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## **The Strategy Report**

A monthly email newsletter for Republican Elected Officials, party leaders and party activists who want to see the Idaho GOP continue to succeed in Idaho. Focused on campaigns and elections with a goal of improving the quality of Republican campaigns and making Idaho the reddest of the red states.

## Campaign Strategy (Campaign Q & A)



In the future we hope people will email us their questions about campaigning but for now we're going to answer questions we get asked frequently.

### **Q: Should I self fund my campaign?**

**A:** Should you? No. Will you have to sometimes, to some degree? Yes. We are often asked this one by successful business people who can afford to self fund if we were to tell them it is a good idea. We always tell them no because the process of raising money gets you votes. If you call everybody on your fully realized Christmas Card List (see This Month in Strategy for more information on Christmas Card Lists) and ask them for a donation of money, time and a place to put campaign signs a lot of them will do one or more of the things you've asked them to do. If they do, they are not only almost guaranteed to vote for you (provided they live in the appropriate jurisdiction) but is also extremely likely they will encourage other people to do so as well. Even if they are not able to donate time or money and don't have a suitable place for a campaign sign they are still much more likely to vote for you than if you had not called them and they will probably also still encourage other people to support you. The people you call become your grass roots support and that is much more valuable than just having money.

Of course, if your campaign plan calls for a certain amount of money to do a certain set of things and you don't raise that much then you should definitely loan the rest of the money to your campaign. It should be a last resort, not a way to avoid having to ask people to donate to your campaign.

### **Q: Should I do a billboard?**

**A:** This question itself is a problem with many campaigns. As a campaign tactic a billboard may be helpful but randomly deciding which tactic to use without knowing who you are targeting for your message is a mistake. The question should be "Are the voters I am targeting more likely to vote for me if I advertise on a billboard?" The determination must be based on:

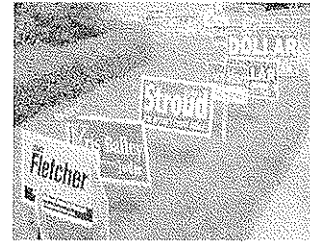
1. How many of my target voters will actually see the billboard?
2. How much will seeing my billboard increase a voter's likelihood to vote for me?
3. Is the billboard's impact on my target voters worth the expense or will another tactic be more effective?

Every tactic you use in the campaign must be judged by impact for dollar spent. A campaign plan must specifically identify your target voters, address tactics to reach each target voter, and judge the efficiency of each tactic in light of limited resources.

Should you do a billboard? What does your campaign plan say?

To submit a question please email us by clicking [Here](#).

## Non-Partisan Strategy (Focus on Non-Partisan Races)



Our plan for this feature is to offer specific guidance on what Republicans should be doing all around the state of Idaho to ensure the success of Republicans in non-partisan races. Since this is our first issue we wanted to start by explaining why we think it is so crucial to get the Republican Party involved in non-partisan races. Why are non-partisan races so important?

There are three main reasons: The work these taxing districts do, their impact as a political training ground for higher office and the fact that the Democrats are aware that they cannot compete on an equal footing in partisan races in the majority of Idaho so they are pursuing a plan of seriously contesting non-partisan races.

We'll deal with the last point first. This plan has been very successful. In Kootenai County the Democrats hold no elected partisan office. All of the county elected officials and state legislators are Republicans. The Democrats have had majorities on many of the boards on the over 50 taxing districts in Kootenai County. In some cases they have held every seat. All because the Republican Party in the county focused, quite effectively, on the partisan races. The Democrats focused on the non-partisan and quietly won victory after victory.

While these positions seem small the amount of money they deal with each year is not. The school districts in Kootenai County have a combined annual budget of almost two hundred million dollars. That's just three of the more than fifty taxing districts. The city budgets total over another hundred and fifty million per year. All told the taxing districts in just one county, albeit our third largest, totals over five hundred million annually.

The minority party in any state has an obvious strategy to follow: get people elected to small, non-partisan offices and move them up the ladder until they can run for a larger, partisan office. Experienced people who've made lots of connections stand a chance of winning based on their records. It is much easier, and much less expensive, to defeat someone running for school board or even city council the first time than it is to face an experienced local official who people are used to voting for.

It is very easy for the majority party, especially in a state like Idaho where the majority is so overwhelming, to forget that things change. Idaho used to be a reliably Democrat state. If we don't want it to be a blue state again we cannot neglect the non-partisan races.

