

The Ultimate Field Guide for Political Foot Soldiers

How to Deploy a Neighbor-to-Neighbor Battle Operation that Kicks Butt and Takes No Prisoners!

by Dr. Chuck Muth, PsD
Professor of Psephology (homeschooled!)

Whether you're "just" an individual citizen who would like to do "something" to help elect better people to office but don't know what to do or where to begin...

Or you're a precinct captain or district coordinator who isn't being given very good information on exactly what to do or how to do it to be effective in running a volunteer grassroots operation or where to begin...

Or you're a candidate or campaign manager or other staffer who knows you need a "ground game" but have never put an effective one together – the key word here being "effective" – and don't know what to do or where to begin...

Begin right here...

Lincoln's Law

Let me start out by paraphrasing something I heard many years ago: "There is more incompetence in the field of political consulting than in any field other than psychology."

It has been my experience that all too many good, well-funded, winnable campaigns lose on election day, not because of a lousy candidate, but because of a lousy campaign.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

The essence of putting together a winning political campaign isn't exactly rocket surgery.

Abraham Lincoln gave as clear and concise an explanation of what it entails back when he was still a Whig in the mid-1800s:

"The whole state must be so well organized that every Whig can be brought to the polls. So divide the county into small districts and appoint in each a committee. Make a perfect list of the voters and ascertain with certainty for whom they will vote... Keep a constant watch on the doubtful voters and have them talked to by those in whom they have the most confidence... On Election Day see that every Whig is brought to the polls."

Other than communications technology – especially the Internet – not much has changed since then.

Stephen Shadegg was former Arizona Congressman John Shadegg's father and an extremely successful political consultant in the 1940's and 1950's - including managing two of late Sen. Barry Goldwater's early Senate campaigns.

Campaigns that "conventional wisdom" said Goldwater shouldn't have won.

In 1964, Shadegg wrote and published a paperback book titled *"How to Win an Election: The Art of Political Victory."* The book back then sold for all of \$1...but is worth *thousands of times* that amount in the information it provides for candidates and campaigns.

The publisher noted that Shadegg "distilled nearly 20 years of political experience in this easy-to-understand handbook" and "reveals those modern techniques and strategies that are successfully used today."

Interestingly, those "modern techniques and strategies" in 1964 are no less relevant some 50 years later. For example, Shadegg wrote:

"Political decisions are made by the Indifferent – by that segment of the body politic which really couldn't care less. ... The Indifferents decide elections."

Nothing's changed. The Indifferent don't make up their minds whether or not to even vote, let alone who to vote for, until the closing weeks and days before an election. They are unlikely to make a rational voting decision; instead deciding whether to vote or who to vote for "in response to an emotional appeal."

What we today refer to as the candidate's "Base" voter is called the "Committed" voter by Shadegg, who describes them as "strongly prejudiced toward one party or the other – a condition described in colloquial terms as being a yellow-dog (blank) – interpreted to mean that a voter would give his ballot to a yellow dog if such were on his party's ticket, in preference to bolting the party."

The third category of voters is the Undecideds – and they are different from Indifferent voters:

"The Undecideds are frequently those who are truly best informed. They recognize that often times only slight shades of gray separate two candidates. They understand the niceties of the situation. And because in their thinking so many complexities are involved, they frequently find it difficult to reach a decision."

So the key is, obviously, to turn out your base of support, the Committeds, in high percentages; persuade the Undecideds that your candidate is the better choice; and motivate the Indifferents to both show up at the polls and vote for your guy.

Simple, right?

Well, not so simple. As veteran political strategist Joe Gaylord says, "The planning is easy; the execution is hard."

While most of Shadegg's book focuses on what the campaign manager and candidate should do, Chapter 10 focuses on the indispensable army of "foot soldiers" that can make or break a campaign; that can level the playing field against a well-funded, entrenched incumbent or opponent.

In this Special Report, we'll excerpt "The Foot Soldiers" and add modern-day commentary and updates as appropriate so you, the average grassroots "grunt" on the ground will know exactly how to deploy a highly powerful **Neighbor-to-Neighbor** campaign operation...even if the candidate or campaign you're supporting doesn't!

