

Running to Win: Qualities of Good Candidates and Managers

SINCE 2003, Wellstone Action has trained thousands of candidates and campaign workers, providing both philosophical and practical advice for how to run progressive campaigns and win. Participants in our training programs have gone on to win races for mayor, city council, state legislature, sheriff, school board, secretary of state, Congress, and other positions. We've trained candidates, campaign managers, press secretaries, field directors, volunteer coordinators, and finance directors for campaigns in thirty-eight states. These individuals come from widely diverse backgrounds. Some are from rural areas, others from urban centers. Some needed clear and specific guidance for every step of the campaign, while others take some suggestions, ignore others, and create their own style of campaigning. As we tell our training participants, campaigns are not one-size-fits-all undertakings. The successful progressive campaigns we've been involved with have varying messages, employ different strategies, use different tactics for communicating with voters, and have their own style and tone.

Despite their differences, there are two things that all of these candidates and campaign workers share: a progressive political outlook and a desire to win. We will not spend a lot of time in this book talking about what it means to be a progressive. Our focus instead is on skills, strategies, and tactics that help candidates and their campaign workers win elections. But we write this book because we are progressives who want to see our values brought into the public and political realm. Values such as a belief in economic justice and equality of opportunity, the primacy of educating our children and supporting families, and making sure we *progress* as a country to the point where good physical and mental health care is not just a privilege for some. We

believe homes should be safe places for women and children and should be free of violence. We believe our role in the world needs to be one of leading in matters of peace and justice, instead of sowing disaster for years to come, as we have been doing in the first part of this century. We believe, as Paul Wellstone would say, that we move our country forward in this new global economy by focusing as a country on the goals of a good education, good health care, and good jobs for all Americans. And that “we all do better when we all do better.”

We’ll leave the rest of the definition of what it means to be a progressive to you and others. This book is about the other thing we hope you share: a desire to win. We want to win not for the sake of winning but because winning is how we actually move our communities, states, and country in a more progressive direction. In other words, we work to attain *power* to make the change we seek in this world. Sometimes the concept of power makes progressives uneasy; after all, most of us have grown accustomed to fighting the people and interests that control power in our communities and in our country. We’re used to railing against the misuse and abuse of power. We’ve seen too clearly the corrupting influence that power can have on those who control it. But as Harry Shearer asks: “If absolute power corrupts absolutely, does absolute powerlessness make you pure?”

Power is neither a good nor a bad; it’s neutral. Look at the Latin root of the word power, *potere*: “to be able to.” That is, power enables one to achieve things. Martin Luther King Jr. used to say that power is simply the ability to achieve a purpose; whether it is good or bad depends on the purpose. Used the right way, power can improve people’s lives and positively change the state of our nation. We should not be afraid of power. On the contrary, we should pursue it ethically, aggressively, and skillfully. We’re not interested in selling out our values, but we do like to win.

A story from one successful progressive candidate, Green Bay City Council Member Celestine Jeffries, illustrates why we emphasize power as our ultimate goal. Jeffries, who had grown concerned that her neighborhood had fallen on hard times, began pushing for greater accountability for rogue landlords who let their properties fall into disrepair. Then in 2005, an advisory committee of the city council proposed eliminating the inspections department of city hall and putting the duties under control of the fire department, which Jeffries felt would severely weaken the inspection process. “So I went to a meeting of the city council and I spoke out very strongly against this proposal,” she told us. She left feeling that she had spoken too forcefully and

hadn't shown enough restraint. At a meeting a couple weeks later, she saw the mayor and approached him. "I apologized for losing my cool," she said. "And he responded with words I'll never forget. He said, 'Celestine, you know what you need? You need more power.' I was floored, absolutely floored." She took the mayor's advice to heart and launched a campaign for city council, winning 57 percent of the vote and becoming the first African American ever to serve on the Green Bay City Council. As the mayor who encouraged Jeffries knew, winning is about gaining power and using it to empower others.

So how do ethical, caring, and passionate progressives stay true to their values and beliefs and win an election at the same time? In other words, how do you win elections the right way? We believe it is possible to stay true to who you are and win your campaign. We believe you can articulate a message about values and employ strategies that both galvanize a strong grassroots base *and* appeal to undecided voters, and throughout this book we will give examples of campaigns that have won this way. This book zeroes in on the skills required to run these kinds of campaigns in a winning way.

