

CHAPTER VII

MESSAGE, IMAGE AND PRESENTATION

The object of a campaign is to win. To achieve this goal, a candidate must convince a majority of voters to go to the polls and vote for her. All campaign communications should be designed to connect with voters and convince them to support your candidate. The goal is to deliver the right message at the right times through the right channels to the right audiences.

Two simple facts a campaign can never stress enough are 1) the candidate's name and 2) the office she is seeking. These should be the first two things the candidate says when she meets a potential voter or gives a speech ("Hi, I'm Carla Candidate and I'm running for Governor"). The candidate's name should stand out prominently and be mentioned often in all campaign materials.

Name recognition is an important factor in a winning campaign, but it's also important to have a message that makes a connection between the candidate and the voter. Each campaign should develop a consistent and credible message. That message should be the common thread that unifies all the campaign's activities.

MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

The candidate needs to relate to people on an emotional as well as intellectual level. She must convince voters she cares about the same things voters care about and that she's qualified to make a difference.

A winning message stresses those areas where there is the most overlap between the candidate's priority concerns and those of the electorate. Use research and polling information to establish which of the candidate's goals best match the voters' concerns. If you're involved in a low-budget race and your campaign can't

afford a public opinion poll, check to see if independent polls have been done by newspapers

**People vote FOR candidates
they trust and AGAINST
candidates who stand for an
issue or way of life they reject.**

or special interest groups, or take time to talk with voters in different parts of the district to ask them what's on their minds.

The next step in this research is to determine the three to five points that your candidate can make that will appeal most to the voters your campaign is targeting. Focus on the key reasons to vote for your candidate or against an opponent.

Your campaign's message should distinguish your candidate from her opponent (e.g. I'm pro-business, and he's for higher taxes). It should project the candidate's convictions and demonstrate her deep commitment to the community. In other words, the message should show that your candidate has the right reasons to run.

Voters have their own agenda, which seldom matches up exactly with a candidate's agenda. For example, a pro-choice woman who is challenging an incumbent U.S. Congressman who voted against the Freedom of Choice Act should determine where her voters stand on abortion before she focuses on reproductive choice as one of the reasons she is running.

The message should be designed to persuade and motivate more than 50 percent of the vote to support your candidate. While the message can be related to a key public policy issue such as the economy or crime, the candidate should focus on the kind of leadership she would provide and not get mired in the details of pending bills. Most candidates don't have enough time or other resources to educate voters on the complexities of each issue.

A campaign shouldn't be afraid to take on a tough issue if it will help your candidate attract undecided voters. Don't be overly intimidated by any special interest that does not represent a majority of voters in your district. For example, for years candidates stayed away from the issue of reproductive freedoms because the anti-choice movement was so vocal and well-organized. Now that the pro-choice majority is more visible, more candidates are openly running as pro-choice and winning.

To define the message, campaign planners should write a half-page message statement that connects the candidates to the voters, reflects the shared concerns of the candidate and the voters, and distinguishes the candidate from her opponent.

Once your campaign has developed a message, test it. If the budget allows, use focus groups or polling to test its effectiveness. If the budget does not allow formal research, run the message by a few of your friends and relatives to get their opinion and then expand the review process to include people who do not know the candidate.

Patty Murray's message in her winning 1992 Senate campaign had two components: a "liberal" message (choice, the environment and women's rights) for her core group (King County, labor and college-educated liberals) and a "voice of working families" message to reach other targeted voters (college-educated women in Eastern and Southwestern Washington), which the campaign called the expansion vote. The campaign showed Murray as the candidate who understands the economic concerns of working families and would make government work for the people. Her theme statement was: "Patty Murray ... the only choice for real change."

A candidate must repeat her message hundreds of times throughout the campaign. If the candidate, campaign staff or the media start getting sick of hearing the same message, she's approaching the frequency required for the message to reach voters.