Which reminds me...

Again, the vast majority of campaigns will talk about putting together a "ground game," but few ever do. And even the ones who do, they likely don't do a neighbor-to-neighbor foot-soldier program as I'm about to lay out for you here.

As such, if you're a local party leader, an issue advocacy organization, a political club, a tea party group...whatever...you can make yourself and your organization INVALUABLE to candidates and campaigns if you have a field operation already in place that they can deploy from one election cycle to the next.

Indeed, you as an individual can make YOURSELF invaluable to the campaigns, local party operation and outside activist organizations if they know who you are and that you're willing to personally contact your neighbors at election time.

So let's begin...

All Politics is PERSONAL

While each election is different from state to state and district to district, Shadegg argues that "there are always enough Indifferents and Undecideds to turn the tide in an election contest."

That's not to say gerrymandered districts where one party enjoys a 2-1, 3-1 or better voter registration advantage is a prime race to target – especially with a mediocre candidate who has little or no money.

But any race with even a relatively close voter registration breakdown is doable...if done right. Otherwise you wouldn't see Democrats getting elected as governor of Montana (Bullock) or Republicans getting elected governor of New Jersey (Christie).

I'm sure you've heard the phrase that all politics is local, but in reality, all politics is personal, as Shadegg explains...

The campaign manager who understands the make-up of the electorate and what is required to motivate a favorable action will always attempt to arouse the Indifferents.

The candidate must inspire the party faithful; he must radiate confidence; he must challenge the opposition; he must please his audience. All this is quite an undertaking.

Two quick points on this:

1.) While conventional wisdom says a candidate must “move to the middle” in the general election, if you don’t inspire your base there’s a good chance your Committeds will shift themselves into the Indifferent category.

Just ask GOP presidential candidates John McCain and Mitt Romney.

2.) A candidate – especially a candidate running against a well-funded, entrenched incumbent – MUST “challenge the opposition.” A candidate who says, “I’m just going to run a positive campaign and talk about what I’m going to do” is almost assuredly going to lose.

Campaigns aren’t referendums; they’re choices. If a candidate fails to provide a strong contrast between himself/herself and his/her opponent, the Undecideds will be confused and the Committeds will be, to put it mildly, less than motivated.

But this is about you, the foot soldier, not the candidate...so let’s move on.

The voter who has seen (the candidate) personally or heard him speak is more likely to be influenced by that brief personal contact than he is by advertising or literature. But in most constituencies it is physically impossible for a candidate to appear in person before, or to be seen by, more than an insignificant number of the voting population.

Television has increased the opportunities for personal confrontation. Skillful use of this new medium may one day revolutionize the whole field of politics.

Boy, did that prediction ever turn out to be true!

The candidate may be charming on TV. He may be extremely persuasive. But the members of the Indifferent group will most likely be watching “Rawhide” or “Perry Mason” when the candidate is on the channel discussing those issues that will affect the direction of the world.

Remember, this Shadegg published this in 1964. Today’s Indifferent voters are more likely to be watching “American Idol” or “NCIS.”

The mathematics of majority decision are irrefutable. The Indifferents and the Undecideds must be reached; they must be persuaded to vote for your candidate. ...

The purpose of a political campaign can be summed up in one sentence – to address a persuasive request to every registered voter to support your candidate at the polls. The foot soldier program is designed to implement that sentence.

Because the Indifferents are indifferent, the approach to them must be made on a personal basis if that is possible. Some campaign devices or strategies gain their maximum effect by being widely publicized. Having an overflow crowd on hand when the candidate appears indicates popularity and strength. Prominent citizens who declare their support for your candidate attract those who like to follow the leader.

Never underestimate the power of the “herd mentality,” especially as it relates to voters who are nowhere near as informed and engaged as you are on politics and public policy.

People have a very human desire to be associated with winners. Seeing large numbers of supporters showing up for a campaign event indicates the candidate may just be a winner they can hitch their wagon to.

