that should have been the sole focus of our candidate. We should have been able to get enough people into the campaign to let the candidate do nothing but be the public face of our efforts. But with only four people on board, we all took on jobs that were beyond the time we had available, and often our skill set. In my case, I was downright naïve. When the people whose example you need to follow have no idea what they're doing, there's nobody to teach you those things. That was my situation as well. There was no one in the Lee campaign to learn from.

When I signed on to the campaign, I had no idea what a campaign plan was or why it was such a massive mistake not to have one. I just thought, "We need to get moving, right now." So I started handling the day-to-day operations of a campaign without a vision of why we were doing those things or how they all fit together to make a case for our candidate. Lee was a first-timer himself, so he was just as uncertain as the rest of us. Our campaign manager quit halfway through the campaign, so I never got to ask him about our massive mistake. Lee and his wife took over the management of the campaign, and that's when whatever momentum we had started to evaporate.

I let the enthusiasm of the campaign and the rush to just do something carry me along. If a friend asks you to run their campaign, the energy of the moment may inspire you to schedule press conferences and public appearances. Wait! Don't do it immediately. Don't just jump in. Plan things out. A football team doesn't show up without its playbook. A good campaign plan is a prerequisite for any competitive campaign. We didn't have one, and it killed us. For example, our campaign needed money. Every campaign does, but we had nothing. At the time, an effective challenger campaign should have been able to raise a quarter of a million dollars. But I didn't take the time to look at Federal Election Commission (FEC) reports to benchmark my fund-raising goals against other

current and previous campaigns. We didn't even have a budget. We'd scramble around and raise enough money to pay for a direct mail piece or newspaper ad. We couldn't raise enough money for ads on television. But even the things we did pay for, we paid for up against deadline, and we just barely made those bills. We never once had enough money ahead of time to commit to things. I went in without any idea of how much money we needed and no sense of steady fund-raising on a schedule. I didn't prepare, and that lack of preparation led to my own poor performance.

We cut corners everywhere. When you're in a hotly contested election, primary or general, you absolutely can't cut corners. For instance, the two-color brochures we used looked amateurish, but we didn't have money for a real four-color brochure. Black-and-white photos done in-house weren't very attractive. Our materials would have looked bad in a college student government campaign, let alone a contest for US Congress. Had I developed a fund-raising plan, scheduled brochure production, and followed through, we could have looked like a professional organization. I wasn't prepared, and so I failed. Instead of carrying momentum forward, we became a joke.

A campaign ought to prepare outreach for selected voters. I didn't prepare for what neighborhoods we would canvass, what households would receive direct mail pieces, and what messages should be directed to those voters. First you have to know who your voters are. The number of people in the district, which ones are registered, what party those voters identify with, and their ages and socioeconomic status all offer valuable insights that a campaign needs. Breaking down the precinct subdivisions within the district, especially with maps, helps even more. You can't convince people to vote for you if don't know who they are. In the Lee campaign, we did little to none of this. We should have taken the time to prepare a voter analysis of our district. Preparation would have allowed us to know what communities were our base, what places to stay away from, and where we could pick up the undecided. Once again our lack of preparation led to haphazard and ineffective campaigning.

When I organized my first door-to-door activities for the campaign, I started with neighborhoods close to campaign headquarters. I was thinking about the convenience of our canvassers, but I'd missed an important consideration: that the neighborhood we were in strongly identified with the other party. Our canvassers got frustrated, we didn't have much success, and our opponent reaped the benefits. Had I any clue about the importance of planning ahead back then, I would have known that there were better neighborhoods in which to spend our time. We should have started with our party's loyalists to get canvassers comfortable and then move on to evenly split precincts where we had the opportunity to pick up the maximum number of votes. Haphazard actions led to a whole lot of wasted energy.

A well-planned campaign also knows its candidate and the opponent. Not the Lee campaign, though. We never did any opposition research. We had nothing to

compare our candidate to when we needed to tell the electorate why our candidate was better than our opponent. Knowing the voting records, political positions, and personal traits of your candidate and your opponent guides your strategy in planning a campaign. A well-planned campaign also knows electoral history. One of the best predictors for a candidate, especially one challenging an incumbent, is the performance of previous candidates in the district.

