

How to be a

DOWN-BALLOT WINNER

***THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE
TO LOCAL CAMPAIGNING***

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Down–Ballot Winner

The Definitive Guide to Local Campaigning

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Down-Ballot Winner: The Definitive Guide to Local Campaigning will be published mid-2015. For notification of when it is available, email info@localcandidatecoach.com. Or complete the form at LocalCandidateCoach.com.

Meanwhile, take a peek at samples now available: the introduction, the table of contents, and the chapter entitled, “Attracting Endorsements.” Once you have, you will agree that *Down-Ballot Winner: The Definitive Guide to Local Campaigning* is worth the wait.

INTRODUCTION

By purchasing *Down-Ballot Winner: The Definitive Guide to Local Campaigning*, you join a select group willing to take a serious look at what it takes to run for public office. Most people never think of running for public office, let alone do it. Just contemplating it makes you exceptional, and I congratulate you for your desire to learn more.

The term politics has its roots in the ancient Greek word *politikos* meaning of, for, or relating to citizens. Modern electoral politics is the art of candidates influencing or persuading citizens to vote. Political campaigns do it by appealing to voter self-interest through a mix of logic and emotion. The candidate’s responsibility is to explain so clearly and convincingly what he or she offers that voters get motivated to cast votes for that candidate over the opponent.

Every action taken by a campaign comes at a cost, so smart ones avoid spending time and money unless the expense supports the goal: To win at least 50 percent plus one vote, assuming a two-person race. Therefore, the book’s continual focus is on what actions benefit you, the candidate, on Election Day.

Its message is to view your campaign as a start-up business, one with a short time horizon. Essential is an appealing message that mobilizes a majority to vote for you. Crucial also is a campaign plan, similar to a business plan, which keeps you and your campaign on track from start to finish. With it tactical decisions about actions and expenses, especially those made under pressure, come easier because the plan supports them.

As you read *Down-Ballot Winner*, think of how to apply what you learn to best advantage. Successful campaigns address these three objectives: To craft a winning message; to nudge people to contribute time and/or money; to deploy volunteers and finances such that voters are motivated to vote for you.

You also learn to trade subjective emotion for objective, clear-eyed realism so that you stay focused on your goal: winning at least 50 percent plus one vote on Election Day. The *Down-Ballot Winner* message is directed to anyone considering a run for a down-ballot, local district office like city or county council, state legislature, school or special-purpose district, or judicial office where winning is possible on a small budget. Races where volunteers run the campaign and you, the candidate, are chief fund raiser. But when your prospective race calls for more financial resources and paid staff, full or part-time, *Down-Ballot Winner* benefits you too.

From assessing pros and cons of a candidacy, preparing for your campaign, executing it, to winding it down after Election Day, *Down-Ballot Winner* covers it. And you learn what to expect and do beyond Election Day as you prepare to be sworn into office if you win. *Down-Ballot Winner* guides you every step of the way. With it you know where to devote valuable time and money for maximum return on Election Day.

Luck happens when preparation meets opportunity. With *Down-Ballot Winner*, you have everything you need to transform yourself into an effective, self-confident candidate, one who meets opportunity prepared.

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ATTRACTING ENDORSEMENTS

Whether individuals or groups bestow them, endorsements serve as mental shortcuts for voters who align with an endorser, and that can mean votes for you. Endorsements sway many voters. In short, endorsements have good value. So the more you receive, the better, and the earlier the better.

For authenticity, endorsers should list their reasons for endorsing along with their names, titles (individuals) or organization names (groups). With strong endorsements from citizens, civic leaders, elected office holders, and the local weekly newspaper, you enjoy third-party credibility to use as you see fit. Mention them wherever and whenever you believe they will do you the most good.

But use endorsements from controversial individuals or organizations with care even if balanced with those from opposing sides. Voters who know little or nothing about you and dislike an endorsing individual or group may decide to support your opponent just because they fail to understand why both sides endorse you. Endorsements never win elections, but their value is still evidenced whenever candidates without them advertise that they are, “Endorsed by the People,” to disguise their lack of community support.

Individuals

Start by asking those you know to endorse you. Go after low hanging fruit: friends; family; colleagues; fellow members of organizations and clubs. Those who agree are more inclined to promote your candidacy to others. And get to them before they commit to another candidate. Prepare a stimulating, concise summary in advance which addresses your reasons for running, your positions on issues important to those you know, and your benefit to the community once in office.

The endorsement below was offered to the author by a businessman from a nearby city, someone who did business in the City of Bothell but was unknown there. He permitted it to be used as an attention getter on the cover of the author’s direct-mail piece:

“We are cheering for you! Your strategy and organization reflect well on your deliberate and direct approach, one that benefits all of Bothell”

Bob Betts, President, Robert S. Betts, Inc., Consulting Land-use Planners, Bellevue, Washington

Printed on the permission form endorsers sign or email is a thank you for their support. Stated also is that by completing and returning the form, they permit their names to be included in print and digital promotions. So offer a page on your Website entitled, “Endorse or Support,” and make it easy to locate and navigate.