Ultimately, we at Wellstone Action do our work (and wrote this book) because we believe that at this point in time for our country and the world, we need many new people stepping forward to run for office and assume roles of leadership. More than ever before, we need new waves of quality leaders at all levels. At Wellstone Action we are hardly alone in our commitment to building the progressive movement through electoral victories. A large and growing network of progressive organizations has formed in the past few years with a focus on developing progressive candidates and campaign workers to win elections across the country. These groups, including the White House Project, Progressive Majority, Center for Progressive Leadership, and EMILY's List, to name just a few, are doing great work to mobilize a broad network of progressive candidates and activists committed to winning elections.

A consistent theme of all these organizations is the need for each of us to consider running for office. It's not easy to be a candidate, and for those of you who advocate and organize from the outside, don't misunderstand: yours is also critical work. But without people willing to run for office themselves, we remain on the outside and without certain power. Some of our urgency comes from losing Paul Wellstone's voice on the national stage just when we needed it the most. But we know Wellstone would be saying, "Don't mourn, organize." And for Wellstone, organizing meant bringing communities together to realize their power, fighting for the issues, and stepping

forward to run for and win elective office. So we honor those who have taken the plunge and decided to be candidates, and we encourage more progressives to consider making the same decision.

The advice we provide in this book is aimed at both candidates and campaign workers. While some of the specific information about candidates and the decision to run for office is not directly relevant to campaign workers, we present to both audiences anyway, because not only is it good information for campaign workers to know, it is also the type of advice that good campaign workers will give to their bosses. Likewise, we talk in detail about the role of campaign staff and volunteers. While this isn't aimed at candidates, it's good background information for candidates to have, provided that candidates understand that their role is not to manage the campaign—their role is to raise money and speak directly to voters.

The Need for Total Commitment

Running for office requires having a total desire for holding the office you are seeking. Running for office, says State Senator Patricia Torres Ray of Minnesota, “requires a genuine commitment to the candidacy. You have to demonstrate that you really want to be in that office. Sometimes people run for office because they want to run for something else. I think people have to be genuine about wanting this and letting people know that this is what they want to do and why.” Voters know passion when they see it in candidates. Another successful candidate said, “People recognize that passion and they can sense when you are genuine.”

Passion not only makes you a more genuine candidate—it can give you confidence. “My advice to anyone running for office is to be very clear about why it is you want to do it,” said Andrew Gillum, who became the youngest member of the Tallahassee City Commission in 2005 after running an aggressive grassroots campaign. “When it gets tough, that will be the one source of strength to rely on. You need a way to articulate to yourself and to others exactly why you want to have this job. If you can do that, you'll be able to renew yourself throughout the campaign even when others can't.” It helps to write this down very early in the campaign with a narrative answer to the questions: “Why do I want to do this job?” and “Why am I the best candidate?” Too often this very basic answer goes unexamined and unarticulated. The wordsmiths and messaging all come later and are informed and grounded from this core.

Commitment extends not only to your passion for holding office, but also to the amount of time it takes to run a winning race. Ask yourself: Am I really prepared to put in the work a campaign requires? Is my family ready? Kathy Hartman, a newly elected county commissioner in Jefferson County, Colorado, told us, "I wish I had taken more seriously the advice of the people who told me how much time this would take out of my life. I had been warned ahead of time about some of the time requirements, but I just didn't take it seriously enough. As early as April, I was working forty hours a week on the campaign, and I had a day job! My days started at five in the morning and ended at eleven at night." Another successful candidate, State Representative Steve Simon in Minnesota, told us that one of the most important things for new candidates to know is that you have to "be willing to work really, really hard. There's no escaping the fact that it's just a lot of time. You can't fool yourself into thinking it's not." So the decision to run for office or work on a campaign should not be taken lightly. Give it the time and thought it deserves. Ask yourself and your loved ones some key questions: Will your family support your decision? Is there a realistic path for winning? What are the issues that might force decisions that could cost you an election? Are you prepared to raise the money? Are you prepared to work harder than you have on anything in your life? Are you prepared to be a public person from now on, even when you may not be "working"? Are there people in your life you can really count on to succeed? For campaign workers, the questions are similar: Is the candidate someone I believe in? Do I have the time, energy, and inclination to devote twelve to fifteen hours a day, six and sometimes seven days a week, to this campaign? Do I have the support of my family and loved ones? Will I receive both the support I need to do the job and the authority to control the key campaign management decisions?