As long as voters respond to your candidate's message, stick with it. The media and supporters may urge the candidate to speak on other topics, but the campaign's goal is to keep repeating a consistent message. Only if polling or voter response shows a message isn't connecting with voters should the campaign consider introducing a new theme. No changes should be made without a great deal of thought and sufficient time to develop the revised message.

1992 WINNING SLOGANS:

Rose Spector of the Texas Supreme Court: A Judge for Justice.

Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (D-CA): The Best Person for the Job.

Congresswoman Karan English (D-AZ): She Can Do It.

Congresswoman Jan Meyers (R-KS): Jan Can!

Washington Attorney General Christine Gregoire: Our Attorney General, we can get things done!

THE CAMPAIGN THEME

Your candidate's message and policy positions can take several paragraphs to explain, but most campaigns can condense them into a simple, one-sentence theme statement. The theme should be designed to connect with voters and be consistent with all aspects of the campaign.

The campaign theme is the synopsis of the campaign message. It sums up why your candidate is running for public office, the type of leadership she offers and why she is the best person for the job. Voters are concerned with issues of responsiveness, accessibility and relevancy, as well as by public policy concerns such as the economy or abortion. Instead of offering a broad range of issue positions, give voters a perception of how the candidate will deal with all kinds of issues.

This is one area where it is essential to use the "KISS" theory -- Keep It Simple, Stupid. Don't try to be too clever in searching for a catchy slogan. It's better to have a clear, concise phrase that everyone understands than some lofty literary reference with big words. Speak to voters on their level, not over their heads.

Incumbents like to use the word "re-elect" or "keep" in their theme statement. Challengers, on the other hand, often use the word "change." If your party has a clear edge in your district, the campaign may want to use the word "Democrat" or "Republican" in its slogan. The campaign may be able to get the message across without using any of these trigger words in its theme. In 1974, former New York Lt. Governor Mary Ann Krupsaks used a now-classic theme for women candidates: "She's not just one of the boys."

TWO EXAMPLES OF THEME DEVELOPMENT

EXAMPLE 1:

A Republican woman is running for the state Senate against an incumbent male Democrat with a credible record. Both candidates are similar in economic and educational background and they support similar tax policies and state budget policies. However, the incumbent is fundamentally inaccessible -- a basically private person. He seldom holds office hours, dislikes public campaigning and has not organized a mechanism for responding to constituents. The challenger, while never having held public office, has been active in a variety of community groups, including managing a citizens' information center on city government.

Here, the challenger's theme ought to be clear. She is more in touch with the people of the district and more likely to vote in tune with their interests. An aggressive campaign is called for, showing specific instances in which the incumbent did not respond to constituent requests and highlighting his difficulty in communicating information. The challenger should pledge that, if elected, she would have regular office hours and town meetings. She should be fully accessible during the campaign.

Since the question is one of access and response, the theme statement could be "Mary Jones will give you a straight answer" or "Mary Jones will work for *you*." Both statements speak to the incumbent's weakness, to the basic concerns of people about the political process, and to the challenger's strengths and campaign pledge.

EXAMPLE 2:

A feminist activist is challenging a woman incumbent who is opposed to abortion except in cases of rape and incest, has a poor record on economic issues and voted against a bill to extend unemployment benefits. The district is blue-collar, low-income, predominantly Catholic and has a high union membership.

The question in this case is whether a sufficient number of voters in the district care about women's issues. Although abortion will be a winning issue with certain groups of voters, the general message probably should focus on economic issues. By stressing organized labor's disenchantment with the incumbent, the challenger does not compromise on women's issues, but recognizes that economic security is more important to that constituency.

Since the question is one of economics and changing leadership, a possible theme statement would be, "We can do better" or "Vote Sue Smith: A Change for the Better."

STAYING ON MESSAGE

It's crucial that the candidate stay focused on her message and not confuse voters by sending mixed signals. Even though the theme may seem trite and overused to volunteers and the most sophisticated voters, it needs to be heard over and over to really sink into a voter's memory. Repeat the theme at every opportunity. It should be highlighted in brochures, in advertising, and in all campaign appearances.