Not learning electoral history was a mistake I corrected in later campaigns. Working on a state representative campaign in the late 1990s, I gathered data on previous challengers in our race. When I dug into the numbers, I saw that some candidates had come close and some hadn't. I immediately contacted the more successful candidates and started getting any information I could. Those candidates had one thing in common: Every one of them campaigned as a moderate, pointing out the extreme voting record of the incumbent. My strategy was made for me. We followed that very game plan, building our message on a consistent record of voting that became contrary to the district's interests, and we won by five points.

After the Lee campaign, my haphazard fund-raising was replaced by careful analysis of FEC data. Previous successful campaigns provided fund-raising benchmarks for my own campaigns, which encouraged me to set monthly fund-raising goals and organize events well in advance of when we needed money. Like Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, we were never going to be hungry again. I learned how to spread out fund-raising events to provide a steady flow of money into the campaign, ensuring bills were paid and, most importantly, not burning my candidate out on fund-raising. When you're in a panic to raise a lot of money in a short amount of time, the effort becomes exhausting. Ironically, I learned over the course of a lot of campaigns that it's best to have fund-raising be an everyday part of the campaign duties. It's better to do an hour a night than a day every month.

I embarrassed the Lee campaign, too, due to my lack of preparation. I didn't do it intentionally. The National Rifle Association (NRA) is an interest group that normally contributes to members of my candidate's party. Lee asked me if I thought the group would give us money, and I didn't even think about it. When your campaign has raised \$2,000 total, the chance to raise up to \$5,000 with a single check is just too much of a temptation not to take. I made the call without looking up the fact that Congressman Poshard had a 100 percent voting record with the NRA and was a regular beneficiary of its donations. To this day, I can still remember the sting of the NRA's legislative liaison's laughter in my ears when I asked him for the NRA's support for Lee. If I had researched the group's donation history, I could have avoided that embarrassment. But when you're inexperienced and desperate, you don't think. You just react.

And the mistakes kept piling up. I had no business being in campaign leadership, other than being willing to take on the responsibility. All the necessary skills a campaign operative needs, I lacked. So I had to learn on the job, which

I did. But that on-the-job training probably kept some very good people from being able to hold elective office. Most especially, I could have helped Douglas Lee better. I'll never be able to apologize enough to the campaign for my lack of preparation and organization. Nevertheless, that campaign was my introduction to the importance of the 5P Rule.

### **Planning Is My Mantra**

As my story from the Lee campaign shows, nothing is more damaging to a competitive campaign than jumping in without a plan. Don't believe me? Watch a football game for this lesson. Pay attention to either the head coach or the offensive coordinator, whoever calls the plays in from the sideline. If you don't know football, look for the guy with the massive sheet of laminated paper in his hand. That's your campaign teacher for the day.

Those laminated sheets the coach or coordinator holds are crib sheets from the team's playbook. Each play resembles an activity in a political campaign, and the coaches don't pick those plays randomly. Play selections get made as part of a deliberate process in which the coaches have examined their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the other team. By doing significant planning ahead of time, the coaches do two things: (1) maximize the effectiveness of their team's abilities and (2) allow themselves to react intelligently to game scenarios they didn't plan for. By the end of this process, the teams know exactly what plays they're going to call at what points in the game. For example, a team on third down and short would normally run the ball, unless the team's preparation suggests that the opposing defense has a stout run defense. Then passing plays would be called for.

Why all this talk of football? Because a good campaigner will go through the same planning process as a good coach. A campaign manager and other high-level campaign staffers are a bit like a football coach and his or her coordinators. They figure out what plays to call, adjust strategy, and motivate the personnel to execute plays as well as possible. Every campaign manager/coach needs to have a playbook and a game plan. Campaigners who think they can just walk in and start a campaign are setting themselves up for failure. I know, because I did it that way in the Lee campaign. I had no game plan, and I tried to make it up on my own. I failed.

Campaigns need a ridiculous amount of attention and focus. So as soon as the decision to run is made, it's time to step back a moment. That can be very hard to do. There's an adrenaline rush you get from committing to a run for office. And the worry that opponents might be ahead of you in any aspect of campaigning can impel you to jump into campaign work without planning. I did it myself—I joined the campaign in April with a July primary. We were under the gun, and I immediately started making fund-raising calls, planning events, talking with county party officials. Instead, I should have taken a few days to plan.

