

Public Office Project

Notes March-April 2019

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March 1, 2019: Ujjal Dosanjh and Mike Wilson

- Young staffers at the premier's office often hold more power than MLA's, discretion on holding press conferences and policy directions
- Ujjal informed the premier he would not run again to be a backbencher: was appointed to cabinet
- Politics is a team sport, Raminder Dosanjh's support was crucial
- Fundraising rules have changed so it's harder to survive of a few donors
- It takes time to build a base, very difficult for independents to win

March 15, 2019: Suzanne Anton and Kareem Allam

The most miraculous invention of modern society is rule based government. In most of history, change of government is through blood and thuggery accompanied by social and economic crisis. Our current form sees government change and no one dies. The genius of the British Parliamentary System is that the opposition is not the enemy of the state but an integral part of the state.

In British Columbia, before 1902 there were no political parties and it was chaotic. Each vote could have a different configuration of supporters within the legislature. With the establishment of political parties, government achieved a more predictable management of issues and voters could better understand the policy stance of each candidate.

Political parties are essential to getting things done. Those aspiring to elected office need to understand how parties work. It is generally a bad idea to support one side of the political spectrum and then move to the other side. No one loses points in politics for being loyal. But when does party politics stifle good government. Every elected person needs to actively watch and engage in this.

What is the impact on family of elected office? It is not a thankless job says Suzanne. You are constantly getting thanked and asked to participate in events.

There is no actual job description other than to attend mandatory meetings. Each politician finds their own job description. Some attend every event. Some attend no events and have a media persona.

One technique is to book personal time in the schedule called 'Meeting'. In the White House today this is called 'Executive Time'.

Each aspiring elected office holder should find their own core constituency.

Suzanne Anton focused on playing fields. She found a large constituency in soccer moms.

Remember that each governing institution controls its own meeting schedule. In the 1970s, many City Councils opted to have their public hearings in the evenings. With a growth in the number of people who work in the evenings and opportunities for social media this has come into question. This is a choice.

Kareem identified the three essential elements of any campaign: Message, Media, Money. But he also added that Authenticity is important.

He also emphasize the importance of a local constituency. He said 'All politics is local'. Someone with local strength will always be someone with campaign experience.

Kim Campbell had said famously that 'a political campaign is no time to talk about policy'. There was a debate about this and what was more important during a campaign, policy or message. One person suggested that she was probably right but she shouldn't have said it.

There is a 'Ladder of Participation'. From small subsistence nomadic groups to large metropolitan areas only 1 to 3% of the population is actively engaged in governance while 7 to 15% are actively supporting this governance. The rest are minimally or not at all involved. No matter which political parties or configuration, the same small group of people are actively engaged.

Technology has changed campaigning but there is an ebb and flow. New technologies can work well and then lose their effectiveness.

You learn more from losing a campaign than winning a campaign.

March 22, 2019: Andrew Saxton, Barb Justason and Ken Sim

At last week's Public Office Project seminar, Andrew Saxton, former Member of Parliament for North Vancouver, and Barb Justason, experienced pollster and strategic advisor, shared their thoughts on polling, campaigning and political life.

Andrew Saxton encouraged those interested in going into politics to think critically about the realities of the job, including how it will impact your lifestyle.

He noted that, as an MP, you are constantly attending events and flying across the country. You have to really enjoy interacting with people, or else the job will consume you. However, he noted that the more people you meet and events you attend, the more likely you will build connections and be successful.

He also mentioned the importance of open communication with your loved ones, especially with your sentimental partner, as the strain of politics can have an impact on your relationships. Especially during elections.

Elections are emotional roller coasters, he affirmed, be prepared for ups and downs. On the same note, do not take your victories or your losses personally.

That being said, while Andrew told us that the job of a politician can be stressful, he also emphasized that it can be extremely rewarding. He recounted an experience of helping one of his constituents with an immigration file in order to see their sick relative, which he was able to make a reality.

Barb is similarly passionate about her career as a pollster and strategic advisor, which she said she fervently pursued upon entering the job market, encouraging others to pursue their career aspirations with a similar rigor.

She spoke on the polls conducted during the recent Nanaimo Bi-Election, which were not accurate in part because respondents were confused about which riding they were voting in.

Following this critical stance on political polls, she noted that polls can be manipulated substantially by the way that questions are phrased. Additionally, polling can become inaccurate if a rigorous methodology is not followed.

According to Barb, you should always ask your pollster:

- What is their record of success?
- What methodology do they use?
- How have they overcome challenges in the past?

Key Take-Aways from POP Seminar with Andrew Saxton and Barb Justason

Andrew Saxton

- Think very hard about running, but once committed be 100%, don't go on holiday after announcement
- Must like people, as a candidate attended more community events than the incumbent MP who had to spend time in Ottawa.
- Have conversations with your sentimental partner, many couples have broken up over the strains of politics
- As an MP could help to solve immigration files from constituents, could be very rewarding
- Elections have emotional roller coasters, be prepared for the ups and downs

Barb Justason

- Sought very hard a career as a pollster and strategic advisor, persevered until hired
- Polling can become inaccurate if rigorous methodology is not followed
- Polls in the Nanaimo bi-election were not accurate in part because respondents were confused about which riding they were voting on boundaries
- Polls can be manipulated by how the question is posed

Ken Sim

- Entrepreneurship requires persistence, it's better to start than to be a perfectionist and never begin.
- Be prepared to sacrifice business when committing to a campaign
- The rigors of being a mayoral candidate made inevitably made him grow, skills could be transferred back to business

March 29, 2019: BC Lee and Mark Marissen

BC Lee

Local government is different from provincial and federal. It is more hands-on and because it is at-large voting, you have to represent all parts of the city.

There is no back bench in local government. There is only one bench. Everyone participates in all decisions.

If municipal issues were just about right and wrong we would just need a judge. But they are more complex. You need skill to find solutions and have everyone accept the outcome. You need to gain respect from the staff.

Learn Roberts Rules and the Procedure Bylaws of the city. Learn the Vancouver or Community Charter. These are the rules which govern you and you should know them.

Watch City Council online.

It is helpful if your activities outside of politics gives you a core group of supporters.

Mark Marissen

Help someone you believe in. I don't let the candidate find me, I find the candidate I want to support.

Don't run as an independent if you want to win. It is also difficult with a new party.

Municipal is very different from the other levels. People want to protect their independence whereas the other levels have well established processes.

A good candidate is someone who loves people and loves reaching out to them. 95% of their effort should be talking to people.

Winning an election has little to do with policy.

With the new social media environment, you need 10 times thicker skin. You can quickly lose the plot in a social media environment.

A greenlight committee should be a friend of the candidate not an enemy. Helping them through the process.

Politics is a team sport.

April 5, 2019: Greg Lyle and Hector Bremner

Greg Lyle

- Politics is one way to make change, but not the only one, often the least likely to succeed.
- Follow the north star, remember what you want to accomplish
- Parties can benefit from having "HR" from nurturing candidates, taking care of their needs
- The central campaign tends to control messaging for the local campaigns, printed literature advertising is uniform. Nonetheless, it may be beneficial to have a unique (verbal) message for local issues.
- Historically party nomination races used to be open, local riding associations would be given discretion, this has shifted to party leaders choosing candidates.

Hector Bremner

- 4 principles: bring people together, take the good ideas, don't play politics, get the job done
- You have won when your opponents begin to champion your issues
- Passion is introverted, compassion is directed outwardly. Be compassionate
- Beware of the cocktail party rubber chicken trap: remember your vision and the job you were elected to accomplish.