A candidate should not waste time bashing an opponent or defending herself against an opponent unless that's determined to be part of the strategy. It's usually more effective for the candidate to stay on message and let others publicly criticize her opponent(s).

Many campaigns get bogged down preparing issue statements and policy papers that are never used. A volunteer or a staff person, often the press secretary, should write brief issue papers on a few key campaign issues that relate to the campaign's message, and prepare the candidate to respond to media questions on other issues. It's usually far more important to have a system in place for briefing the candidate on important issues as they come up than to have the campaign issue position papers that may inspire detailed questions and generate controversy if anyone chooses to critique them closely.

IMAGE

The candidate is the personification of the campaign's message, and her image and presentation should be credible to voters. How the candidate comes across can enhance or detract from her message. A candidate needs to present herself at all times as if she had already won the office she is seeking.

It's important for the campaign to see the candidate as others see her. Where does she fit among voters according to education level, background and income level? As Roger Ailes said in *You Are the Message*, "We make a quick assessment of other people within seven seconds of first meeting them. What sort of instant impression do you make on others?"

Each voter forms a favorable or unfavorable impression of the candidate that is not based on her verbal message, but on her visual and vocal presentation. Every aspect of the candidate's image should convey that she can be an effective representative for her constituents.

Early in a campaign, determine what minor changes a candidate might wish to make in her image and presentation. Although packaging is important in politics, keep in mind that the candidate must feel comfortable with her projected image.

Visual presentation: clothing and grooming

A candidate should feel good about the way she looks. Her hair, makeup and clothes should give her extra confidence and not distract from her message.

Keep in mind what John Molloy said in *Dress for Success*, "The way we dress has a

remarkable impact on the people we meet professionally or socially. It affects how they treat us. You act better when you are well-dressed." Your clothes make a visual statement, so it's important to dress to reflect the image you want to project. A candidate doesn't need to be polished, but she should look professional or "put together" at all times. She needs to feel comfortable in her clothes. She should avoid low-cut blouses which might expose too much skin or short skirts that ride up when she sits down.

Business attire is the standard uniform for most candidates since it's what most public officials wear to work. A candidate shouldn't step outside unless she feels confident of the way she's dressed, but she also should avoid wearing designer outfits that cost more than the average voter's monthly salary. Her appearance should be appropriate for the district and each event.

Male candidates seldom break away from the standard uniform of a navy suit and light blue shirt, while women candidates have a wide variety of clothing options. Wearing red or other bright colors can help a woman stand out from the crowd.

The candidate should find clothes which make her look and feel good and keep rotating them (you may want to check into a dry cleaning service). Some candidates ask fashion-wise friends to help them pull together a few outfits which are appropriate for television interviews and campaign appearances.

Pockets are helpful to store a candidate's notes or other materials and collect business cards. A purse or briefcase can get in the way; if a candidate needs one, she should keep it in the car or ask a staff person to carry it during events.

Many voters and reporters are more conscious of a female candidate's appearance than that of a male candidate, so a candidate should pay attention to little things that might not mesh with the image she wants to project. For instance, Geraldine Ferraro said photographers took shots of her slip showing when she lifted her arm to wave during a parade.

Always have an extra pair of nylons handy in case of runs. On a hot day, a candidate may want to take along an extra blouse as well. Some candidates prepare for the unexpected by leaving a spare set of clothes at campaign headquarters or in the car.

A candidate should be able to style her hair herself. She should stick to the same

TV CLOTHING TIPS

Watch your local television news to learn what clothes work and don't work on television. In general:

- Wear royal blue, maroon or other rich colors, but avoid black which absorbs light and white which is too bright (the television uniform for male politicians is light blue shirts, navy jackets and red ties).
- Avoid plaid, spots or other intricate patterns. Broad stripes are fine.
- Bring the focus to your face with a bright blouse under your jacket or a lighter scarf.
- Avoid shiny fabrics and large silver or gold jewelry that might reflect light.