Aim to get as many citizens to endorse you as soon as possible. Focus on neighborhood opinion leaders and current/past board members of neighborhood homeowners associations, and neighbors who are, or were, active in the community.

Make it a goal to get at least one person from each neighborhood or precinct to sign your endorsement sheet. Ask as many as you can so that if you run a print ad, you have an impressive list of names to brandish. Get quotations from them and use them in a local flyer, or offer to write one for the person and confirm it before using it in any promotional materials.

As part of your Get-out-the-Vote (GOTV) effort, produce and distribute neighborhood-specific handouts or flyers listing names of those who endorse you. Familiar names from the neighborhood should lead the list. Not everyone will recognize every name, but most everyone will recognize at least one, and that counts in your favor because voters often are swayed by who their neighbors support. This is especially the case in local, down-ballot races where low-budget campaigns can find it difficult to get their messages to voters.

If an endorser has a bad reputation in a particular neighborhood, you can exclude that name from your targeted GOTV flyer, but include it in general newspaper ads listing everyone who endorses you. Endorsements at this level carry little or no political baggage. But some in return for their endorsement may expect you to support them for an appointment to a board or commission once you take office. If that happens tell the person that you will consider it but make no promises now or for when in office.

Elected and Appointed Office Holders

Next are current and past-elected office holders. Current office holders do not endorse unless they know the candidate or believe their support benefits him, her, or the community at large. Past elected officials tend to endorse when they believe in the candidate and share similar philosophies. To win endorsements from either, show that you are capable, professional, and will respect the office if elected.

Cultivate current and past members of boards and commissions as well. They lend their support when they believe that what you advocate benefits the community. When you meet with them, highlight how your beliefs coincide with their past or present views.

Make a list of people to target. Then educate yourself on important issues facing the district to learn who is liberal, conservative, pro-environment, or pro development. Save time and improve chances of receiving endorsements by trimming the list to the best prospects.

For each verbal commitment, ask the person to sign an endorsement form or ask him or her to respond to your confirming email. Ask also for a testimonial explaining the reasons behind the endorsement. Better yet, compose a draft yourself stressing your key issues or positions you want mentioned. Then send or email the suggested text to the person, ask permission to use it, and note the office held. Whenever you provide the text for a potential endorser, you make follow through on your request easier.

In a re-election bid, the author received these endorsements. Note the concise, positive language and specific reasons for supporting the candidate:

“Mike Noblet is always a strong advocate for Bothell. And the part he played in the Brightwater project [a regional sewage treatment plant] was an essential factor in my decision to not locate it in Bothell. Mike is a true public servant, one who merits re-election on November 6th.”

Ron Sims, former King County Executive

“I am pleased to endorse Mike Noblet for re-election. He’s a consistently credible and fair advocate for Bothell’s interests. It was he who identified the need for a connector road between York Road and 39th Avenue to solve cut-through traffic in Canyon Firs. Due to his leadership, that project will be completed a full year earlier than it would have otherwise.”

Bob Drewel, former Snohomish County Executive

“Mike Noblet has performed well in his office and deserves re-election on November 6th. His active interest in all community activities reflects his concern for his city. He has worked hard toward Bothell’s betterment, and I am pleased to endorse him. Mike Noblet can be counted on to continue to work hard for Bothell and community at large.”

Royal Donaldson, former Bothell Mayor

Local Political Parties

If yours is a party primary race, make securing the endorsement of your local political party top priority. Parties endorse candidates with proven track records in past organizing and supporting of candidates or activities which share belief in the party’s positions.

Come prepared for endorsing meetings by showing up with a strong position statement outlining why you are running, your platform, an overview of your work on behalf of the party, and other reasons why the party should endorse you. Demonstrate by your attire, presentation, and confidence that you are worthy of their endorsement. Show party and community support by making sure that party opinion leaders who back you also attend.

Party endorsements are often granted early in an election year and can come with financial contributions and sometimes even volunteers. A party endorsement can pay dividends all the way to Election Day, so do what you can to win one or more.

This goes for candidates running in local, non-partisan races, for sometimes local parties endorse them as well. If this fits your situation, learn if a party is endorsing in your race and then go after it. If, however, you are running where all offices are nonpartisan and no party endorsements are on tap, reach out to precinct committee officers (PCOs) of both parties. Collect as many PCO endorsements as you can to demonstrate wide community support for you and your campaign.

Civic and Neighborhood Groups

Civic groups run the gamut: neighborhood homeowners associations; city oriented environmental groups; good government associations. Early in your campaign decide which groups to target for endorsements and set a strategy for each.

Research what concerns them. Talk with their allied opinion leaders to learn the group's hot-button issues. If you prepared before your election year, you now may enjoy a track record that puts you in a position to be endorsed by your target civic groups.