We strongly recommend that you as the candidate and your campaign workers—whether you are deciding to run or have already announced your candidacy—seek out advice from as many people as possible. You will find during the campaign that people like to give you advice. (In fact, sometimes they give you more than you want!) Take them up on it. Even if you don't use the suggestions people give you, the fact that you are asking them signals that you respect their opinions and will make them more likely to support your campaign. One of the biggest mistakes of new candidates and campaign workers is the impulse to "fake it" and pretend they know more than they really do. So make a list of people who are experienced and respected in the political community. Even if you don't know them well, ask them to meet

face-to-face so you can get their suggestions on how to run and win. Not only will most people agree to such a meeting, they will also be flattered. “I was like a sponge at the beginning of the race,” one candidate told us. “I had a breakfast meeting almost every day, asking the same questions of different people—How much will this cost? How good are my chances? What are my potential opponents up to?—and I realized that I was quickly creating a buzz about my candidacy. These people liked to feel that their opinions mattered, and I gave them a little ego boost by sitting down with them and asking their advice.”

If you do decide you are ready to run, remember that while you are working hard, you also need to take care of the things in your life that are most important. “As busy as I was, one of the best decisions I made was to pick a time every week that was family time and make it sacred,” said Commissioner Hartman of Colorado. “No matter what anyone said, I wouldn’t let them touch that time. There are always important events to attend, and there are a lot of things that people will tell you that you need to do, but you really need to protect your family time.” Taking care of yourself is good for your family, but also for your campaign. Tired candidates make mistakes: they misspeak in public appearances and interviews, lose their temper in front of volunteers or voters, deliver lackluster speeches, and deflate the energy from campaign events. Many candidates and campaign workers told us that one of the most important qualities that make a good candidate is the ability to deal with the roller coaster that is a campaign. There will be good days and bad days, but the candidate is always on, is always under scrutiny, and is the one who sets the tone for the campaign. As one successful candidate told us, “When you’re on the campaign trail, you always have to be precise.” Staying healthy and well rested helps a candidate stay focused and disciplined.

The decision to run for office or work on a campaign is deeply personal; no one can make the decision for you. But once the decision is made, the next challenge is to be the best candidate and run the best campaign possible. It starts by being authentic.

The Best Candidates Are Authentic

Of all the characteristics that define good political candidates, we believe authenticity is at the top of the list. In fact, evidence from the past several election cycles strongly suggests that voters are attracted to candidates who convey a certain authenticity. Voters are looking for candidates who under-

stand their lives, seem real, and are running for the right reasons and not just for their own self-aggrandizement. As Al Quinlan, a Democratic strategist, puts it: “Voters choose a candidate more and more based on who that person is, not just what they say they will do. It is a gut reaction based on how a candidate presents him- or herself. Do they only talk about their ten-point plan on education or do they also share how hard it is to spend time with their kids? Trust is a two-way street: in our personal lives and in politics. If people trust that you respect them and are honest, then they will support you even if they disagree with you on certain issues.”

We asked dozens of candidates and campaign workers to tell us what they think makes for a good candidate. Almost to the person, they talked about authenticity in one way or another.

- ▶ “Don’t ever feel bad about standing up for what you think is right.”
- ▶ “The most important thing for me was to convey a message that I myself believed in. I think I was successful because I was able to have the confidence in myself to say ‘This is me’ and authentically relate to a broad audience.”
- ▶ “You have to be able to connect with the audience. You feel it; it’s an emotional thing that you can’t fake. You have to have a voice that is authentic.”
- ▶ “People had to believe that I was real.”

Everyone is an authentic person of course, so why do some candidates come across as more authentic than others? Because they have effectively conveyed to voters some things about themselves, their story, their values, and the experiences that inform their worldview. It is difficult, if not impossible, for candidates without an ability to articulate what drives their interest in politics to be seen as authentic. That’s just common sense. Think about it: if you meet someone new, what are the characteristics that make you want to get to know the person better? It’s not complicated—they are engaging and interesting. They share your values or understand your experience even if you come from different backgrounds. They are good listeners and are responsive. In short, you like and trust them. That’s also true of political candidates. Quinlan expresses it this way: “The dimensions and qualities that make up the authentic candidate are no more complex than those lessons some of us learned from our parents: tell people about your life, be decisive

and don't run away from an honest debate, stick to your principles, and make sure that you always say what you mean and mean what you say."

Sounds pretty straightforward, right? In many ways, it is. But political campaigns have a way of either turning candidates into people they are not or instilling an overwhelming fear, caution, and carefulness that holds candidates back from revealing their true selves. You don't need to look far to find evidence of this phenomenon in candidates of all political persuasions. After all, how often do we hear people characterize candidates as self-serving and phony politicians? But being authentic is more than just appearing "not fake." It requires intentional effort to let voters get to know a candidate.