Ever since the Lee campaign, planning has been my mantra. It reminds me of the unintended damage my inexperience did to their campaign. My lack of planning sabotaged that first campaign in countless ways. The multiple demands for the same time would lead to bad decisions on where to send the candidate. Sometimes, we'd miss an event entirely. It's a miracle that we even won the primary. We were not so lucky in the general election. When we faced real competition, we collapsed. It's unfortunate that my on-the-job training came at the expense of our campaign. Through the failures, I learned how to plan for events, but more importantly, deadlines. I committed to not making the same mistakes again.

I now make a point, whenever I agree to work on a campaign, of not doing anything public with the campaign for two weeks. Any campaign that brings me on has to commit to roughly two weeks of preparation, and I encourage my students to do exactly the same when they go to work on a campaign. Those two weeks let us write a campaign plan, do our research, and get ready to attack.

### **Planning and the Media**

Campaigns do many complex things. Campaign advertisements, whether in the form of direct mail pieces sent to voters' mailboxes or broadcast ads on television, can be the most complex of all. Like everything else, they must be planned. And direct mail was another one of my failures of (no) planning and learning how to be a successful campaign operative and manager.

Direct mail is the ninja of a campaign: silent, sneaky, and deadly. The biggest advantage of direct mail is that you can get a message to a targeted subset of the population without the opposition getting wind of it. When you run an ad on television, everyone can see it. When the message goes to only specific mailboxes, your opponent may have no idea what you're doing or saying, at least not at first. If the opposition doesn't know what you're saying, they have no way to counter your message. Plus, if you have done your homework and can identify certain characteristics about the voters in your district, you can tailor the message to different people. Voters over age fifty-five can get a senior-friendly message, and people with specific interests can get messages that resonate with them. So even though many first-time campaigners write off direct mail, there's no campaign that should go without the straight-to-mailbox effort.

Direct mail is also a lot cheaper than television. Since we had to do everything in the Lee campaign on the cheap, we went with direct mail. It was one of the smarter ideas we had. Too bad, then, that we didn't do it right. Direct mail pieces might seem simple, but they require plenty of advance work. Photographs have to be taken. Text must be laid out. The size of the piece must be chosen, as well as the color scheme: a four-color piece looks much better than anything else. Paper stock has to be selected. The target population of voters has to be chosen. Once all those decisions are made, you send proofs to a printer,

who will make a print-ready copy to edit. Then an exhaustive check of spelling, accuracy, and visual appeal has to be done. After the edit, the proofs have to go back to the printer for production. Already, you've invested about ten days. Then the mailing database has to be collected, although that's easier today than it was in the early 1990s. Finally, the pieces have to be bulk-mailed, and the postal service has its own built-in lag time. Total time from collecting the materials to a direct mail piece arriving in mailboxes can be as long as a month.

In the Lee campaign, we learned about planning direct mail the hard way. To close our campaign, we decided to send out five thousand postcards promoting our candidacy to targeted Republican primary voters. Our piece was a good one, using an effective layout to emphasize the strengths of our candidate. It looked good, but it was ineffective because it arrived at voters' mailboxes two days after the primary. Why? Because I didn't get times from printers or research the post office's delivery schedule. I didn't prepare. Adding to the frustration was the fact that our primary opponent didn't do any publicity at all, so having that piece out in time would have likely made our victory even stronger and positioned us better for the general campaign. All that time and money were wasted because of my inexperience and our poor planning. We won the primary, but by less than five points. We could have lost. Had we been a few points behind, we would have looked at the direct mail failure as the reason we lost. We got lucky, but we shouldn't have. The failure showed we weren't ready for prime time.

### **Planning and Opposition Research**

The Lee campaign had a golden opportunity, and we blew it because of a lack of research and preparation. Remember, we didn't do any opposition research on our opponent, Congressman Glenn Poshard. We should have. Poshard had finished a Ph.D. at Southern Illinois University a few years before. We had heard rumors that Poshard had plagiarized part of his dissertation, but we never sought proof. I had no idea how to do that kind of investigation; none of us did. Had we known what we were doing and had the time to do our research in 1992, we could have found the same information that was uncovered in 2007, that Poshard had in fact plagiarized significant portions of his dissertation. Fraud is something that voters ought to know about—we had an obligation to inform the public about the ethical problems of their congressman, and we were derelict in our duty. A little research would have helped in any number of ways.