A candidate should be able to style her own hair. She should stick to the same hairstyle throughout the campaign and schedule time for trims to make styling easier. Republican consultant Ann Stone said her long, blonde hair became an issue during her own mayoral campaign. When asked if she would cut her hair if elected, Stone responded, "A lot of things in this city I support cutting. My hair is not one of them."

For candidates who wear eyeglasses, it's important to keep the same style throughout the campaign and have non-glare lenses for television. If a candidate wants to change frames or switch to contact lenses, she should do it before she announces her candidacy.

Many women look better with a little lipstick, blush or mascara, but a candidate should try to keep her look consistent throughout the campaign. Although television lights can wash out a person's complexion, a candidate should not overdo her make-up, even for a press conference or television interview. Some stations have a make-up artist who will make a candidate look great on camera, but she should take off heavy make-up after the interview.

A candidate should keep accessories simple and avoid wearing anything that makes noise, reflects light or needs adjustment. While bold earrings might be part of a woman's personal style, they don't always work well for candidates. One woman candidate realized after completing a 10-minute television interview that she had forgotten to put an earring back on after making fund-raising calls.

TV BODY LANGUAGE TIPS

A candidate may be seen by more voters in a single television appearance than she will meet in person the entire campaign. She should learn to be her best in front of the camera.

Facial Expression: Be more animated. Since television drops depth and a flat picture exaggerates a frown, have a slight smile to look neutral. Watch the news without sound to see how the anchor smiles even when giving bad news.

Eye Contact: Look at the interviewer's eye closest to the camera. Looking up and down or from one side to another can make you look shifty.

Hand Gestures: Keep all gestures within an imaginary box the size of a 21" television screen from your chin down to your chest, between the shoulder blades and 6" to 8" out. Use your whole hand, not just one finger, and keep tight and focused.

Posture: When seated, tilt forward with a straight back. If you're short or wearing a short skirt, cross your legs at the ankle and then tuck both under your chair. When standing, don't keep your arms crossed or stiff. Put one hand in a pocket, bend arms at waist level or have both arms relaxed at your side. Stand with one foot slightly in front of the other, and try to keep any movement forward and not lean side-to-side.

Body language

Candidates should learn to control their body language to connect physically with voters. Whenever a candidate is in a public setting, she needs to look friendly and relaxed.

To connect with a voter or potential donor, it's important for the candidate to make good eye contact. She should try to make it appear that each person she meets is equally important. When working a room, try not to spend more than three minutes with any one person. The candidate's goal is to share her name, the office she is seeking and a brief synopsis of her message with as many people as possible.

During a speech, a candidate should look up often. Pick out a few people in different spots in the crowd who are listening closely. Focus on those individuals, and occasionally move your eyes across the entire audience.

A candidate may want to read major speeches in front of a mirror to see if she is making too many hand gestures, swaying from side to side or using other body language that distracts from her message.

Vocal presentation

A candidate should develop a successful voice image and speaking style to make sure people can understand her. She should speak slowly and clearly, and learn to modulate her volume, control her pitch and vary her inflection.

While a candidate needs a strong delivery style to rouse a crowd, remember that television is an intimate medium. A candidate should use a cooler delivery style in television interviews, talking to viewers as if she'd been invited into their living room. Many candidates practice speaking into a tape recorder or in front of a video camera.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

The two things most candidates fear the most are asking for money and giving speeches. A good candidate learns to overcome those fears.

Political speaking happens every time a candidate speaks in public. Whether it's a one-on-one conversation with a donor or a speech to a high school graduating class, the candidate is "on stage." Candidates don't have to be great orators, but they do need to speak in complete sentences and get their audience to relate to them.

