



Politics is Personal

AND THAT AIN'T BAD

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Define Terms: POLITICS

- Poli = *many* & Tics = *blood-sucking parasites*?
- Show business for ugly people?
- Mark Hanna, Chairman of Republican National Committee in 1896:

*“There are two things important in politics,
the first is money and I can’t remember what the second one is.”*

- Really though, politics is NOT a “bad” word ... it is simply deciding:
 - WHO gets WHAT,
 - WHERE, and
 - WHEN.

1.) Politics Is NOT Scientific

Today a great many colleges and universities offer degrees in Political Science... but in truth, there is little or nothing scientific about politics.

Political scientists today have as much ability to predict with certainty the outcome of next year’s election as:

- Economists do predicting the Dow Jones Industrial average a month from now, or
- Meteorologists do predicting next Tuesday’s weather.

The point is that in truth, politics is actually much closer to an intuitive art form than a legitimate scientific process.

While this may sound elementary, it is vitally important for any individual or group – especially transportation organizations – to recognize that:

- YOU CAN’T ENGINEER ANSWERS TO POLITICAL QUESTIONS!!! (*In the engineering world 2 + 2 will equal 4 every time. The same cannot be said in politics.*)
- MIC meeting in Sen. Graham’s office. (*“But...but...” It’s NOT scientific – take “YES” for an answer!*)

*“In theory, there should be no difference between theory & practice.
In practice, there is!” -Yogi Berra*

2.) All Politics Is Personal

Former House Speaker Tip O'Neil was fond of the maxim that "all politics is local." My "Callaway's corollary" to O'Neil's maxim is that "*all politics is personal.*" You've must have a relationship with your legislator(s) and, specifically their staff, or you won't get very far in Tallahassee or Washington.

- "You've Got Mail" analogy – Tom Hanks & Meg Ryan *It's not personal; it's business...pretty personal to Meg Ryan's character! (A recession is when your neighbor loses his job... a depression is when you lose yours!)*
- Staffer & Lobbyist story from Sen. Bob Graham's office

"If you want to get across an idea, wrap it up in a person." -Ralph Bunche

3.) Ya Gotta Be There

To establish a solid reputation with your legislator(s) and their staff, you'll need to follow the model employed by the major league baseball player Cal Ripken.

What was Cal Ripken famous for? Most home runs? Most golden gloves? Highest batting average? Most stolen bases? No, he was famous for playing in the most consecutive games.

- Basically, Cal showed up for work every day -- he "was there!"
- Being there means taking the time to develop a relationship – either directly or through your organization – with the appropriate folks in your State Capitol and in D.C.

To be a Ripken-like "player", ya gotta be there, and here are three tips to help:

1. Prepare- Preparation is a key ingredient to success in the political arena.

- But don't succumb to the "**Jell-O Syndrome.**" The Jell-O Syndrome is where motion is mistaken for progress.
- As the actor Michael J. Fox once remarked, "***I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection. Excellence I can reach for; perfection is God's business.***"

2. Show Up- Don't allow the pursuit of the "perfect" – but untimely – answer or information prevent you from providing folks in Tallahassee or Washington with a good answer that's on time! If Ripken had not been on the field, it would have been impossible for him to contribute to the success of his team.

- If you, or your organization are not "in the game" ... then you'll never have the chance to "make the plays" that will mean the difference between winning and losing.
- Like Woody Allen has said, "***fifty percent of life is just showin' up.***"

3. Perform- Like an All-Star shortstop, your reputation and that of your organization will be largely made by how you perform ... or basically, how you **react**.

- Like Cal Ripken, once you've prepared and shown up ... simply do what you know how to do and the result usually takes care of itself.
- As Oprah Winfrey has said, ***“luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity.”***

4.) **Facts Are Nice, But Slogans Sell Beer**

Most legislators, and practically all their staffers, are not engineering professionals so a major task will be to translate the needs of your group from “engineer-ese” into “legislative-ese.” Here are three examples of “translating:”

- “Bringing People Together” ... what about freight? (*Not about “stuff.”*)
- Pedestrian facilities (*Ever learned to ride a bike on a “pedestrian facility?”*)
- Coaching 8 & 9 year-old Girls Soccer team. (*“Mark-up” ... “cover somebody” ... “go stand next to someone with a different colored shirt.”*)

The best way is to ask three basic questions about any issue:

- 1.) Why is this issue important to me?
- 2.) Why should this legislator care about it?
- 3.) What exactly do I want this member to do about it?

While the “facts” (big thick reports) certainly have their place, what often separates just a good proposal from a successful one is the slogan or marketing that goes along with it.

- During the Civil War, Edward Everett – a clergyman, president of Harvard University and orator of national renown – was asked to give the keynote address at the ceremony dedicating the cemetery at Gettysburg. President Abraham Lincoln was invited to “give a few remarks.” Everett spoke for two hours, and today nobody remembers what he said. Lincoln talked for two minutes and his words will never be forgotten.
- It is also essential to communicate your position with passion, as well as purpose. If you don't act like you care about an issue, why should the legislator or their staff?
 - As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, ***“nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”***

So remember:

- Politics Is NOT Scientific
- All Politics Is Personal
- Ya Gotta Be There, and
- Facts Are Nice, But Slogans Sell Beer

Now go get'em! And as you do, remember the immortal words of former Florida Governor Reubin Askew...

“Always be sincere whether you mean it or not.”

Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT)

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