Research is a vital part of planning. I worked for a campaign that didn't have the money to poll, but we did hear from many constituents that our incumbent opponent voted against a Pledge of Allegiance bill they supported. The bill was largely symbolic, but it would have allowed the Pledge of Allegiance to be said at the beginning of school days. Knowing we had an issue

that people, especially Republicans, were passionate about, we distributed a direct mail piece on the Pledge of Allegiance. A two-thousand-piece run was enough to increase our support 5 percent. All thanks to preparation.

There is always the possibility that the candidate will not want to attack his or her opponent. In future campaigns I never again missed opportunities like the one with Glenn Poshard. If I could get out verifiable information that called our opponent's voting record or professional behavior into question, I would do it. However, some candidates for whom I worked refused to go down that road despite the costs of not doing so. One candidate for office was absolutely opposed to anything other than boosting his own name recognition and positives. When I managed his campaign for state representative, he made it very clear to me that he did not want to engage in any comparisons with the opponent. We built a campaign that focused on who the candidate was, but that was only half the battle. Our opponent made questionable claims about her own experience and fitness for office—and we never challenged her. To this day, I don't know if she deserved credit for the successful community activities she claimed. We heard rumors that our opponent took credit for work that other people did. Every time I discussed that in a call with someone who knew the real story, my candidate told me to give it up. My candidate thought that he would be able to claim the moral imperative to govern only if he never said anything negative about our opponent. In theory, that's wonderful. But it never really works in practice, and by not planning for or doing opposition research, we took an important weapon out of our campaign arsenal and decreased our chances of winning.

Near the end of the campaign, I spoke with a resident of the district who said that he really appreciated the positive tone of our campaign. Assuming he was one of our supporters, I thanked him and asked him to vote for my candidate. After all, you can't expect people to vote for you unless you ask for their vote. I was shocked when he said that he considered himself a member of the other party and he had no reason to switch parties in this election. At that moment, I realized we needed to make the case in our favor and against the other candidate. Our party was in the minority in the district, so we had to convince loyal members of the other party that our opponent didn't represent their views well enough.

We knew enough to be concerned about her fitness for office, but we were constrained by our candidate's refusal to go negative in the campaign. I knew we should have dug for more information; I knew we should have attacked. I let my candidate make the final decision, and I failed my candidate by not making the case for a comparative campaign well enough. And just like the Lee campaign, we lost. In fact, we lost big, by almost twenty points. We could have narrowed that gap and maybe even overcome it entirely to win, but to do that we had to put doubt in people's minds about our opponent. We let her control the agenda: the campaign was dominated by her strategy, and she won. My ultimate

adage, the one certain truth I pass on to my students in campaign management classes today, is this: “To win, you must give people reason to vote for your candidate and against your opponent.”

You have to do both. A campaign that just attacks its opponent never convinces people that their candidate is the better option. Just saying your opponent is bad without emphasizing the good things about your candidate may encourage people to leave the ballot blank or not vote at all. And campaigns that only tout the good things about their candidate will do nothing more than get their loyal base to support them. If you’re managing the campaign of a popular multi-term incumbent with weak opposition, then that strategy may work. Most of the time, though, you’re going to work for a challenger who starts twenty or more points down. If you don’t give those supporters of your opponent reason to switch, you’re going to lose no matter how high-minded and positive your campaign stays.

### Planning and Managing Relationships in a Campaign

The Lee campaign schooled me in the 5P Rule quickly. Another lesson took longer. All my planning lessons dealt with strategy and doing the work of a campaign. But campaigns are also an intensely personal affair, and campaign managers must be able to work with people. More to the point, they have to manage people well and be able to navigate the delicate interpersonal relationships among campaign staffers and volunteers. I absorbed this lesson during another state representative campaign. I was lucky—at least at first—to have a couple of teenage volunteers. The two of them were dating, though, which became a problem. My two young lovers would do everything together, including volunteer for us. When they volunteered, they were remarkably effective. They would stuff envelopes, enthusiastically walk the district and go door-to-door, and make phone calls. If I had go-to volunteers, they were the ones. When they broke up, though, I didn’t think much of it. They came to volunteer separately, until one day when I needed the two of them.