Practice is the key to good public speaking. A candidate should read major speeches out loud in front of a mirror and tape herself on audio or video cassette until she is satisfied with the result. Rehearse in front of family or friends. One benefit of running for public office is that most candidates become better public speakers.

If a candidate is running for a major office and is not confident of her speaking skills, she

may want to consider hiring a speech coach or taking a speech class. A candidate should buy services available within her budget that can make her a better candidate.

The Republican National Committee recommends a six-step format to construct a persuasive political speech:

- Establish a rapport with the audience by demonstrating a shared concern.
- State the problem in terms of how it directly affects the audience.
- Support your position with evidence expressed in terms people understand. Show you understand how things directly affect the audience.
- Identify the enemy (usually an opponent) and tie him to the problem.
- Offer a solution to the problem and show how it directly benefits the audience.
- Conclude by offering a vision for the future and showing how your solution would contribute to this vision. Describe this vision and encourage the audience to participate in the process.

Most effective speakers begin by establishing some common ground with the audience. A candidate should show that she recognizes her listeners' needs and values such as family, economic security, health and education. She can lose the crowd with details, so she should outline her ideas before discussing the specifics of any issue.

A candidate should discuss her qualifications in terms the community can relate to. She might want to stress how long she's lived in the area and how well she understands local problems. Or link her life experiences with local issues. For example, if she was a nurse, she might relate that experience to the problems she wants to address in improving health care.

The best speeches include anecdotes and personal examples from the candidate's life to show her special skills and ability to serve. If she wants to include statistics, find a few interesting facts or figures to illustrate her message.

If a candidate makes contrasts between herself and her opponent, generally she should avoid mentioning his name. Many women challengers find it more effective to talk about "the incumbent." Decide early how to refer to an opponent or larger enemy (e.g. the bureaucracy or Washington gridlock) and be consistent throughout the campaign.

Candidates are not comedians. It's hard to find a good joke that is appropriate and will not offend anyone. It's often best to stick to humorous real-life anecdotes. A candidate should show that she has a sense of humor by being able to laugh at herself and at unexpected situations, but still give the appearance that she's a serious person.

A candidate should share some personal information, but only what she's comfortable making public. For example, Texas Governor Ann Richards was candid about her

alcoholism, but refused to discuss any use of illegal drugs.

People respond to energy and optimism. A candidate should concentrate on why voters should vote for her and not why they should not vote for her opponent.

Many candidates write and prepare their own speeches. Even if someone else prepares her speech, she should be familiar and comfortable with every word. While she wants to seem relaxed and unrehearsed, most people ramble when they speak "off the cuff." She should memorize the points of her basic message so she can speak comfortably without a written text.

A candidate may want to list key points she wants to mention on a single piece of paper or index card. If she needs a written text for a long speech, make sure the text is easy to read with all pages numbered. Most political speeches are typed in large, bold type using just the top two-thirds of each sheet of paper. To avoid awkward pauses while the candidate turns each page, each page should end with a complete thought.

SPECIAL SPEAKING TIPS FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES

- Candidates must have a strong ego, but many women are afraid to blow their own horn. Go ahead and brag about your strong points.
- Control your emotions, especially anger or tears.
- Avoid tilting your head or using other body language which suggests a lack of confidence.
- Recognize that some voters question a woman's leadership skills. Highlight any experience that shows you leading others or making tough decisions.
- Be prepared to speak on all issues that the winner will have to face. Some voters still link female candidates only with "family" issues such as health care and education.
- Voters may pay more attention to your family status than that of your male opponent(s). If you're single, be prepared for curiosity about your sex life or speculation about your sexual preference. You may want to find an appropriate escort for some events. If you have children, find a good, reliable baby-sitter, preferably a relative.
- Prepare answers for stupid questions. For example, "What does your husband think about your candidacy?" Possible response: "He supports me and recognizes that my background and work in our community make me the best candidate for this office."
- Avoid drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes in public.

