

# Tuesday Associates

*Specializing in grassroots campaigning, direct mail, and fundraising.*

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## HOW TO START A WINNING CAMPAIGN

The first steps you take as a candidate are crucial. The voters, press, party officials, volunteers, and donors will closely judge your initial candidacy. You will want to present a strong campaign that will build momentum for a November victory. The following is a list of suggested steps for any candidate to take to implement their campaign.

### Step 1

#### **Make the decision to run.**

With a rational head consider all the possibilities and ramifications of your running. Here are a few questions to consider: Can you win? Can you raise enough money? Is this the year? Is the incumbent vulnerable?

Time is one of the most valuable resources in a campaign. Don't waste too much time with your decision. Make a firm decision to either get in or out. Candidates that wait too long to enter a race can often jeopardize valuable early support. However, making the final decision to run does not mean you have to announce immediately. It only means you need to get organized.

### Step 2

#### **Tell your family.**

If your family is not on board, you will never win. The impact of a campaign can be devastating on family life both financially and emotionally. They should be prepared for what is about to happen which will be at minimum the invasion of their privacy. On the other hand, often family members are a great source of volunteer help.

### Step 3

#### **Update your resume and biography.**

Much of a campaign's written material includes personal and professional data from the candidate's background. Therefore the candidate should outline his/her biography and update the resume. It will make designing commercials, mail pieces, press packages, and other campaign literature much easier.

Your biography and resume should be accurate because the press will certainly review every detail. More importantly, exaggerating on one's background can be a costly mistake.

### Step 4

#### **Decide why you are running.**

What is your rationale for seeking the office? Does it make sense? Can you make a difference? How can you interest people in your campaign? These are some of the questions you should consider.

Ted Kennedy's campaign for President never got off the ground, because he failed to articulate why he was running. Know your reasons for running.

**Step 5 Clear your desk at work.**

When you run for office, your mind is no longer devoted to either your job or your business. Make sure you can afford the time. If you leave important business matters hanging, they will certainly get lost in the shuffle.

For candidates that are not self-employed, you should warn your employer. Hopefully, they will be supportive and even become major donors.

**Step 6 Comply with campaign and finance laws.**

Missing a filing deadline can be not only embarrassing but also illegal. When can lawn signs be put up? Do you need to collect signatures? Is an ethics report required? When can you raise money? When are signatures due? Not meeting all of the legal requirements can end a campaign before it has started. Become an expert or at least have an accountant and lawyer willing to assist you. It is your reputation on the line.

**Step 7 Raise seed money.**

Now that you know the rules you can start asking for donations. Funds are always important. No campaign can get off the ground without the seed money to buy letterhead, signs, and bumperstickers, rent office space, conduct a poll, etc.

You will be able to "test the waters" by raising these initial funds. The best way to raise the first dollars is to make direct solicitation calls to your friends, family, and business associates. Don't count on PAC money in the early stages. It comes much later in the campaign.

The amount you will need will depend on the size of your race. For example, for the first reporting period a Congressional candidate should raise at least 6-figures to be competitive when an overall budget is expected to be over \$1 million.

**Step 8 Hire professional consultants.**

The best way to win is to hire someone that knows how to campaign and knows how to win. Why reinvent the wheel? There are many so-called

consultants out there. Never hire a consultant that has not managed several campaigns from beginning to end.

Depending on the size of your race, you may want to hire more than one consultant. For federal and statewide races, a fund raising, media, polling, and general consultant will be needed. Other races may need a general consultant that can handle multiple tasks.

**Step 10      Conduct a Benchmark poll (For larger races).**

This is very necessary step. How will you be able to tell if you are moving in the polls, if you don't have a baseline? More importantly, you can see if there is a way to win. A poll can tell you many different things such as the biggest liability for your opponent, which issues are hot, your potential negatives, and what voters you may be able to swing into your camp.