The young man arrived earlier than his ex. When she arrived, the tension in the room was thick. We managed to keep them apart until it was time to phone bank. I had established a call center with ten phones at our headquarters, and I needed every phone staffed. While we had everyone in one room making calls, they stared daggers at each other until one of them had enough, and words were exchanged. I don’t remember who started it or what was said. I’ll never forget the aftermath, though. Their voices got louder. Eventually, they let their animosity get the best of them, and they yelled at each other while in the phone bank room. The other volunteers were still making calls, and one of the shouters still had his line open. Their anger undermined our ability to call voters and get the message out. There were some callers who got complaints from our target

voters that they couldn’t hear us over the shouting. No matter how much we needed them, I should not have had those two people in the same room working on a common project at the same time. Another lesson in personnel management learned.

I was in a tough spot. I either had to eliminate both of them from the campaign or make damn sure they never entered campaign headquarters again at the same time. I was so burned out by their fight that I chose not to have either of them participate in any campaign events again. We didn’t lose the election because we didn’t have those two volunteering, but we certainly made things harder on ourselves, given what good volunteers they were before they broke up.

Managing brokenhearted teenage volunteers was relatively minor compared to dealing with a candidate’s spouse. My first campaign debacle was a perfect storm, with a cavalcade of traps and problems that campaign managers might have to go their entire career to learn. I got them all in eight months. There has been, I’m sure, no greater lesson than my dealing with candidate spouses. Most candidates are married, meaning we all have to deal with candidate spouses when we’re working on a campaign. Some candidate spouses are wonderful, helpful people. Some no-hoper candidates even have their spouses manage their campaigns. Almost every time a spouse manages a campaign, it’s a recipe for disaster. Spouses are simply too close to the candidate to be objective. The spouse-manager doesn’t help a lot and hurts a bit. But there are some spouses who hurt a lot. They are liabilities to a campaign, not assets.

The first time I managed a campaign from start to finish, the candidate’s spouse was a real handful. She was a negative person at her core, argumentative and difficult. I was still a young man, inexperienced, and I think, looking back, that I believed everyone would just magically get along and do the work of the campaign. I never once thought that our biggest enemy would come from within. The campaign staff never knew if she would merely second-guess our decisions or outright yell at us. Once, in front of the entire staff, I got yelled at for getting lunch. You run out to get a sandwich, and the next thing you know you’re the target of a tirade so nasty that Simon Cowell from *American Idol* wouldn’t dare utter it. The other high-level campaign personnel and the candidate were all in the room. She called me an idiot, said that I wasn’t committed to the campaign. She called me lazy. She called me other things that comedians refer to as “working blue.” In other words, she cursed. Repeatedly. The effect of her rant was to undermine my authority and create a wedge between me and the candidate. When I would have a disagreement with the spouse, no matter what the topic, the candidate would side with his spouse rather than with me and the campaign staff. As a result, the staff learned either to defer to the spouse regardless of whether we thought she was right or to try to do things without notifying her. Being led around by the spouse, who had no political experience to speak of, meant we were constantly shifting our message and looked unprofessional. Some potential supporters told me in confidence (which is why

I will not reveal the name of this candidate) that she was the reason they did not contribute to or support the campaign. Many people liked my candidate but couldn't stand his spouse. When the spouse makes it a package deal, you have to develop a strategy to deal with that person. We worked in constant tension because of one very important member of the candidate's family. I will not say that we lost the campaign because of the candidate's spouse, but she certainly didn't help.

A spouse or a partner should be a valued component of the campaign. Spouses should be willing to help and defer to the staff. But sometimes it's up to the campaign manager to step in and establish boundaries between the candidate's spouse and the leadership of the day-to-day campaign. Campaign managers have to know that they are not just responsible to the candidate but the candidate's spouse. Establishing good relationships with the candidate's spouse is important. Again, like the teenagers run amok in my earlier example, one absolutely vital skill for a campaign manager is understanding how to work with the personnel, no matter what difficulties they might present.

As a result, I have a regular practice when I run a campaign—I meet first with the candidate and then separately with the candidate's spouse. The spouse is too close to the candidate, so there are two bits of information I need to learn from the candidate before I meet with his or her spouse: First, the candidate must let me know what kind of role his spouse will play in the campaign (if any); and, second, I want the candidate to let me know anything that he or she does not want the spouse to know. If there is a scandal in the candidate's past, the spouse should hear it from the candidate, not from the campaign manager or (even worse) in the newspaper. A spouse that will cooperate with the campaign and play an appropriate role is a wonderful asset to a campaign. A spouse that undermines the work of the campaign, though, can be destructive.

