



WLN Academy

Developing Your Personal Media Campaign

by Richard P. Burke

From the comfort of your home, you can advance the campaigns you support using free media outlets. Examples include **letters to the editor, radio call-in shows, and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.** Newspapers readers, listeners of talk-radio, and politically active social media users are all high-percentage voters, the very people you will want to reach.

This document will help you to develop and execute a personal media campaign. Following the guidelines shown here will increase the odds that your message will actually get out. You may also find that these basic guidelines can also be applied or adapted to any venue or medium which accepts comment from the public.

- ① **Make a List of Media Contacts.** Go the websites of area newspapers and find out how to submit letters to the editor. Most newspapers have specific requirements including word counts and information about how they can reach you. Check out talk radio station websites and find out the call-in phone numbers and times of shows you can call into. On social media, check out groups and chat rooms you think are dominated by persuadable people who vote. If you follow specific blogs, get their web addresses. **Compile all of this information into a *written* list you can use as you execute your personal media campaign.** You can also share this list with friends to help them develop personal media campaigns of their own.
- ② **Use This “Four Point” Method to Develop SHORT Messages.** Short messages are far more likely to get make it to your target audience than long ones. In any medium, short messages are more likely to actually be read or heard and offer fewer opportunities for opponents to challenge. For your personal media campaign, develop your message by using the “Four Point Method” shown here:
 - A. **Explain the Purpose of Your Letter. Get right to the point.** The first line of your letter should say something like, “*Dear Editor, I write this letter in support of Jane Doe for Position 3 on the Anytown School Board in the upcoming local election on May 16th.*” That’s it. Boom!
 - B. **Say Why You Support Your Position.** Your next sentences should suggest a personal connection with the candidate. For example, “*I have known Jane Doe for ten years. She is a woman of integrity who has the good of our community at heart.*” **Express ONE main idea only.** If there are more reasons to support Jane Doe, have other people express them in separate messages. **Use no more than one, two, but no more than three sentences. In this case, less is more!**
 - C. **Close the Sale.** The last sentence closes the sale by saying something like, “*For this reason, I hope you will join me in supporting Jane Doe for Position 3 on the Anytown School Board – Election Day is May 16.*” Yes, it is a repetition of the first line. Drive the point home!
 - D. **Tell Them Who You Are and Why You Matter.** As appropriate for each media outlet, provide your name, address, email address, and contact phone numbers. Newspapers and some blogs require this information.

If you can, use a title of some kind. If you are a public office holder, member of a civic organization, member of a neighborhood organization, or almost anything else, a title lends credibility to your letter by showing you are connected and active in your community. For example, one could sign the letter, “*Sincerely, John Doe, Member, Anytown Elk’s Lodge #9999, 123 Oak Street, Anytown, OR 99999, 555-555-5555, johndoe@johndoe.com.*”

IMPORTANT: If you offer any kind of title related to an official body or group, you need to make clear that you are representing only yourself rather than the group or body you are referencing. One way you can do this by placing the words, “Speaking for myself,” at the very top of the letter. There are other ways to do this, but it is important not to imply that the group you are a member has endorsed your position unless they actually have.

- ③ **Build and Deploy a Personal Media Campaign Team.** Get as many friends and supporters as you can to develop personal media campaign plans like yours. **agree to submit letters to the editor on your behalf.** Provide copies of this document to your politically active friends and coordinate messaging with them. Doing this will multiply your impact.

In the case of letters to the editor, you can type letters to be signed and submitted by your friends who are too busy to write letters of their own. After all, **while friends and supporters may have the best of intentions, people get busy and follow-through can be a problem.** Getting them to sign letters in advance offers them a way to help you without imposing on them too much. Be sure to vary the tone of each so their authenticity is not questioned.

- ④ **Don't Go Negative.** We see negative campaigning all the time. Professionally done, negative campaign tactics can help high-visibility campaigns. **But remember – voters generally do not respond well to negative campaign tactics when it comes to local campaigns and ballot measures.** Most voters understand that local positions are usually unpaid and are undertaken by people who genuinely want to contribute to their communities. I was once challenged for my seat on a water district board of commissioners by a challenger who spent over \$12,000 on a negative campaign. It backfired big time (I spent \$0 and got over 60 percent of the vote and several endorsements). Do your best to keep your messaging positive in tone.

- ⑤ **Pace Your Personal Media Campaign.** **Using a calendar from Election Day backward to today, plan your personal media campaign.** Using the information on the media list you compiled, decide how many letters to submit to each local publication, when, and how often. Decide how often you will express your message on talk radio and social media. If you acquired signed letters to the editor in advance from your friends, submit them in a coordinated way. If you are relying on people to submit their own letters, have a plan to assure follow-through. **Remember to pace yourself and involve others if you can.** Editors and talk radio producers will get annoyed if they receive a constant bombardment of letters and calls from one person.

Following the suggestions in this document will not ensure that your letters and blogs will be published or that your call will be put on the air. But a personal media campaign can make the difference between victory and defeat for close races and local non-partisan races where people don't know the names of many candidates. Local races in particular feature low voter turnouts and low candidate expenditures that work against name recognition. By getting the names of the candidates and ballot measures you support into the public domain through a personal media campaign, you can do a lot to determine who makes up the fabric of the political culture in your community.

#