**Step 11      Learn your district.**

Even if you have lived your entire life in your district there is always more to learn. Not knowing could cost you valuable credibility and potential votes. For example, you should know the names of local officials, all the towns in the district, who are the big employers, etc.

**Step 13      Study the issues.**

What are the priorities of your community? What do people talk about? Unless you are an incumbent, you are probably not a whiz kid at all the issues. Most of the time incumbents have a significant advantage on knowledge. One of the best ways to bone up is to read all of your local newspapers on a daily basis. Many political organizations publish issue briefs that can help.

Once you have learned the issues, take the time to practice potential press questions. You don't want to get caught off-guard. A lack of knowledge can cost you credibility with the press and voters.

**Step 14      Do voter history analysis.**

Previous voting patterns are essential data for drafting a campaign plan. Does district vote Republican or Democrat? What is the swing vote? What areas have the strongest turnout? From this data you can determine where to spend time and money.

**Step 15      Organize your Brain Trust.**

Don't operate in a vacuum. You need a sounding board for your ideas and to troubleshoot potential problems. This group will help keep you grounded and allow you to discuss options frankly. They also tend to hear the "whisper" campaign. Schedule regular meetings to update them on your progress.

**Step 16 Hire the Right Manager.**

Every campaign needs a manager. A candidate that manages his or her own campaign will certainly lose. There are two main responsibilities for a candidate; meeting voters and asking for money. The manager handles almost everything else.

Choose someone that has lots of energy, able to organize, is determined, and has experience. This person needs to get along with volunteers and your consultant team.

**Step 17 Write a campaign plan.**

With your professional team develop a plan starting with Election Day and planning backwards. Make sure to include key components of a budget, fund raising plan, organizational chart, earned media strategy, and implementation timeline. Set goals that are realistic.

**Step 18 Set up an office.**

Successful campaigns have their offices outside of the candidate's home. Although a home office will save money, it will cost you in mental stability.

An office no longer has to be a storefront. Any space with good parking, in a secure area, and has lots of room at the right price will do. Within the office the candidate should have a private office to dial for dollars.

**Step 19 Have a message.**

Developing a message is one of your most important tasks. Every campaign needs a rationale, a compelling reason why voters should vote your way. That's your message – and it's largely based on personal and issue distinctions between yourself and your opponent. Your message will frame the central choice you present to voters.

Your professional consultant team and staff will play a vital role in creating your campaign message.

**Step 20 Smile for the camera.**

A picture is worth a thousand words. Photographs will visually reinforce your message, therefore, it is important that you use a professional with campaign experience. You will need at least one black and white head shot for your press packages and you should also have some photos of your family and action shots of you meeting voters.

**Step 21 Create a web site.**

Nowadays campaigns for higher office are not real until they have a state of the art web site. You can usually get some computer junky willing to

design and create it for you just for recognition. Make sure it includes a bio, a press release section, a method for volunteering and donating, and that it also looks like your campaign logo.

It should be updated as the campaign progresses.

**Step 22**

**Prepare for announcement.**

Your formal announcement will be one of the first impressions voters receive. Therefore, every detail should be well planned. Remember that good events take at least 6 weeks to organize. You may want to announce in several different locations or you may want to do one big event. Be mindful of press deadlines.

Announce on your timetable not the media's. Many times the press will try to force an announcement before you are ready. This is the only time you are guaranteed good "earned media" coverage. Don't waste it.

**Step 23**

**Write your stump speech.**

Obviously you will be asked to speak at various event and to numerous groups. A good stump speech highlighting your message and your key issues is necessary. The speech should be about 5 to 7 minutes at the longest. Formal written speeches are reserved for presidential candidates. Furthermore, don't forget to specifically ask for the ir vote in the speech.

**Step 24**

**Make it official.**

Announce your candidacy as planned and with lots of enthusiasm.

**Step 25**

**Follow your plan.**

My last bit of advice is to stay on track now that you have all pieces in place. If you keep the momentum building victory will be yours in November. Your plan may need to be adjusted due to unforeseen circumstances, but try to remain on track.

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