### **Planning, Fund-Raising, and Working the Phones**

The 5P Rule has also helped me overcome one of my greatest fears going into the Lee campaign: asking for money or support over the phone. One truth of campaigning that I learned over time is never to be afraid to ask for money. In my fraternity training to recruit new members, I was asked by a national recruitment specialist, "Do you know why 90 percent of men don't join fraternities?" I answered no, and he told me, "Because they aren't asked." The same attitude holds true whether you're asking young men to join a fraternity, asking a potential donor to contribute to your campaign, or soliciting voters to cast a ballot for a candidate. You have to ask for money to get it, because nobody contributes or votes for someone unless they're asked. In fact, I've learned that some people even appreciate being asked to provide some form of support. But if you aren't ready to ask, you'll never get to find out.

My first attempt at campaign fund-raising occurred at the Lees' home, which was our campaign headquarters. Lee's wife met me in their downstairs

apartment, so that I wouldn't be distracted by other campaign work going on. She handed me a list of people—the source of which I never quite knew—and told me that they were big potential donors. But I was given absolutely no preparation or training. With no preparation whatsoever, no script, and little knowledge of my candidate's position on many issues, I was supposed to extract money from the people I called. I was scared witless at the idea of calling people and asking them to donate money. Who was I to be making these calls? What if they said no? Could I live with the rejection and the shame? Those thoughts paralyzed me at first. Despite no experience, no training, and with much trepidation, somehow I had to turn that list into money.

I sat in the chair for half an hour, staring at the phone, trying to make sense of what I was about to do. I grappled with that unnamed fear all of us face whenever we ask for something important. I had asked people for money before, as a student on behalf of my university's alumni fund-raising efforts, but then I had a script. My university put every caller through a brief training session. That half hour was better than nothing, but afterward I was still nervous about calling our alumni. The people I was about to call for the Lee campaign were successful people in the community. The prospect of embarrassing myself to those leaders intimidated me, a young man of nineteen years. I still don't remember how I got through it, but I did. I called the names on that list. Not a single person gave money to the campaign. But the gradual beating of fear out of me had begun. I heard "no" a lot, but nobody yelled at me. Some were very firm, but they were polite. Maybe the politeness of the "nos" was enough to let me know that the world was not ending and nobody was offended that I was asking for money. Yet for years after, I still had the fear. Receiving a list and a phone still gave me a feeling of impending doom.

Later in the campaign, I joined other campaign staffers and volunteers on a phone bank. We were asking the voters in the district to go out and cast their ballots in favor of Lee. When I sat in front of that bank of phones, I felt the same fear I did when I was dialing for dollars. Maybe the fear of asking for support has to be beaten out of you, or drained out of you slowly. There's a natural human predisposition against asking people for anything over the phone. Telemarketers have made it even worse, giving those who call for any kind of support on the phone a bad reputation. Curiously enough, an event unrelated to politics helped cure my fear. I participated in Millikin University's alumni fund-raising phone drive during my years as an undergraduate there, and once while shopping I ran into someone I had called for a donation. The person was instead very pleasant. When I realized that my life would be unaffected by asking people for campaign donations and voting support, I eased up a bit. I knew I could ask for money and that I wouldn't be treated as evil.

I'm still not very good at asking for money, or at least I'm not very effective. I've done it many times now, and I don't normally get much. But now when I make calls, I'm unafraid. I credit that lack of fear to the regular rejection my pleas for money receive. One of the best ways to get over your fear of

soliciting campaign contributions is to do it and get used to the rejection. Many, in fact most, recipients of fund-raising phone calls will tell you no. The more you hear “no” from people you call, the more you get used to it and the easier it gets to deal with it.

In addition, the 5P Rule can help more. Over time, I developed a packet of information any caller in a campaign could use. Two election cycles after my first failures, I had prepared a solid body of work to get the fear out of my callers. In 1996, when I was a running a state representative campaign for Tom O’Sullivan, I had script for fund-raising. A basic script does wonders for effective dialing. Getting people over their fear can be accomplished with some role-playing—and my university experience told me that it took only about a half hour to get people ready. Once again, preparation became my mantra. In the next election cycle, I had volunteers read the script with me in front of other volunteers. I played the role of receptive supporter, fence-sitter, and opponent. My goal was to ensure that volunteers never encountered a caller who was worse than the character I played in our skits. Volunteers might have felt trepidation at first, but a little bit of preparation did wonders for our efforts.