On the other hand, a crowd of just a handful of people – half of whom are staffers – sends a very powerful opposite message!

So one of the most important things you can do as a grassroots “foot soldier” is to recruit as many friends, neighbors, relatives, co-workers, etc., as possible to attend public events featuring your candidate.

As tennis star Andre Agassi used to say, image is everything.

Winning Hearts

But back to making personal appeals to Indifferents...

(Candidate) Jones can't knock on every door. It is physically impossible for him to say in person to every voter: "Please vote for me." The next best thing is to send someone to knock on that door on behalf of Jones. If the emissary selected carries the credentials of a neighbor who believes in Jones, who because of this belief is asking his neighbor to vote for Jones, the response will be amazing.

Remember Lincoln's admonition when it came to “doubtful voters” – Shadegg's Indifferents...

“...have them talked to by those in whom they have the most confidence...”

In this day and age, who do you think the average Indifferent voter will have the most confidence in when it comes to making a political decision: A paid television or radio commercial, a mailer, a newspaper ad, the word of a paid campaign staffer...or their next door neighbor?

Exactly.

And again, remember we're not talking about talking to Committeds here. We're talking about Indifferents. As such...

The foot-soldier program isn't calculated to influence anyone who has a firm political conviction. Great caution must be exerted not to stir up political arguments. The foot soldiers are not commissioned to try to convince by logic. Their single assignment is to say: "Mr. Jones is a good man. Please vote for Mr. Jones."

This is why it's so important in any campaign to, as Lincoln put it, “ascertain with certainty for whom they will vote.” In the closing weeks and days before an election, you do not want grassroots volunteers out there trying to persuade the unpersuadable.

This isn't about winning an argument; it's about winning a campaign!

Indifferents aren't going to be convinced by the unassailable logic of your argument at their door. They don't care, remember? If they're to vote at all, it will more likely be for an emotional reason that quite possibly will have absolutely nothing to do with politics, public policy or even the candidate himself.

Just as an example: I recall a gubernatorial election from back in the 1990s in which the wife of a GOP party official voted against the GOP nominee and for the Democrat candidate because she didn't like kinds of shoes the GOP nominee's wife wore.

True story!

In our complex urbanized society we may not know the name of the man who lives four houses down the street. But if he comes to our door and identifies himself as the man who lives four houses down the street, there is an immediate bond between us because we are neighbors. This is the key to the success of

the program – the man asking you to vote for Mr. Jones is your neighbor. It is impossible to treat him as a stranger.

In most residential areas such a call would be made under more favorable conditions. If the householders have children in the same school, the chances are good the caller's name will be known. In most cases, the caller will not be a stranger. The common concern and mutual interests of people who live in the same neighborhood argues in favor of the foot soldier program.

Voters who live in the same geographical area shop at the same neighborhood grocery store, patronize the same cleaner, buy milk from the same dairy. They may go to the same church or have youngsters in the same Boy Scout troop.

In our lonely society all of us hunger for identification. Most of us instinctively resist the impersonal association. In any crowd we seek to find a familiar face. We want to belong to the group. We feel closest to our own family members. Next we cling to early friendships. But with the exception of the completely de-humanized, stratified society, we respond warmly to the claims of our neighbors.

Let this sink in.

Other than the candidate himself – and maybe even more so – no one can potentially have a bigger impact on the decision an Indifferent neighbor makes on whether or not to vote or who to vote for...than you.

And yet most campaigns treat you and the rest of their volunteers as nothing more than glorified envelope stuffers – “free labor” - rather than the invaluable assets you could and should be.

Seriously...if a potential voter is otherwise disengaged, uninterested and ill-informed, personal contact from you, a neighbor, could well be the only reason such a voter decides to vote and votes for your guy.

Get just one such Indifferent voter per block and pretty soon you've added up enough votes to swing an election even against long odds!

Basic Training

So let's get into the real nuts-and-bolts of a personal, one-on-one, neighbor-to-neighbor ground assault...

The foot-soldier program, properly organized, will completely blanket a residential area. The plea on behalf of your candidate will be delivered in person to every qualified voter in the precinct or the district.