Consider former governor and presidential candidate Howard Dean. In the early stages of the 2004 presidential contest, Dean ran a smart, strategic campaign for president that defied conventional wisdom. Here was a candidate who was not afraid to stand up for his beliefs, particularly his strong opposition to the war in Iraq. He inspired thousands of young people to participate in politics, and he utilized the Internet to expand and harness his base of support, raise money, and communicate his message to voters. But by the night of the Iowa caucuses, his campaign had run out of steam. Many analysts point to Dean's inability to connect with voters beyond the initial excitement about his candidacy. Dean himself acknowledged that he fell short when it came to revealing more about himself as a person. Roger Simon, in *U.S. News and World Report* (July 19, 2004), analyzed the Dean loss in Iowa:

More than any other candidate, Dean resisted emphasizing his "story," his human dimension. Bill Clinton had shown the power of having a story—abusive father, high-stepping mother, drug-addicted half brother—so that people could have something to identify with. By 2004, the telling of a human story had become an essential part of almost every stump speech: Gephardt talked about how he had grown up poor in Saint Louis, Edwards talked about working in the textile mills with people who had "lint in their hair and grease on their faces," and Kerry, of course, talked about Vietnam. But Howard Dean often failed even to tell crowds that he had been a practicing physician. ("You should tell people you're a doctor," a supporter in South Carolina upbraided him after one of his speeches. "In the South, we *like* our doctors.") . . . After his campaign was over, Dean admitted that his failure to make a more human connection with

voters hurt him. When his opponents raised questions about his temperament, he said, the voters didn't have a positive image to counterbalance that. "I think the temperament issue, which also was untrue, did hurt because people didn't know me that well," Dean told *U.S. News*. "It was written about so much that, you know, some people came to believe it." But couldn't Dean have fought that by telling a more personal story, by selling himself to voters as a human being? "It's true, it's true," Dean replied. "You know, maybe I should have done that."

The point is not to single out Howard Dean (he was authentic about being forthright and outspoken about his views) but to say that as simple as it sounds, being an authentic candidate doesn't always come easy. This is particularly ironic since his early breakthrough in New Hampshire was in part the result of a deliberate strategy by his campaign to have campaign workers use their personal stories to recruit other potential supporters at house parties. Dean focused so much on empowering the voters who were supporting him ("You have the power!") that it came at the expense of telling his own story: why his life and his values made him run.

This also means avoiding a trap that progressives often seem to fall into: using the rhetoric of public programs, plans, and policies instead of communicating in the plain language about the values that underlie those programs, plans, and policies. Al Quinlan writes about the progressive proclivity for the language of government: "Our troubles actually stem from something very positive. We believe that government is good. We believe that with the right ideas we can change people's lives and the country for the better. Government is about policies, issues, solving problems, and responsible leadership." Linguist Geoffrey Nunberg also writes about this problem in *American Prospect* (March 2004, "Speech Impediments") and suggests "a new progressive rhetoric, one free of the technocratic jargon for which Democrats have had a lamentable penchant in the past. Phrases like 'unfunded mandates' and 'single payer' may be accurate, but at the cost of coming across as opaque to the Great Unwonky who make up most of the electorate." Or as Paul Wellstone wrote: "Too many progressives make the mistake of believing people are galvanized around ten-point programs. They are not! People respond according to their sense of right and wrong. They respond to a leadership of values."

This does not mean, of course, that issues are not important. Rather,

it means that, as a candidate, you should talk about issues at the level of values, using the words that people use every day. It means that instead of focusing on your detailed plans on your key issues, you should tell voters why you care about an issue and what informs your positions on important issues. Health care, good jobs, education, and the environment are moral issues. Nunberg suggests that progressives recapture the “moral values” high ground by not being afraid to speak (in plain language) about our values: “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work,” “many hands make light work” (particularly in the war on terrorism), “pick up after yourself” (when it comes to corporate responsibility for pollution), and so on.

Polls show that the American public embraces a progressive issue agenda: support for making health care more accessible and affordable, raising wages for working people, investing more in educational opportunities for children of all backgrounds, curbing the influence of money in politics, and changing America’s reckless, unilateral foreign policy. But recent national elections have shown that important groups of voters don’t always vote on these issues—instead they have gravitated toward the candidate they saw as having stronger or consistent values.