## **This Month in Strategy (What Republican Elected Officials and Party Leaders Should be Doing This Month)**



One of the things every Republican Elected Official and Party Leader should be doing is building relationships with voters. The voters should never be introduced to a candidate or Party Leader when you want something from them such as their vote or donation or time. They should already not just know you but have a relationship with you before you ask them for anything.

If these voters are also volunteers or donors then it is even more important that you build a relationship with each and every one. An important way to do this is to work on your Christmas Card List and there's no better time than right after the holidays when it's fresh in your mind and you should still have the actual Christmas Cards you received this year.

The concept of the Christmas Card List as relates to politics goes far beyond what most people outside of politics do. They send cards to a certain number of family members and close friends and also usually reciprocate by sending cards to the people who send them cards. For people in the political arena we recommend much more. Your Christmas Card List should start with what is mentioned above but needs to expand to everyone you know well enough to ask them to donate time, treasure or a spot for yard signs.

That means all of the family members you can think of, everyone you were friends with in high school or college, everybody in your email contacts, everyone in your phone contacts, everyone you interact with on social media such as LinkedIn or Facebook. People you socialize with, your customers, your vendors, the parents of your children's friends. If you spend money at a business then you should add them to the list. Your friends from church. The people you play any sport with. The members of every club you belong to.

As you can imagine, your Christmas Card List should be very large. Over a thousand people.

There are many things to do with your Christmas Card List, and we'll be covering those in the Strategy Report every month (including in this month's Campaign Strategy feature). But right now you should be working on getting your Christmas Card List up to date and into some electronic format such as a spreadsheet. We'll worry about what to do with it later but as you can imagine it takes quite awhile to get it together and even when you think you are done you'll keep thinking of people to add to it every week.

## Strategy Analysis (A Look at One Recent Race)



### This Month: Students Come First

After each election, the Strategy Group invests time analyzing what our campaigns did right and what they did wrong. We review what strategies and tactics were most effective in bringing victory for our clients. We also analyze other campaigns to pick up successful innovations to emulate or practices of which to steer clear. The major statewide campaign in Idaho for 2012 was the Student Comes First Referenda. Here are a few thoughts on why the reforms failed.

**Organization** - The seeds of the defeat for Students Come First were planted in 2010 when the Idaho Legislature passed the reforms. The obvious opposition was the Idaho Education Association and in the midst of the debate over the bills, the IEA and allies in labor mounted loud public opposition to the actually modest reforms. Proponents muscled through the bills relying on wide Republican majorities but failed to match the astro-turfed public relations efforts of the IEA. There seemed to be lack of any strategic plan to persuade the public as to the efficacy of the program. This gave the IEA, as an on-going political organization, the opportunity to mount the public relations offensive that generated the signatures for the referenda while the proponents seemed to do nothing to promote public support until campaign season over a year later. Starting early in 2011 alone the National Education Association, through its Idahoans for Responsible Education Reform, pumped almost \$400,000 into the state, laying the groundwork early for the campaign. In contrast, public disclosure reports show SCF proponents did not initiate operations until mid 2012, far too late to organize a strong ground game.

**Grassroots** - One of the characteristic of the pro-SCF campaign was a lack of almost any grassroots efforts. While the IEA created grassroots front organizations to demonstrate opposition in various constituencies and then campaigned, complimenting mass media with grassroots tactics (door to door, phone banking, social media), the pro-reform campaign did little grassroots organizing. Little was done to organize and utilize the thousands of rank and file Republican and conservative activists and campaign volunteers in Idaho. They relied almost exclusively on mass media advertising (broadcast, newspaper and direct mail) which, in itself, does little to develop a relationship with the voters.

**Identity** - If you run for statewide office in Idaho, an R behind your name almost assures victory. If referenda in Idaho could be tagged on the ballot by their partisan origin, SCF would have won. The fact this was a Republican reform in a prohibitively Republican state should have made this a no-brainer. Yet the campaign for SCF seemed to purposely avoid tagging it as a "Republican Reform." Among the print and broadcast ads we reviewed for our analysis, the only time we found a statewide ad even mentioning "Republican" was in a "paid for disclaimer" by the Idaho Federation of Republican Women. In fact the opposition was actually better in direct mail at identifying Republican opponents than the SCF campaign was at demonstrating Republican support. When low information voters went to the polls to vote against Barack Obama it was not obvious to them that also voting for SCF would achieve the same objective.

**Face of the Campaign** - When a candidate runs for public office the campaign is branded by the candidate's name and face. Voters require a human connection in politics. Referenda are more difficult since there is not a candidate for the voters to identify with. The IEA and their national consultants from the NEA knew this and highlighted the image of a young concerned mother in their campaign ads and material. She was the face of the opposition. The SCF campaign had no

consistent face to personalize the campaign - no person to vote for. They lacked a unified campaign narrative on who would be helped by SCF and hurt if it failed. The practically exclusive message attacking the unions failed because there was no specific image on who was endangered by the union efforts.