The key here is “properly organized.” Remember, the planning is easy; the execution is hard.

Canvassers are asked to cover the houses on their side of the street in their block. They are instructed not to engage in arguments; not to discuss their candidate in contrast to his opponent. Their task is to knock on the door of their neighbor's home, hand out a piece of especially prepared literature and as a neighbor ask their neighbor to vote for the candidate.

Two things here:

1.) You're only asking for a volunteer to cover one side of a one-block area. This is a general rule, applicable to most urban and suburban neighborhoods, not necessarily rural areas where the distance between neighbors can sometimes be measured in light years!

In any event, this is NOT a big undertaking for anyone.

One block.

One side of the street.

That's it.

At most, you'll usually be talking about maybe a dozen houses or so, not a hundred. This is absolutely doable in a short period of time with minimal effort. You will not be overburdening your volunteers in this program.

On the other hand, you WILL need to recruit a lot of volunteers early...which we'll get to later.

2.) Again, your purpose in reaching out to your neighbors isn't to enter into any kind of political debate. Politics is almost a side issue in this kind of personal outreach. It's 100% positive.

Do not fight. Do not argue. Do not pass “Go.” Do not collect \$200.

The ideal time to reach out to these Indifferent voters is sometime within the five-day period before the election. Now, with the growing popularity of early voting and absentee voting, those contacts might have to be moved up a bit.

However, bear in mind that an Indifferent voter is far less likely to vote at all, let alone vote early. If you and/or the campaign you’re working on has done its Get Out The Vote tracking program well, you’ll know whether or not any of your neighbors have voted early or by absentee ballot before you make your personal visit.

Recruiting Station

As noted above, no outreach program to Indifferents – or Undecideds, for that matter – is likely to be more effective than neighbor-to-neighbor personal contacts. Not television. Not radio. Not newspapers. Not mail.

But it is virtually IMPOSSIBLE for a candidate himself to personally visit each and every Indifferent and Undecided voter...at the time they’re making up their minds.

That last part is key.

Sure, if a candidate starts walking early enough – you know, a year or two in advance – they could conceivably walk their entire district; maybe even more than once. But that’s not what we’re talking about here...

We talking about reaching the Indifferent and Undecided voters in the short window of time right before they actually make their decision whether or not to vote and who to vote for.

At most, that window might be a couple weeks. Nowhere near enough time for an individual candidate to reach every potential Indifferent and Undecided voter even with perfect advance voter identification.

NOTE: Ideally, the final neighbor-to-neighbor push will occur the week before Election Day. However, it’s important to note that many states now allow “early voting” as much as 2-4 weeks before Election Day.

In addition, voters can far more easily request an absentee ballot, without providing a reason, and never see the inside of a voting booth.

As such, it's important to check a voter's historical pattern of voting, information easily obtained from your local election department. If someone has a habit of voting early and/or voting by absentee ballot, it's critical that you make your neighbor-to-neighbor contacts with these voters the week before absentee ballots go out and/or early voting begins.

Otherwise, there's a good chance that when you show up at a neighbor's door pitching your candidate...your neighbor will have already voted. The horse will already be out of the barn. And there'll be nothing you can do about it.

In any event, the point is you need to recruit volunteers. Lots of 'em. Here's how Mr. Shadegg explained the process...

The foot-soldiers are all recruited on the telephone. To implement this neighbor-calling-on-neighbor campaign the first step is to get an accurate map of the area to be covered. Count the blocks. This will give you the number of volunteers needed...

If the map reveals there are 5,000 blocks to be covered, 5,000 canvassers will be required. One telephone can solicit approximately thirty canvassers per day. Thirty divided into 5,000 is 166.6 – the number of days it would take to solicit the needed workers with one telephone.

Of course, if the campaign headquarters has more than one phone and more than one recruiter calling, the time it will take to assemble your army of foot soldiers will be dramatically reduced. However...

Shadegg was talking about the "average." Your recruiters might only get 15 volunteers a day. And some of those who volunteer are going to either quit or never show up. So you need back-ups. Reserves.