A related dimension of authenticity has to do with giving voters a sense of your core convictions. What are the things that are most important to you? What are you passionate about? Where do you draw your lines in the sand? What are you prepared to lose an election over? Knowing the answers to these questions means first knowing yourself, so spending time reflecting on your personal convictions is a good exercise early in the process of preparing your run.

There are many examples of “conviction politicians”—leaders who stand firm on strongly held beliefs and values, particularly even when those convictions clash with public opinion or the views of key groups of voters and organized interests. At these times, conviction politicians show the courage of their convictions by saying to voters: “You may not agree with me always on every issue, but you will always know where I stand, and I will always do what I think is right.” Often voters appreciate this quality in their leaders, will overlook particular disagreements on issues, and will reward candidates for their courage by voting for them.

Our favorite example of this type of conviction politics is Paul Wellstone. While he took some big political risks by standing by his beliefs even when they weren’t popular, voters rewarded Wellstone because they like to see cour-

ge in their leaders. In the end, voters knew that when it counted, he was on their side and would fight for them. Wellstone's vote against President Bush's Iraq War Resolution one month before election day—one of only twenty-three and the only senator in a contested reelection race to vote that way—stands out as a powerful example of conviction politics. Not only was it the right thing to do, but voters also rewarded him for his courage: his poll numbers jumped up after the vote.

Another dimension of authenticity has to do with the voters' sense of your motivation for running for office. Do voters think you are in it for the right reasons, or are you more about getting ahead for yourself? A great example of telling your story and conveying authentic motivation is Tim Walz, a candidate for Congress in 2006 in Minnesota's First District. Walz, a high school teacher who had never run for elective office, decided to take on a popular six-term incumbent. The district, which encompasses much of southeast Minnesota, is traditionally conservative, and the conservative incumbent was widely expected to win reelection. But Walz ran a campaign that highlighted his real experience and commitment to his community as his qualifications for serving the First District in Congress. A longtime National Guardsman who served in Afghanistan, Walz was a popular high school teacher and football coach who believed that because of his life experience he could do a better job in Congress than the incumbent. He appealed to voters with a great "authentic" message: "I sure never prepared my life around a run for Congress, but my life has prepared me well. My experience as a public school classroom teacher (and son of a teacher) has taught me the importance of investing in our children and investing in our communities. My military service has taught me the importance of giving back to our country and keeping our commitment to those who serve. Authentic experiences are what have prepared me to serve in Congress." Voters responded to this grounded, humble message, and Walz came from behind to win a hard-fought election that gained national media attention. One voter summed up the positive feelings about Walz that put him over the top: "He seems like a genuine person with a passion to do something right."

Strategy Must Accompany Authenticity

Authenticity alone doesn't win elections. In the end, campaigns are also about the voters—their concerns and circumstances—and if you can't connect with

voters around what drives them, then all the authenticity and conviction in the world will not help you win a majority vote. This is where strategy comes in. Making conscious choices about what to emphasize considering your convictions, values, viewpoints, and issues. As political writer Marc Cooper suggests, “The trick of effective politics is precisely to unite people with different views, values, and families around programs, candidates, and campaigns on which they can reach some consensus, however minimal.”

A winning campaign makes choices about the best argument for your candidacy and provides voters with a clear choice between you and your opponent. You can't talk about every item you feel strongly about, nor can you win elections by *only* standing firm on unpopular ideas. It is about more than just what you think; it is about communicating and connecting with voters. Good strategy can be found in places where the candidate's values and experiences overlap with the values and experiences of large numbers of voters. This is the “sweet spot” where real connections can be made with voters. Ultimately this “gap” between a candidate's values and experiences and those of voters is bridged by trust.

How you present yourself matters to voters. That choice must reflect your personality, background, and political philosophy, but it's one that has to be made deliberately. Examples of winning candidates include those who chose to run as reformers, with a goal of cleaning up politics and the way politicians do business. Another candidate emphasized her credentials as a community organizer and ran a campaign built on her broad-based support in the community. Other approaches include running a campaign emphasizing your progressive credentials in a district with a high progressive performance or running as an “accomplisher” who delivers results and gets things done without regard for party or political ideology.

There is also the populist economic approach, one that we have seen work for statewide candidates all across the country. These progressives reach across ideological fault lines on social issues and unite majorities around an economic agenda. Populists focus on the concentration of corporate and economic power and its encroachment into our government and into our lives. They give voice to lower- and middle-class voters and their concerns around their family's economic security. An economic populist agenda focuses on economic opportunity, curbing big power, education, health care, and jobs. These are the issues that have the most impact on people's lives, both directly and indirectly. As Paul Wellstone put it, “If you want real national security, lower crime, and an economy that works for everyone, not just the richest

corporations in the world, focus on a good education, good health care, and a good job.” Wellstone advocated for average Minnesotans rather than the interests of big business—a message popular with undecided voters as well as with Wellstone’s base.

