



Effective Campaigning With Little or No Money

BY RICHARD P. BURKE

DON'T LET THE PUNDITS ON TV FOOL YOU: Old-fashioned hard work pays off!

Campaigns are more sophisticated, but don't be intimidated! With improved polling, micro-targeting, and other technologies, political professionals keep coming up with new ways to win people over, or at least manipulate them. But no matter what they come up with, NOTHING will take the place of a good ground campaign and elbow grease. This unit will offer proven and effective ways of doing the fundamental campaign work that lies at the heart of winning races.

Not every example here will be right for you or your group. You may come up with ideas of your own not shown here. But whatever you do, develop a written plan, preferably with a calendar assign responsibility to someone for each activity you undertake. Make sure someone follows up.

1 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

These still work – don't ignore them! Send letters on a consistent basis. First, tell the reader what you want them to do. Second, provide a reason why the reader should do what you want. Third, offer a personal comment demonstrating why you are taking the stand that you are. Finally, repeat what you want the reader to do. Keep it VERY short.

2 "DESKTOP ACTIVISM"

Facebook, Twitter, blogs, email lists, and other Internet outlets are great for getting your message out. You can be sure that your opponent will be using them. When you see posts of news stories, leave comments favorable to the candidates and ballot measures you support. Take issue with those who support your opponents!

3 CALL TALK RADIO SHOWS

Don't limit yourself to major statewide talk shows. Call into talk shows offered on smaller stations. Call "Trading Post" type shows, even if you have nothing to sell, and shows where people are allowed "thirty seconds of fame." While larger stations may not offer such opportunities, struggling small stations do. Their audiences are smaller, but they vote! Refer to WLN Academy units on the media.

4 BULLETIN BOARD CAMPAIGN

Grocery stores, laundromats, bus stops, laundry areas at apartment complexes, and other such places provide "Community Bulletin Boards" where people can post event information, business cards and so on. You can post campaign materials on these boards. Management may take them down, but people will see them first!

5 LOBBYING LOCAL AND LEGISLATIVE OFFICE HOLDERS

Prevail upon your elected local, county, and legislative leaders to make strong public statements in support of the campaigns you support. Refer to the WLN Academy units on lobbying. If the issue is sensitive, assure the local official that he or she will have the support of you and your friends. If the official refuses, ask why – you will learn a lot about that official from their answers.

6 HOLD A VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE

You or a group you are affiliated with can secure booths at county fairs, gun shows, food festivals, or other exhibitions where you can offer to register people to vote. As they register, you can familiarize them with the positions, candidates, and ballot measures you support. You will find allies along the way to help in future campaigns!

7 TESTIMONY TO PUBLIC BOARDS

You can testify to public boards such as city councils and school boards during their “Open Communication” segments, where people can testify on any matter not on the meeting agenda. Emphasis should be placed on meetings where local newspaper reporters will be present or meetings covered by public access television. Better yet, inform newspapers in advance of your intent to testify on a particular campaign.

8 DIRECT VOTER OUTREACH

You can do things on your own or you can coordinate with a group or a professional campaign. If you want to work with a group but one is not available, form one and coordinate with the campaigns you support.

a. Door to Door. Distributed literature or just shake hands with people going door-to-door. Do not get involved in long discussions or any arguments - you want to hit as many doors as you can. Dress neatly, and use sidewalks. Bring someone with you if you can. Wear a campaign button if one is available. Work at reasonable times. Do not litter or put literature in mailboxes or newspaper delivery boxes. Keep presentations short.

b. Phone Banking. If there is a funded campaign associated with your effort, you can volunteer to take part in phone banks. If not, you can call your friends or neighbors. You may wish to work with others in your group or with campaign representatives to come up with a script, but try to present it in your own words. Can't get to the phone bank headquarters? No problem... get a list from them and use your own phone.

c. Get Out the Vote (GOTV). A lot of winnable elections have been lost simply because campaigns simply failed to get their supporters to vote! In any case, if there is no GOTV effort behind a campaign you support, do one of your own! See WLN training materials on personal and “desktop” GOTV projects. You can do a lot with very little!

9 TOWN HALL MEETINGS AND RETIREMENT CENTER PRESENTATIONS

Your group can hold a town hall style meeting or an open house where people can talk to members about the races you want to focus on. Perhaps you can organize a debate or a forum for your candidate. You might also want to make presentations to retirement centers. The elderly vote with high reliability, and the social managers of retirement centers are always looking for meeting content.

10 SUBMIT A VOTER PAMPHLET ARGUMENT

You, either alone or with a group of friends, could raise a limited amount of money to publish a Voter Pamphlet statement for or against a ballot measure. This is a good way for groups to do community outreach and increase membership. You will have to raise a few dollars, but there is no less expensive way to reach every voter in a particular electoral district! No money? It is often possible to get your Voter Pamphlet argument published by collecting a few signatures!

11 SIGN CAMPAIGNS

Signs or posters can be produced to be placed in the windows of businesses. If large field signs are available from a big-dollar campaign on your side, it may be possible to find high-visibility locations for them. Lawn signs can be a key component to any sign campaign. Friends and other activists can be asked to put up signs in their yards, find other locations to put up lawn signs, and pick up signs when the campaign is over. It may be possible for you to coordinate with a professional campaign. As election day approaches, you and your friends can hold signs over bridges and at well-traveled intersections.