Either way...START EARLY!

Now, this next part from Mr. Shadegg about setting up a campaign HQ phone bank operation is going to come off sounding a little sexist, but please bear in mind it was writing almost 50 years ago!

If the (campaign) manager elects to allocate twenty calling days to enlist his workers, he will need 8.3 telephones. To be safe he should order ten and then

man the telephone room with fifteen experienced operators and at least three supervisors.

Working twenty or thirty minute shifts, the girls will retain their charm and poise no matter how many “not at homes” or wrong numbers they encounter. And your telephone girl’s voice must be warm, friendly and cheerful. We have always used professional operators and paid them for the work.

Don’t shoot the messenger. I’ll be the first to concede that the telephone BOY’S voice should also be warm, friendly and cheerful, too! Onward...

By the way, in the “old days” volunteers had to look up the names and phone numbers of the folks to be called. The process could take weeks to complete before the first call was even made. But today, this task is monumentally easier with just a few clicks of a mouse within a voter database.

Now back to the phone girls..and guys!

The operators must be carefully trained – cautioned never to depart from the established solicitation speech. Professional operators will complete their calls in the time allotted. They will refrain from engaging in any conversation not indicated. They can be counted upon to retreat gracefully without offending if the request for help is refused.

The request, to be successful, must be made in the name of the candidate.

“Mrs. Jones, this is Mary Brown. (The telephone operator should use their real name.) I’m calling for Senator Robert Maxwell. Would you be willing to help in his campaign for re-election?”

Another form that has worked well for us:

“Mrs. Jones, this is Nina Gleason. I’m calling for Senator Robert Maxwell. He asked me to ask you to help him in his campaign. Would you be willing to do that for him?”

If the person called expresses annoyance, reluctance, or indicates a non-receptive attitude, the call is terminated. If the person called indicates a desire to comply with the Senator’s request but expresses inability to do so, the operator

says, "Mrs. Jones, I know Senator Maxwell will understand. Thank you very much."

The type of response from each person called should be recorded on the same name and number list.

That will more likely be in your voter contact database in this modern era.

If it is hostile, there is a chance the party precinct worker might be able to iron out the difficulty. If it is warm and friendly but for some valid reason a non-volunteer, the name should go to the precinct organization or to whoever is responsible for getting out the favorable votes.

Indeed, while this project is primarily focused on volunteer recruitment, it can serve the dual purpose of voter identification. Anytime you can take a voter out of the "Undecided" column and put them in the "Committed" column, that's moving the ball forward.

If the person called is receptive and asks what he or she can do to help the candidate, the operator replies: "Bob wants you to call on your neighbors...just the people who live in your block on your side of the street...and ask them to vote for him. Could you do that, Mrs. Jones?"

If the response is affirmative, further instructions are given:

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Jones. We will deliver a packet of literature to your house on such-and-such a date. (This should be the Tuesday before the election.) Your packet will contain your identification, a letter of instruction and a little pamphlet about Sen. Maxwell.

"What he wants you to do is to visit the neighbors in your block. Bob knows that when you tell your neighbors you are going to vote for him, and ask them to vote for him, it will really help."

There may be another 30 seconds of conversation before the operator can conclude with: "Bob will be very pleased and very grateful when I tell him you are going to help us, Mrs. Jones. Thank you."

And tell him you better. That shouldn't be just an empty throw-away line...kinda like patting the little lady on the head. The candidate BETTER be told about every person

who volunteers to become a foot-soldier for this project and the candidate BETTER be very grateful.

You can buy television. You buy radio. You can buy newspaper ads. You can buy web ads. You can buy direct mail.

You can't buy a volunteer on every block willing to vouch for you to their neighbors.

What you're asking these folks to do is really simple and really easy in one way. You knock on the door, you pretty much repeat a short memorized script and hand them some literature. Piece of cake.

But to stick their necks out and vouch for a politician, especially in this day and age, is really asking a lot. And the candidate better fully appreciate that...and CONVEY that appreciation. More on that later...