In major races, a candidate may have access to a Teleprompter. She should practice her speech at least once so the operator knows her pace and speaking style.

Basic speaking guidelines for a candidate:

- Know your audience, topic and format.
- Know your best delivery style.
- Stress your name, the office you're seeking and your basic message statement.
- Know your time limit and follow it (you lose an audience after 20 minutes and can usually make all your key points in 10). When in doubt, keep it short.
- Feel free to stop and take a breath, collect your thoughts.
- Know how to use props in advance (microphone and podium) and don't overuse charts and other speaking aids.
- Don't use weak or emotional terms that convey indecision (Instead of "I feel there's a problem," say "There's a problem").
- Speak in positive terms ("When I'm elected ..." not "If I'm elected ...").
- Target your message to your audience's goals.
- Be prepared for audience questions. If you don't have a prepared response, it's sometimes best to agree that a question is important and say you're not prepared to respond at this time. Don't lie and don't make it up as you go along. Off-the-cuff remarks can easily come back to haunt you.

Announcement speech

Your candidate's announcement speech is likely to be her first opportunity to get your message to voters through the mass media. Make sure it hits on all the campaign's key points and makes clear her intentions.

U.S. Rep. Tillie Fowler (R-FL) had an excellent announcement speech in 1992 that any candidate can use as a model. She said:

"This is an important moment for me, personally. But just as important is the meaning of this moment to the citizens of Duval County and the First Coast ... and indeed, to the people of America. Today marks the first step ... it represents our best opportunity ... to be the architects of change in the United States Congress, and become the citizen builders who construct a new America for our children. This morning, as I proudly announce that I am a candidate

for the U.S. House of Representatives from District 4, I want to make it clear from the beginning that we need change in the Congress if America is to be the economic, moral and political leader in a rapidly changing world. ..."

Stump speech

A stump speech is what the candidate repeats at every opportunity. It's her core message in speech format. Whether the candidate is speaking at an ice cream social, talking to potential donors in someone's living room or making a major campaign appearance, she needs to have a basic stump speech that can be adapted to each situation.

Many parts of a candidate's stump speech can be taken from the announcement speech. The goal is to outline why a candidate is running and why she deserves her listeners' votes and their support. Most candidates can condense their stump speech to two minutes or expand it to 30 minutes, but it should always sound more like a conversation than a speech. Use simple language and avoid jargon or insider's patter. Always address the audience and not reporters or an opponent.

As time goes on, the candidate may want to add a humorous anecdote from the campaign trail or make some other changes, but she needs to repeat the same points over and over again. The campaign staff will get tired of hearing the same speech, but hardly anyone else will notice that she's saying basically the same thing several times each day to different audiences.

Effective politicians adapt their stump speech to the audience. The scheduler should provide the candidate with as much information as possible about the audience. Why do they want to hear from the candidate? Are they hostile, friendly or lukewarm? What are their chief concerns?

The candidate should stay flexible and alert to signals from the audience. She should be ready to shorten her speech without losing the main points and make any other changes depending on the situation.

Listening is an important skill for candidates. If there are other speakers before her, she should try to pick out a line from each to incorporate in her own talk. She also may want to recognize any local leaders she notices in the audience.

TOWN MEETINGS

Not everyone is comfortable talking to voters in small forums, but town meetings can be an effective medium to show that a candidate listens to people's concerns. More and more, incumbent public officials are hosting town meetings to stay in touch with voters.

Town meetings can be a lot of work to organize, since the campaign needs to notify area residents of when and where the candidate will be available through a newspaper ad or postcards. Some coordinated campaigns organize town meetings at which several candidates

appear at once.

Although a candidate can start with a short statement, it's important to leave most of the time for questions. A candidate should anticipate the audience's questions and take every opportunity to reply with her basic message. Some campaigns plant people in the crowd to get the discussion going or to ask questions related to the candidate's message.

