Campaigning 101: The 7 Essentials to Every Campaign Plan

VRL Board President and Co-Founder Shannon Garrett walks through each step of building a strong campaign plan, covering the important bases of how to use your resources in the most strategic and successful way possible. She emphasizes the importance of strategic, measurable, ambitious, realistic, and time-bound goals, as well as maintaining a balance between your campaign and your personal life.

1. **Lay of the Land:** Look at your district’s numbers for registered voters, party ID, and previous turnout. Know the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for both you and your opponent. Understand the political and cultural layout of your constituents, important dates and events in the community, and who the power brokers and influencers of the area are.

2. **Strategies:** Know how you’re going to target your audience. Your goal is to get 51% of the votes cast, not to stress about trying to get *every single* person to vote for you. Use your resources wisely to reach that goal, and spend most of your time and energy persuading those who always vote but are undecided on who to support.

3. **Tactics:** Voter contact is the backbone of every campaign. Decide how many voters to contact, who will be doing the contacting, within what timeframe, and what tactic to use. In-person contact is the most effective tactic, but also the most time-consuming. Set weekly and monthly goals, prioritize GOTV, and track everything.

4. **Message:** Make sure that the voters know who you are and why they should vote for you. Your message can be delivered verbally through a stump speech, door/phone rap, or elevator pitch, or written on a palm card, direct mail, or social media. Make sure your message remains constant, compelling, clear, and credible.

5. **Money:** Campaign budgeting is all about what you need to spend to win, not what you think you can raise. Establish a cadillac, pinto, and a minivan plan—what you will do with extra money, the bare minimum, and your most realistic plan, respectively. Remember, 75-80% of your money should be spent on direct voter contact.

6. **Campaign Team:** You can’t do it alone. Fill the roles you need to by calling on people you already know from your daily life. Find a campaign manager, fundraiser/treasurer, PR/communications manager, and a volunteer coordinator through the interests and talents of your peers.

7. **Time Management:** Always work backwards from election day, scheduling in goals, dates, and benchmarks for fundraising, voter contact, earned media, as well as local events, holidays, and personal dates. Know your timeline, execute it, track it, and don’t forget to celebrate at the end of the election!

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