You don’t hear many in Washington suggest that a populist agenda can be a winning policy. Indeed, as the writer and progressive activist Jeff Faux has pointed out, “People who consider themselves liberals are outraged when the maids and gardeners who work in their gated communities want to bargain collectively for a raise. In the ’90s a Democratic president would frequently appear on the front pages of the *New York Times* shedding tears as he felt the pain of poor and disadvantaged children and then go to Washington and sign off on a pinch-penny budget that was far below what was needed to deal with their problems.” Yet recent elections offer evidence that some Democrats are moving away from a corporatist approach to politics. Candidates like Jon Tester in Montana and Sherrod Brown in Ohio demonstrate the success that can result from speaking directly to the economic insecurities facing Americans today. At a time when job security continues to deteriorate, wages stagnate, health care costs rise, and opportunities for young people dry up, voters are looking for candidates who understand what they are going through and will give them a voice in their government.

Other Qualities of Successful Candidates

There is never just one thing you can point to to explain a winning candidacy. There is a package of candidate qualities that usually come together to win races. We describe some of them here and on the pages that follow.

A Commitment to Grassroots Organizing

We have found time and again that successful progressive campaigns harness the power of a base of active, committed, and excited supporters. We believe in applying the principles and sensibilities of community organizing to electoral campaigns. This means that the candidate first builds a base of support and then uses those supporters to continue expanding the base and reaching out to new voters. It places a heavy emphasis on direct voter contact through intensive field organizing and voter targeting. Winning the Wellstone way is all about running a campaign that is built from the grassroots, involves a

broad and diverse base of supporters, and connects with a majority of voters around the concerns and circumstances of their lives.

Depth and Breadth of Relationships

Politics, like organizing, is all about relationships. The best candidates come to a campaign with a base of supporters. They are grounded in communities, constituencies, or issues and have been leaders of some kind in their communities already. Mark Ritchie from Minnesota is a great example. A community organizer for more than two decades before his successful run for secretary of state of Minnesota, Ritchie knew that he had to rely on his long-standing connections across the state if he was going to win his party's nomination and go on to win the general election. "The fact that I had spent my life in organizing means I built relationships over time, and it also meant that I knew that relationships are the basis of really, well, everything. I'd show up at an event in rural Minnesota, and I'd see a farmer I had met twenty years ago. I really worked those connections. I had a life of work, a big extended family, so to speak, and I asked for their help."

Raising the Resources It Takes to Win

While we find the dominance of money in elections to be a destructive force in our democracy (and a tough issue that good progressive candidates should tackle once in office), the fact remains that if we want to build power by winning elected office, candidates must make sure they raise the money to fully fund the kind of campaign that it takes to win their office. In our many interviews with successful (and unsuccessful) candidates, one consistent piece of advice we hear can be summed up by one of our winning Camp Wellstone graduates: "Get the money!" The reality is that money matters if we want to win. In the chapter on fundraising strategies and tactics, we'll talk about how to break down the fundraising challenge into manageable chunks and how to set up the systems that help you raise the resources. We also examine grassroots fundraising strategies by cultivating small donors, getting people to give multiple times, and weaving fundraising into your organizing strategies. Successful candidates learn that campaigns are mostly about "The Ask": asking for people's votes, time, and money. If you are confident as a candidate and are in it to win, you need to get over any fear of asking your supporters to help you fund your campaign.

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Hard Work

As much as we like to win, sometimes there are good reasons why campaigns lose. Maybe the campaign message didn't resonate or wrong decisions on strategy were made. Some campaigns just get outworked. In fact, in some close races, it is the campaign that works the hardest that usually wins. Good candidates and their teams work hard, put in the hours raising money or knocking on doors, get up early and stay up late, and put other things off until after Election Day. So often we hear losing opponents (both progressive and conservative) explain their losses by saying, "We simply got out-hustled." You can't win every election, but you really don't want to lose because you didn't work hard enough. One caveat to this: as a candidate you must also get regular rest so that you are always the best public person you can be when out campaigning.