12 HOLD AN ELECTION NIGHT PARTY

Victory parties give a sense of closure, accomplishment, and camaraderie. They can cement relationships built during a campaign and can provide a venue to come up with ideas about what to do next. They allow volunteers to share a common experience and compare notes in an informal environment. They offer a venue for your group to gain favorable media coverage, raising your group's profile thereby making it easier to recruit new members.

TIPS FOR TRAINERS

If your chapter commits itself to running a “guerrilla election campaign” as discussed in this AFP University unit, your members will be surprised at how effective they can be on a shoestring. Lots of people will get involved, which will help your members gain confidence. Morale within your chapter will rise. With each campaign, volunteers will learn more about politics, your AFP chapter, and themselves. After a few campaigns, your chapter will earn an enviable reputation as a politically effective and formidable group in your area. This AFP University unit is unique because it calls for you to build and run a REAL political campaign on the fly - complete with staff, workers, and a written campaign plan to execute. It is also unique in that it provides a real-life training opportunity for you to build your management skills as a chapter leader.

1. Remember: In This Unit, the Campaign IS the Exercise. Unlike other AFP University units, this one does not teach a single skill or set of skills to be practiced in an exercise. It offers an approach to low-cost volunteer driven campaigning, suggesting specific tactics requiring specific skills. While many of these skills are addressed in other AFP University units, you will not have time to teach these skills in the same meeting you present this unit in. Ideally, you would present this unit AFTER you have presented a few other AFP units teaching skills that will be needed in using some of the tactics listed in this unit.

2. Go Through the Material Interactively. When you are presenting materials with lots of information, encourage students to interrupt with questions and comments by raising their hands during your presentation. By interacting with people throughout the lesson, students will remain interested longer. They will assimilate information better because they will be able to put it into a context they relate to. You will learn things too, and your voice will get an occasional break! If you ask them to hold their questions until you are finished, they will be more likely to daydream and will often forget the questions they wanted to ask.

3. Enlist Your Volunteers. After you go through this unit, go back over each tactic - one by one - and ask for a volunteer to take responsibility for making sure it gets executed. For example, try to enlist a volunteer to lead the “letter to the editor” component of the campaign (Tactic #1). This person would be responsible for contacting the chapter membership and encouraging them to write letters to the editor. Another could take responsibility for organizing a voter registration drive (Tactic # 13) and then proceed to organize the drive. You may not get a volunteer for every tactic, and that is perfectly OK - it is better to do three things well than a dozen poorly. Ask another volunteer, perhaps a newcomer, to write down the name of each volunteer agreeing to take the lead on executing a tactic. After someone takes responsibility for executing a tactic and his/her name is written down, the next question becomes, “Who will help him/her?” Enlisting another person or two will provide support, accountability, follow-up, and redundancy to the lead volunteer. When you are finished, you will have the outlines of a campaign with delegated responsibilities and volunteers in place.

4. Prime the Volunteer Pump. Before the meeting, ask a few volunteers known to be reliable to take responsibility for executing some of the tactics you think are most important to the campaign’s success. As you review the tactics at the meeting you found volunteers for in advance, point out the volunteers and ask for people to help them. As your pool of experienced campaigners grows, “priming the pump” will become less and less necessary.

5. Find TWO Lieutenants to Help You Manage the Effort. If you organize your “guerrilla election campaign” as described here, you will have delegated much of the actual nuts-and-bolts campaign work to volunteers agreeing to lead various parts of the campaign. This is good for your volunteers because they will have more chances to gain leadership and practical political experience. *It is good for you because you will have a chance to build on your management skills.* Your job will be to follow-up with your volunteers leaders and make sure they do their jobs. This task will itself become more manageable if you choose two lieutenants to perform the follow-up work under your direction. Your job will then be to manage THEM. **Remember - as a county chair, we are trying to help you develop management skills to empower you as a leader and help you to do more with what you have at hand - all without burning you out.**

6. Write a Campaign Plan. Write a campaign plan with input from your volunteer leaders and lieutenants, who become a campaign staff for your “guerrilla election campaign.” Remember - when you write a campaign plan, you start on election day and work backward to the day on which you write the plan. One way to start is to get a big calendar and hold a meeting with the entire campaign staff. Using the calendar, establish target dates for executing the various tactics which volunteers took responsibility for. Where you can, set objectively quantifiable goals for each component of the campaign - for example, a person volunteering to lead the “letter to the editor” effort could set a goal of 20 letters to be printed in the local paper. Make sure that each campaign staff member knows how to contact the rest of the staff. When you are finished, write up the plan and distribute it to each member of your staff. The plan can be changed as needed, but it will help everyone understand how their jobs fit

into the larger effort. It will also help to provide the support and accountability your “guerrilla election campaign” needs to be successful. Not to be forgotten, your chapter members will also get some real campaign experience.

7. Work With Your AFP Staff. If you feel overwhelmed or if you have questions, remember that your AFP staff has “been there” and will offer you advice, support, and encouragement. **We want you to succeed, and you can WIN!**

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