It is easy to come up with a position statement that supports a particular group, but not so if yours differs. For example, a neighborhood group wants cameras on traffic lights to discourage cut-through commuter traffic, a position you do not support. Your responses might be:

"I oppose cameras on traffic lights, but I promise to keep an open mind as I assess what might be best for our community."

"But I do believe that cut-through traffic can be decreased by posting signs which identify the area for local traffic only. If that step doesn't work, I will advocate for adding traffic circles and narrowing streets at certain intersections."

Civic and Issue-Driven Groups

Make a point of targeting civil rights organizations, environmental, ethnic, and issue-driven groups for their endorsements, and expect formal screenings. Know that before you can win an endorsement, you must address possible concerns or objections they have regarding you and your candidacy. They want to know if their interests will be well served with you in office.

For example, if running as a green candidate, you should align yourself with local or regional environmental groups. Depending on the makeup of your district, target organizations like the NAACP, La Raza, LGBT groups, or ethnic associations for possible endorsements. If you are running as a conservative, seek out anti-government groups like the local Tea Party and others with a similar viewpoint.

Before you decide whether to make contact, determine if their endorsement will help you on Election Day. If so, then learn the goals and concerns of such groups and take thoughtful positions on them. If you believe you have a chance to be endorsed, find out when interviews take place and come prepared with well-reasoned, convincing answers to all anticipated questions.

Good Government Groups

Become familiar with so called good government groups who rate candidates. City municipal leagues are examples. Though not formal endorsements, they can bestow significant credibility on a candidate, so strive for a rating of "Outstanding" or "Very Good."

Prepare just as you would for a newspaper endorsement by contacting candidates from past elections to learn how their interviews went and what types of questions were asked.

Learn the ground rules for the group well ahead of time, rules like are questions provided beforehand, and is each candidate interviewed alone or with his or her opponent(s).

Because municipal league endorsements often come later in the campaign cycle, you can advertise your rating with stickers affixed to your yard signs. Include the rating also in any GOTV flyer or last-minute mailing as well as on your Website.

Unions

Candidates for local municipal, county, or school district offices are also smart to win endorsements from labor organizations representing employees in their district. Major focuses are police and firefighters unions whose endorsements often come with financial contributions and volunteers ready to assemble and plant yard signs and knock on doors to get out the vote.

Pursue endorsements from bargaining groups also like those representing general employees. Candidates for school district offices should seek endorsements from teachers, clerical and custodial unions. Those running for state legislature, especially Democratic candidates, should seek union endorsements.

Before interviewing for an endorsement, decide which commitments to make. By staying current on local issues affecting public employees, you demonstrate logical thought when interviewed. Certain unions provide questions in advance, so take advantage of it. Then you can arrive having researched and drafted your responses. As with most groups or businesses who endorse candidates, unions look for a philosophy favorable to interests of their memberships.

As positive as union endorsements are for some candidates, evaluate first if you want them considering your district, your candidacy, if partisan, or other influences which could cast labor endorsements in a negative light.

Development and Business

Just as with civic groups, you should also target certain development or business groups for possible endorsements if you feel they will help your candidacy. When it comes to local municipal, county, and, legislative races, groups focused on development endorse candidates who they see as supporting increased land development and opposing environmental controls. So contact builders associations, chambers of commerce, and the like for endorsements. Ask recent past candidates for their opinions on what the groups favor. Then find out what the groups look for in candidates they endorse. Take what you learn and prepare for interviews with development and business groups as you do for other civic groups.

Local Weekly Newspapers

Include your area's weekly newspaper on your endorsement target list. Editors and editorial boards look for candidates who shine when it comes to displaying a clear understanding of local issues and knowing how to tackle them. Again, prepare ahead of time for meeting with editors or editorial boards.

In a race where one candidate's civic experience provides an edge, the choice to endorse is easy: A first-time candidate, for example, a woman with a proven record of having served on the planning commission. She presents well at the editorial board meeting and demonstrates how she will benefit the community once in office. That and the fact that she enjoys wide community support play to her favor.

On the other hand, single-issue candidates tend not to impress editorial boards for the simple reason that they are not often conversant on local issues. Newspaper endorsements of candidates running in local cities, counties, or for school boards most often go to the well-versed ones.

Though endorsements from local weeklies come late in the campaign cycle, you can promote yours in a final GOTV flyer or last-minute mailing as well as on your Website and via social media.

Concluding Thoughts

By themselves, endorsements never win an election, but they do add a winning aura to a candidacy. Endorsements lend credibility. Neighborhood endorsements influence locally; civic ones influence district wide. Union and development endorsements often come with volunteers and financial contributions. But it is newspaper endorsements that carry the most wide-ranging credibility, so use yours to best advantage. In short, whether endorsements come from large groups or small, all are vital to your campaign!