In some cases it may be impossible to enlist a recruit in every block. When this happens it is necessary to ask someone to travel a block or two from his own home to make the calls. But the volunteers must be recruited from an adjacent street if they are to achieve the desired identification with the people whom they will solicit.

Make no mistake, even if you can't find someone who lives anywhere near the block in question, even a complete stranger making a personal, last-minute visit asking for a vote can't hurt.

But the real strength of this particular program lies in the power of neighbor-to-neighbor. That should be your goal. And the earlier you start to set this up, the more likely it is you'll be successful and your implementation will be as solid as your plan.

Oh, and by the way, when calling to recruit volunteers for blocks where you are unable to immediately secure someone from your same party...

CALL EVERYBODY!

Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Greenies, independents, Klingons...whatever.

Most voters are nowhere near as ideological and you and I. If they like a certain candidate, regardless of party, they just might hop on the wagon.

And who better to persuade a Democrat to vote for a Republican candidate than a fellow Democrat, right?

Rallying the Troops

Not only is the candidate the best person to secure a vote, if and when it's humanly possible for him to do, the candidate is also the best person to follow up and make sure a volunteer recruit does what they've volunteered to do.

To confirm the telephone commitment requires prompt action. The volunteer's name and address, with the acceptance verified by the initials of the telephone operator, must move immediately to the mail room.

Here a letter of confirmation ending with the personal signature of the candidate is prepared and mailed immediately. The letter should strive to enhance the personal relationship between the cause of the candidate and the volunteer.

"Dear Mrs. Jones: Nina Gleeson has told me that you are going to help us. I am truly grateful and greatly encouraged by your willingness to be an active worker in my campaign.

"The packet of literature Nina told you about will be delivered on such-and-such a date. Mrs. Brunson, who lives not too far from you, will bring it to your house. ... Gratefully yours, Bob."

In the marketing business, professionals understand the most difficult part of the sales process for major purchases isn't so much in making the sale, but in keeping the sale. Buyer's remorse is a huge challenge. People say "yes," often as an emotional response, only to have second thoughts after the heat of the moment has passed.

Ditto folks "buying" the notion of volunteering to participate in the neighbor-to-neighbor campaign. That's why this immediate follow-up program is so vitally critical to your success.

"Nina Gleeson has told me you are going to help..." This is confirmation of a personal commitment on a personal basis. "Mrs. Brunson will bring the packet. She lives not too far from you..." You are really joining your neighbors in this effort, Mrs. Jones, and don't worry – if you still have some questions, Mrs. Brunson can answer them when she calls.

Now someone is going to make a personal contact, someone who knows that you, Mrs. Jones, told Nina Gleeson that you would work for Bob. Nina told Bob that you said you were going to work for him. If you were just trying to be nice to the girl on the telephone and don't really want to help in the campaign, it's too late now, isn't it?

Mrs. Brunson could very well be the precinct captain for Mrs. Jones' neighborhood, either for the campaign or for the local party or an outside grassroots activist organization.

Remember, your neighbor-to-neighbor foot-soldiers have been recruited for one, and only one, very simple yet critically important project.

Is it possible that someone originally recruited for the Neighbor-to-Neighbor campaign will raise their hand and volunteer to take on additional responsibilities? Absolutely. In fact, if you handle this process correctly, it's likely.

But if you've recruited people to do just this one thing, don't try to throw more on their shoulders without them agreeing to it.

If funds are available, enthusiasm can be further stimulated by including an autographed photograph of the candidate with the letter of confirmation. High quality photographs, complete with signature, can be reproduced by various printing processes quite inexpensively.

OK, again remember this was published way back in 1964...long before Al Gore invented the Internet, let alone Steve Jobs inventing the iPhone. So technology today makes all kinds of even better options both possible and affordable.

Knowing how vital this program is to your success on Election Day, how cool would it be for the campaign to invite just the Neighbor-to-Neighbor foot-soldiers to an exclusive, private special event with the candidate so they can be recognized and thanked in person?