Our analysis of the campaign shows the success and failure of utilizing resources and opportunities. Proponents of SCF started too late, did not have an effective strategic plan, and left on the table their two greatest resources: touting a Republican reform in a dark red state and an army of grassroots conservative activists with no other statewide races for which to volunteer. Opponents in contrast started strong and early and brought to bear substantial resources.

## Big Picture Strategy

In 2012 Republicans took serious losses in what should have been a banner year for Republican pickups, considering the economy, the budget situation and the foreign policy mishaps of the Democrat administration. Failure to take the Presidency, loss of two seats in the Senate, fewer Governors and a drop off in the House showed the 2012 Republican strategy obviously did not work as planned. On our state level too, Republicans lost some key legislative seats and failed to defend the Republican education reform legislation from repeal by the Democrats and the teachers union.



In reviewing the results, strategy and tactics, we at the Strategy Group have concluded that Republicans have a "relationship problem" with the voters. The two-way connection with voters has broken down and the strategies and tactics relied upon for over a decade only exacerbate the problem.

Since the 2000 election, the Republican National Committee and the Republican apparatus has focused on an overall strategy based on technical production - force feeding information to votes through mass media advertising (TV and radio) "robocalls" and high-scripted mass phone banking, mass direct mail and then driving them like cattle to the polls. It is one-way non-interactive campaigning. It has not worked. In fact we saw voter turnout nose dive in the 2012 election, suppressed by negative ads and voter disconnection.

Republicans have failed to develop a "relationship" with the voters, turning from the interactive communication so masterfully practiced by Ronald Reagan. In contrast Obama's Democrat machine has taken the "relationship" at the center of the old urban political machines and refined it with social media and community organizing. They develop relationships with voters by identity politics, not only racial and class but also by sexual and victimhood status. They have created crises, designated perpetrators and developed relationships based on common cause against them. They have stage managed a "seductive" relationship with women and youth with orchestrated psychology-based tactics and rock concert conditioning techniques.

In contrast Republicans have failed to develop strong relationships with the voters, failing to engage in that give and take that enhances knowledge, acceptance and trust. Relationships with voters is

the great antidote to the plagues that sapped Republican victories in 2012: candidate gaffes, negative advertising and a hostile media. When a candidate and supporters have relationships with voters, they are given the benefit of the doubt, something not afforded strangers. And voters with relationships with candidates and their supporters consistently turn out to vote.

So how do we develop relationships with voters? The same way we develop any relationship: intentional "mindfulness" that enhances the closeness of the relationship. We must seek to understand the wants and needs of our voters, not by mere polls by engaging in the community: listening, engaging, questioning. There is a lot to be said about "community organizing" techniques.

We also must engage voters on a personal level. The greatest campaign tactic invented is knocking on doors, especially for local and legislative campaigns. Replace robocalls with real phone calls. Town Halls should be more about asking voters questions than telling them how great we are. And engagement should not begin on Labor Day and end on Election Day. Take a page from the old ward bosses, - for politicians and activists voter relationship requires year round attention.

In the end it comes down to this: affinity. Why would the voters like you if they do not know you like them? Relationships require honor, respect and equality and our voters deserve no less. Ongoing relationships with our voters, our citizens, not only make us better candidates and activists, but make us better at governing once we are elected.

## The Strategy Group "think outside the box"

As one of the Northwest's premier political consulting firms, we are committed to electing Republicans and conservatives at the local, state and national level. If we can assist in making your campaign victorious, we want to help.

Since our founding in 2011, we have racked up one of the most successful win-loss records of any general political consulting firm in the country. The Strategy Group has had 29 clients in four elections cycles (May & November 2011 and 2012) with a record of 24 wins and 5 losses (or an 83% victory rate).

About a third of TSG clients have been incumbents with active challengers and all (100%) have won of their races. Considering the fact that less than one in ten challengers beat incumbents, our 58% rate of victory for the fourth of our clients who were challengers to incumbent officeholders is nothing short of remarkable.

Whether you are an incumbent, a challenger, or seeking an open seat, we at the Strategy Group would like the opportunity help you to victory.

For campaign consulting - campaign branding - campaign materials (yard signs, rack cards & mail pieces) please call us at 208-773-3743 or email us at **Ron Lahr** or **Jeff Ward**

From the smallest campaign to the largest we want to help you get elected!