Discipline

Along with hard work comes discipline, or staying focused on a plan, strategy, and timetable. A campaign goes one of two ways: you either run your own race or have it run by your opponent. Your opponent runs you if you don't have or follow a plan, if you stay reactive instead of proactive, or if you go off on unstrategic tangents. This is particularly important around message delivery. Breaking through with voters in this busy, noisy world we live in is one of the single biggest challenges all candidates face today. Conciseness, frequency, and repetition are all techniques to allow you to be heard by voters. Saying something different all the time means voters have a hard time hearing anything from you. That is what message discipline is all about. Well-run, disciplined campaigns are ones that make intentional and strategic decisions to do certain things and follow a certain direction and then effectively implement those decisions during the course of the election.

Qualities of Good Campaign Managers and Campaign Workers

When we ask successful candidates and campaign managers to name the reasons they won, one common response is, "I had a great team working with me," or "I found good people I could trust to do the work while I stayed focused on being the candidate." Winning campaigns are never solitary

endeavors; every campaign needs a manager along with a team of people who keep focused on the goals, work the plan, and help the candidate be at his or her best every day. A well-functioning team, with a person in charge, operates with clearly defined jobs, measurable goals, and a problem-solving attitude. Unresolved personality conflicts, gossiping, infighting, and personal agendas are the sure signs of a losing campaign.

We've gathered a lot of stories, both good and bad, about progressive campaigns over the last couple of election cycles. Here's a particularly bad (and not atypical) one about a dysfunctional campaign:

The personal egos of the senior campaign staff got in the way of the business of campaigning. The candidate was fortunate to have a senior staff who was very experienced and skilled, but each of those staff members had their own ideas about how every aspect of the campaign should be run, and there were daily disagreements over the smallest of details. This made it almost impossible to formulate or stick to an overarching campaign strategy, which all campaigns need for cohesiveness and direction. . . . The personal egos and inability to compromise or communicate effectively was a major weakness of this campaign; the ramifications of this were felt throughout every aspect of the campaign.

How can a campaign avoid a situation like this? With a good campaign manager, firmly in control, who can balance the need to communicate internally while maintaining efficient decision making. It's also up to the rest of the campaign team to do their part. Campaigns are anything but a normal work environment and thus are not for everyone. You work long hours under stress and deadlines; there are no elaborate work rules and personnel policies; you are thrown together with others and have to quickly learn to work together; you are not always paid well (or at all). And yet, people are expected to be flexible and do whatever job they are asked to do.

Many of the qualities that make for a good candidate similarly make for a good campaign manager: discipline, hard work, strategic vision, the ability to connect with people, and commitment to a set of core values. But campaign workers have a unique role on a campaign. On one hand, it is the campaign manager and staff who effectively run the campaign. Starting with the campaign manager and moving down, the campaign workers set strategy, identify voters, recruit volunteers, make phone calls, canvass targeted neighbor-

hoods, and raise money. Although it's the candidate's name on the ballot, the campaign workers are responsible for ensuring the campaign's success. On the other hand, campaign workers should never forget that they work for someone else. While they may share the candidate's vision for the future and believe strongly in the candidate's message, ultimately that vision and message are the candidate's and the candidate's alone. So working on a campaign requires putting aside your own agenda or desire for advancement and simply working hard to get your candidate elected. You might run the campaign, but in the end it's not your campaign but the candidate's.

Whether there is trust or not between a campaign manager and a candidate can be the difference between winning and losing. Experienced campaign manager Matt Filner describes trust as "the rudder that guides the campaign through the rough spots." And inevitably, there will be rough spots in the campaign, times when the candidate and the campaign manager need to hold things together. Elizabeth Glidden, a successful city council candidate, said that new candidates need people who believe in them, and that starts with the campaign manager. "You need someone who believes in you, because you need to believe in yourself. Voters are not going to believe in you if you don't believe in yourself." Secretary of State Mark Ritchie described what real trust looks like between a candidate and a campaign manager: "My campaign manager could tell me what to do, and I would do it. He had a way of explaining things to me that really worked. It wasn't 100 percent of the time—sometimes we disagreed—but he knew what we needed to do. The bottom line was that I didn't run this campaign. I wasn't 'handled,' but my campaign manager ran this campaign, and that's the way it needed to be."