In preparing volunteers for calling, I tried to make the effort fun and to increase their confidence. If you are running a campaign, you will have to train volunteers to ask for money or a vote. The manager must be able to allay their fears by being comfortable with the idea of fund-raising. A campaign manager who displays the attitude, “Well, making phone calls isn’t fun, but we have to do it,” won’t motivate his volunteers well. Being enthusiastic and positive about the calls, and participating in the training as a leader, are necessary to make volunteers effective at soliciting campaign support.

Sometimes it’s the people you least expect will be nervous about fund-raising that you have to manage the most. During another campaign in 1996, with a bit of fund-raising experience under my belt, I told my candidate that it was time for him to pick up the phone and make calls to potential big-money donors. I’d never been on a campaign where the candidate had not done fund-raising himself before. One candidate, though, was more scared than I had ever been about fund-raising calls. The people we needed my candidate to call were people he knew well from his business connections in the district. Still, he did not want to make calls.

Of all the people you shouldn’t have to motivate in a campaign, your candidate is at the top of the list. Sometimes, though, you have to get the candidate over his or her own fears. Role-playing and scripts, again, make the difference. Practice and preparation make things much easier. After my candidate practiced making phone calls with me, while I played a receptive donor, a persuadable donor, and then a combative nondonor, he got over his fears.

Fund-raising doesn’t just happen on cold calls, though. Mail solicitation is also part of the process, and that takes planning too. When I started writing fund-raising letters for campaigns, I would never ask for specific amounts of

money. I would include a letter, a response form, and a return envelope. I wasn’t doing enough. By my second campaign in 1994, I was including a listing of suggested amounts, from \$25 to \$1,000. When I started graduate school at University of Missouri, I met former congressional candidate Rick Hardy, and he showed me how to make it easier to get donations in larger amounts. Rick’s campaign for Congress set up a three-tiered fund-raising group of “clubs.” You can name those levels however you wish: some of us use Red, White, and Blue; others use Bronze, Gold, and Silver. Either way, people respond to status, and giving a fund-raising effort a designation allows people to feel they have a higher status. Simple fixes like asking for specific amounts of money increased my success.

As my fund-raising efforts, phone calling, and mail solicitations became more effective, I noticed that some people enjoyed being approached about political contributions. Status can be extended to people in many ways, but one of the biggest ways to appeal to ego is to tell someone that they are a big shot. As I wrote more scripts for fund-raising, I became a bit more forward about complimenting the potential donor and casting the fund-raising request as a symbol of that person’s status in the community, by hinting that only a real leader in the community would be interested in donating. That angle works with many people. Letting someone think that their donation is a special thing is a very effective method of boosting fund-raising.

## Conclusion

Whether it’s managing people, asking for money, or writing up a campaign plan, the real work of a campaign is done behind the scenes, often before anyone even knows who the candidate is or what office he or she is running for. Campaigning is like driving a car—you can just jump in and try it, but you’re likely to cause a big crash. Practice, planning, and preparation are absolutely necessary if a campaign is going to be successful. There is no substitute for preparation. Most of the failures I have experienced in my campaigning have resulted from a lack of preparation. I have always benefitted from thinking ahead, whether about strategy, direct mailing campaign pieces, targeting voters, or managing people. In 1998, working for Patrick Henry’s state representative campaign, I convened a “kitchen cabinet” of close friends and advisers with the candidate. That evening we brainstormed, planned the campaign, and set a process in place that would turn a first-time candidate with seemingly no hope into a contender. The Henry campaign was really the culmination of a lot of experience for me. For the Henry campaign, we had a playbook. Then we just went out and executed. I wish I could say we won, but when you take on incumbents, it’s rare that you will win. We took solace in the fact that we were competitive, and having a plan helped our competitiveness. So I shall end as I began, by



shouting my mantra one more time: Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance. The 5P Rule is the triumph of reasoned planning over the rush of excitement that comes with a campaign. To campaign well, take the time to plan. It worked for me. So learn from my experience, the 5P Rule, or that old gospel song, because you don't want to build your ark after it's started raining. At best you're soaking wet, and at worst, you'll drown.