WLN Academy

How to Get Out The Vote (GOTV)
by Richard P. Burke

Introduction. "Get Out The Vote" (GOTV) operations often determine whether campaigns win or lose, especially where local campaigns are concerned. While there are many things during a political campaign that candidates cannot control, they can help themselves with a strong GOTV effort. Likewise, individual activists can undertake their own GOTV projects to help the candidates and ballot measures they support. No matter what your campaign budget is (even if it is $0), or what your strategy might be during the days before an election, it is critical that every single campaign carefully plans and executes a serious GOTV operation.

① **The Psychology of Getting People to Vote**

A 2012 Stanford University study found that people become much more likely to vote in any given election **if they see voting as a part of their personal identity and if they have a specific plan about when and where they will vote**. Keep this in mind whether you are an activist undertaking a personal or "desktop" GOTV project, or if you are working as a campaign volunteer as part of a professional campaign.

Though you will want to adapt the message for different situations, you could say something like, "*Jill, you've been a conservative most of your life. It is important that you stand for your values now by making sure you vote.*" This statement ties a person's identity with the civic act of voting. Include a question like, "*When do you plan to vote or mail in your ballot?*" This forces people to consider a basic plan about when they will vote or at least plants the idea in their minds.

Live GOTV appeals are best - when you look someone in the eye and ask them to commit to voting, you will have the most success. Phone appeals, while interactive and also effective, are not as successful as live appeals. Email, robo-calls, and social media appeals are not as effective as live or telephone appeals, but are still effective and are certainly better than nothing. Keep this in mind as you formulate your GOTV plan.

② **Collect, Organize, and Prioritize Your Voter Information**

If you are an undertaking a "desktop" or personal GOTV project, start with a list showing all the individuals and groups you plan to contact, how you will contact them, and when you will contact them. You will reach some over the phone. You will reach some through social media. Perhaps you will want to reach out to a service club, community group, business or church group, or bridge club you belong to. It's all good.

If you are working on a campaign, get a list of all voters in your district from the relevant state or county officials. You may also want to get information available online from the U.S. Census Bureau about demographic information associated with your district. Once you have the this information, prioritize voters according to how often they vote and by other metrics (like party affiliation, income, or education level) that you think are important. As needed, volunteers can look up phone numbers and find email addresses where they are missing. The goal is to make sure that voters generally inclined to vote, and those who are likely inclined to vote your way make it to the top of your GOTV list.

❸   Prepare Your Messaging

If you are undertaking a personal or "desktop" GOTV project, consider what you will say to your contacts before you contact them. Write it down. Are there hot-button issues that will motivate your contacts? Is the political environment competitive? Whatever you think will motivate individual or groups of voters should be added to your contact list. As mentioned before, you will want to say something that connects the act of voting to their personal identity and a request for them to commit to a specific voting plan.

As you develop your message, you may want to contact one or more of the campaigns you support to see if they have tested any messaging they know will motivate voters. Be sure that you also include important information such as when voter registrations must be updated, when mail-in or absentee ballots must be mailed, and where ballot drop boxes are located. Example:

"Hello, Jane! I'm calling to encourage everyone I know to vote in the upcoming November 5th election. I know you have been a conservative most of your life and hope you can be counted on to stand for your values now. Joe Blow is running in a close race for the state legislature and we all want Ballot Measure Z to be defeated, right? Have you received your ballot? If you plan to mail it, you should do so before November 3rd to make sure it arrives on time. When do yo plan to cast your vote? I have a list of ballot drop locations if you need it. Do you need any help? Thanks!"

❹   Get to Work!

Sometimes, the hardest part of a personal or "desktop" efforts is just getting started. Set an appointment to start. Design and commit to a specific plan to work on GOTV a few hours per day. Take notes as you go you can use to determine who you will need to follow-up with, who may need assistance because of disabilities or some other reason, and who may have skills and interests that may be helpful in future campaigns.

If you are coordinating with a professional campaign, it may be able to give you daily information about who has voted and who has not. You can use this information to avoid wasting time following up with voters who have already voted. After the election, this information can also provide you with valuable feedback on how effective your GOTV plan was. If you are not working with a professional campaign, you may still be able to get this information from county or state election offices.

Conclusion. The history of big elections is rife with examples of campaigns decided by only a few votes. In smaller elections, a few more votes here and there can be even more decisive. Individual or "desktop" GOTV projects can literally put activists in the position of determining the outcome of elections, particularly close races and local races. GOTV work is among the most powerful tools that can be in an activist's toolbox. The connections you make along the way will serve to elevate your reputation as an opinion leader and as an effective activist. As you build this reputation and your personal relationships, you will also have a lot of fun! ☑

Personal Get Out the Vote (GOTV) Campaign Worksheet

Pg. #: ___

Use this form to build your personal GOTV campaign. Feel free to photocopy this sheet or contact WLN to have a PDF file of this form emailed to you that you can print. Put down information of people you are comfortable dealing with. As you do that, write down when you plan to contact this person initially and to follow up. Then get to work! Don't forget to find out when they plan to vote and don't forget to relate the act of voting to their personal identity. Voters who do both of these things are much more likely to vote. Good luck!

CONTACT NAME:

❑ REGISTERED TO VOTE
❑ DID THEY RECEIVE THEIR BALLOT?
❑ WILL THEY NEED ASSISTANCE?

❑ DO THEY HAVE A PLAN TO VOTE?
When Will They Vote? _____
❑ **THE CONTACT HAS VOTED**

PHONE NUMBER: _____ **EMAIL:** _____

ADDRESS (If Needed): _____

HOW CONTACT WILL TAKE PLACE (Check all that apply):

❑ Phone   When (Initial Contact): _____ When (Follow Up): _____
❑ Email   When (Initial Contact): _____ When (Follow Up): _____
❑ Personal Meeting   When (Initial Contact): _____ When (Follow Up): _____

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❑ REGISTERED TO VOTE
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