One of the key functions of the campaign manager is to give direct, honest advice to the candidate. "I think a candidate needs to surround herself with people who can be critical," State Representative Steve Simon of Minnesota told us. "My campaign manager was a real straight shooter. We'd leave an event and I'd ask him how I did, and I always knew he'd be honest. In a very low-key, professional way, he would say, 'average to below average,' or 'you didn't really connect there.'" Another candidate told us: "I made it very clear to my campaign manager that she would be doing me no favors if she simply agreed with everything I said or told me I was doing a great job even when she didn't believe it. I had so few people I could count on for objective advice that without her ability to give me her honest opinion, I would have been surrounded only by people who were telling me what a great job I was doing." Sometimes, however, candidates mostly hear about what they're

doing wrong. Another Minnesota candidate, State Auditor Rebecca Otto, told us, "You have to be open to critique and be able to adjust, but you really need to take that advice from people you trust, like your campaign manager. Everyone will tell you what to do, and sometimes people will tell you all the things you're doing wrong. If you take advice from everyone, you will lose your way. Don't get freaked out by all the noise and the doubters." This point is almost more important for candidates because it is the candidate who sets the tone for encouraging directness. Don't shoot the messenger; instead listen and take things to heart.

Good campaign managers keep the campaign running smoothly, but they don't need to be experts in every aspect of the campaign. The sign of a good campaign manager is someone who knows what they don't know and seeks out the people who can help on those areas. One candidate told us he was nervous about having to hire a young and relatively inexperienced organizer as his campaign manager because of budget reasons, but the young manager actually used that to his advantage. "I didn't have much money to spend, which required me to hire someone young, but we overcame that because I introduced him to people who have a lot of experience and told him to use them as a resource. He constantly checked in with people who knew more than he did about running a campaign. He knew what he didn't know, and he called on these experienced managers to become his mentors, which they did." Indeed, we have found that behind a good campaign manager is a circle of mentors and contacts that the manager relies on during the course of a campaign.

It's critical that your campaign understand that the candidate should never also be the campaign manager, either explicitly or by action. That's right, the candidate should *never* try to run his or her own campaign. It's pretty simple: a candidate needs to focus on voters, while the campaign manager needs to run the campaign. The candidate should not spend her time on the minutiae of running a campaign. She should not balance the checkbook, run staff meetings, debate office equipment to purchase, or otherwise waste any opportunity she has to speak directly to voters or raise funds. Even if the campaign manager is part time or a volunteer, that person needs to be someone other than the candidate.

It's also usually a poor choice to have your spouse or close relative run your campaign. If the campaign manager cannot speak honestly and directly to the candidate and the candidate cannot fire the manager if something goes

dreadfully wrong, then the wrong person is running the campaign. Having a spouse manage a campaign can be problematic.

Consider the experience that Kathy Hartman had in her race for county commissioner in Colorado. “One of the reasons I won is that my opponent’s campaign manager was his wife,” Hartman told us. “That meant everything was personal. For example, we criticized my opponent for taking money from a developer after he took a controversial vote on an issue. His campaign totally overreacted to the attack, which was stupid. We ended up getting three media stories out of this, and it got even worse for him. Because he was so upset, he claimed he had never met this developer in his life. Turned out we had records to prove that he had. So he not only got dragged into responding to our attack, he said things that weren’t true and that we could prove weren’t true.”

There are exceptions to the rule about spouses as campaign managers. We know of campaigns that have gone very well with the spouse at the helm, and in very small local races, having a spouse as a campaign manager may be the only option. One candidate for city council told us that while she initially opposed the idea of her husband managing her campaign, he was also the most experienced and committed person who was willing to do the job (and do it for free!). They created a great working relationship, and she relied on him to both run the daily operations of the campaign and also give her clear, honest, and sometimes tough advice. For most candidates, that’s a role better left to someone who is not immediate family, but we recognize that every candidate has to make the decision that works best.

Regardless of who manages the campaign, the other staff need to understand their roles, define a set of objectives, and go out and achieve them. If you are a campaign worker, you will likely hear some variation of this mantra from your campaign manager: “Your job is to get to work, help implement the plan, not complain, not say ‘But that’s not my job,’ and just put your head down and get it done.” That might sound a little harsh, but campaigns are not places you should work if you need constant affirmation from your superiors. Yet the best campaigns are not run as military command-and-control structures, just as they are not run by consensus. There should be an openness to sharing ideas, to disagreement and debate, and to creativity. After all, if we ourselves cannot figure out how to make this happen in our own organizations, how do we expect it to happen elsewhere? Having said this, once a campaign decision is made, the time for debate and

second-guessing passes and it becomes time to get the job done—the job of winning the race. The environment of a campaign is too intense, the pace is too fast, and the stakes are too high for campaign workers to worry about bruised egos. Ultimately, you are there for the candidate (another reason it's important to choose your candidate wisely), not yourself.