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES

As mentioned in the chapter on time management, a winning campaign doesn't spend time on things that won't help the candidate win votes. Issue questionnaires from special interest groups are a good example of how a campaign can waste time on things not included in the campaign plan.

A campaign should answer questionnaires from groups it knows include your voters. If a candidate is seeking or has won a group's endorsement, let members know that your candidate agrees with their positions by completing their questionnaire. Ask a friendly public official for a copy of his or her previous response to the group's questions to use as a guideline in preparing your campaign's responses.

One staff person, usually the campaign manager or the press secretary should be assigned to handle questionnaires. If the questions are slanted or the group's agenda is not the same as the campaign's agenda, it's best not to respond.

CANDIDATE FORUMS AND DEBATES

Any joint appearance with your opponent(s) offers both an opportunity to get your candidate's message to voters and a potential disaster for your campaign. Incumbents generally have more to lose from debating than challengers, but most challengers probably shouldn't take on the difficult undertaking of a debate unless it's a major statewide or federal race.

Even if there's no major blunder or brilliant statement from either side, debates tend to draw attention, resources and concern away from other campaign activities. Approach any debate situation with great care.

No candidate is obliged to debate. Accept an invitation only if the candidate and campaign manager have made a conscious decision that it's in the campaign's best interests.

Major debates: negotiate an acceptable format, terms and rules

- Will there be a live audience? If so, who will be in the audience? Make sure your candidate can invite family members and at least as many supporters as each opponent. Before the debate, find out if there will be reserved seats and what time the doors will open.

- Who asks the questions? Agree on a moderator and/or panel of questioners and find out if the questions will be available in advance. If questions will be taken from the audience, prepare questions the campaign would like its supporters to ask your candidate and her opponent(s).
- What are the debate topics? Debates can be wide-ranging or single-issue.
- How long will it be? Debates are usually 60 to 90 minutes.
- What is the format? How much time will be allowed for each question and how will the candidate get time cues? Responses are often 45 seconds to two minutes.
- How will the order of speakers be decided? It's often a coin toss immediately before the debate.
- Will follow-up questions be allowed? Will each candidate have time for a rebuttal to each response?
- What is the physical layout? Some candidates like to stand, others like a stool or chair. Will each candidate have a podium? How about water? Will they each have a pad and pencil to take notes? Is there adequate lighting?
- Will there be opening and/or closing statements and how long will they be? Can a candidate use a prepared text? If so, will there be a Teleprompter?
- Will it be televised? What media coverage will be allowed? Few debates off-limits to reporters. Usually one television and/or radio station is selected to carry the debate in its entirety and provide tape to other stations for their news shows.
- Is there a use agreement? Can your campaign receive taped copies soon after the debate? Many campaigns agree that neither candidate can use a portion of a debate in a political commercial since it can be taken out of context. Your campaign may want to ask for a tape of each debate to review what was said or give copies of the debate to reporters who didn't attend.

Practice

Once the candidates have agreed to debate and the rules have been negotiated, it's time to set aside part of each day to prepare. Major campaigns often assign someone to play an opponent in one or more mock debates. Many campaigns prepare a briefing book for the candidate that includes:

- A format summary and style hints,
- A strategy summary, including one good line that supports your candidate's message and is both humorous and pointed,

- The 15 most likely questions and prepared responses,
- A summary of each opponent's debate history and style,
- Arguments to counter five possible opponent charges,
- Positive points to stress, and
- Points on which to attack each opponent.

The campaign may also prepare a short list of tips for the candidate to keep in mind during a debate, including:

- Pause to gather your thoughts before responding.
- Consider starting each answer by repeating or rephrasing the question.
- Be consistent, clear and concise in your responses.
- Answer the question you want to answer, even if it isn't the one asked.

Spin Control

Prepare a post-debate plan that lists the names of reporters the candidate should speak with right after the debate. The campaign should be prepared to issue a press release highlighting the candidate's best lines and an opponent's errors. The press secretary should send the release, a tape of the debate and/or a taped actuality of the candidate's post-debate comments to any reporters who didn't attend.

After a debate, it is likely that both candidates will claim victory. No matter what happens, a candidate should sound confident and satisfied in post-debate interviews. If a candidate does make a major mistake, it's usually best to acknowledge the error and quickly move on to other things.

NEGATIVE ATTACKS

Political campaigns can be vicious. Voters have the right to know the person they're electing. While the candidates are trying to put their best face forward and not alienate voters with messages they don't want to hear, they often are painting the worst possible picture of their opponents, especially in the last days of the campaign.

Research often reveals areas that can become negative ads. A candidate might decide to highlight an opponent's public statements on a controversial issue or instances where his record is in opposition to his campaign promises (flip-flops). In some cases, the issue might be the candidate's personal life or family scandals. It's up to each candidate to draw the line on what negative information about an opponent or his family the public should know.

Attacking your opponent(s)

It's important to draw a contrast between your candidate and each opponent, so don't be afraid to use accurate information that might lead voters to question an opponent's qualifications for office. Be very careful to verify the information and be able to substantiate any charges the campaign makes.

Determine the best method and timing to disseminate that information. Negative ads are often run on radio late in the campaign. Many campaigns with limited funds feed the damaging information to selected reporters with supporting documentation or have a surrogate hold a news conference.

In recent years, more reporters have started to scrutinize the accuracy of political ads, particularly in major races. Some campaigns protect themselves from negative coverage by sending political reporters a packet documenting every negative attack before it's made.

Usually, the candidate should concentrate on spreading a positive message while the campaign uses other means to get out the negative message. The candidate should be very careful in criticizing an opponent and never attack off-the-cuff.

If your candidate is being attacked

Early research is the key to preparing for negative attacks against your candidate. Know which areas are likely to be attacked and prepare to respond or take the heat.

If there's a "smoking gun" or nasty rumor concerning your candidate, be prepared to have it made public. Rumors often take on a life of their own, so it's better not to let something sit out there and grow. Decide how to respond and try to turn attention back to your message.

Try to learn when an opponent is launching a negative attack against your candidate. Develop a good relationship with the media so reporters will call your campaign as soon as his press conference is scheduled or when a new ad is delivered to a radio or television

**WOMEN AND
NEGATIVE ATTACKS**

Women candidates are often very sensitive about negative campaigning, both authorizing attacks against their opponents and being the target. But criticism is a part of politics, whether you like it or not.

It's important to be prepared with research to use against your opponent and to prepare for attacks against you. To avoid being caught off guard, women candidates should share with key staff anything that could become an issue in the campaign.

Negative ads often use an unflattering picture of the opponent. Some women may have trouble taking this in stride. Voters may comment about your picture in an opponent's ad, but it may be best to laugh it off and show you aren't running based on your looks, but on your abilities.

Although the candidate must approve using a certain negative message about an opponent, she is not likely to be the best messenger. A negative ad which backfires can especially damage women candidates who are perceived differently than men.

station. It's best to respond on the same day and within the same news cycle.

There are several approaches a campaign can take in responding to a negative attack. A candidate has several options:

- Say, "It's a lie and I have documentation (research) to prove it's a lie."
- Say, "It's true, but it was taken out of context or distorted."
- Say, "I'm sorry, and I'll never do it again" (e.g. I smoked pot at 19 and wish I had been more aware of the dangers when I was young).

If the charge is not serious, a candidate can turn media attention back to her message by saying, "This is not what the voters care about. My opponent is trying to confuse voters about what's important in this campaign."

Sometimes it's best to take the negative hit and move on. Never lie. If your candidate uses illegal drugs, she should not say she only did it a few times if she continues to have a problem.

If the attack was on your candidate's family, the candidate can turn attention back to her message by talking about what the experience taught her. She can use the opportunity to share her concerns for other families facing similar situations.