And if you're going to do that...and really want to seal the deal...stage an old-fashioned photo-op with the candidate and the Neighbor-to-Neighbor volunteers, and make it REALLY special.

Again, this is both simple and inexpensive...all you need is an iPhone, good lighting and someone who knows how to frame a shot. But if you want to invest just a little extra to really make this a memorable experience, here's what you do...

1.) Find someone with a digital camera that shoots higher quality images than an iPhone...though again, an iPhone (or any other smart phone) is perfectly acceptable. But using a real camera by someone looking like a real photographer will make the perception of the event more special.

2.) Get a "step and repeat" banner printed using the campaign or organization logo. If you don't know what a step and repeat banner is, they are the backdrop you see behind all those Hollywood celebrities who have their photographs taken on the "red carpet" before entering an awards show.

They're also relatively inexpensive to print. You can find suppliers with a simple Google search.

3.) As alluded to above, complete the special experience by laying down...yep, a swatch of "red carpet" for the volunteers to stand on as they get their pictures taken with the candidate!

4.) Now, if you're on a really tight budget, you can post the photos online where the volunteers can download them and print them out themselves, post on their Facebook page, post on their blog, whatever.

But I still highly recommend Shadegg's suggestion of printing out the photos on 8x10-, or at least 5x7-sized photo stock (you can do this quickly and inexpensively at just about any Wal-Mart or local drug store), have the candidate personally sign the photo, and mail it to the volunteer.

HUGE impact.

But that's more about what the campaign should do. Let's get back to the foot-soldiers program itself...

On the wall at telephone headquarters there should be a detailed map, one that shows all the streets in the area to be covered. Colored pins on the map will indicate where the volunteers have been solicited. The area should be divided into a comfortable geographical section for the distribution of the packets. A volunteer captain to each district.

Or precinct.

The name of the volunteer solicited is printed or typed on the packet. We have found commercial 9x12 envelopes suitable for this purpose.

The more things change...

This packet must contain an identification badge or name tag. This strengthens the volunteer's sense of commitment. A printed instruction sheet to inform Mrs. Jones precisely what she is expected to do and enough pamphlets to cover the estimated number of houses in the block are included.

Don't put in a few extra pamphlets. Your volunteers will probably fail to connect with two or three of the householders assigned to their area, and two or three unused pamphlets in each packet can result in a lot of wasted printing.

The instruction sheet is a review of everything we have discussed here. The volunteer is admonished not to engage in any arguments – never to mention the name of the opposition candidate or to speak critically of anyone in the opposition.

It bears repeating: Your Neighbor-to-Neighbor foot-soldiers are emissaries, not attack dogs. They are sugar and spice and everything nice. There is a time and place for everything. Let the campaign bring down the thunder. Neighbors should be, well, neighborly.

Got it? Good. Now here are two sample solicitation scripts to include in the instructions:

1.) To be used if you know your neighbors on a first-name basis:

“Good morning, Helen. I'm out working for United States Senator Robert Maxwell. He's a good man and I think we need him in the Senate. I hope you and Bill will vote for him. Please read this pamphlet and show it to Bill when he comes home.”

There, that didn't hurt, did it? Doesn't take much time either.

2.) To be used if the neighbor's name is not known:

“Good morning, I’m Mary Jones. I live at 1012 Elm Street. I’m a volunteer out working for United States Senator Robert Maxwell. He’s a good man and I think we need him in the Senate. I’m going to vote for him and I hope you and your husband will, too. Won’t you please read this pamphlet? It tells all about Senator Maxwell.”

Notice, your Neighbor-to-Neighbor volunteer doesn’t even mention the candidate’s party affiliation. And again, this is because your target audience is the Indifferents and Undecideds for whom party affiliation has far less meaning than it does to Committeds.

The selling point here is that Bob Maxwell is a “good man,” not a “good Democrat” or a “good Republican.”

Psychological Warfare

Let’s wrap this up...

I have explained the neighbors’ organization to a dozen different campaign managers. Someone always says, “Why should they vote for a candidate just because their neighbor is voting that way? What kind of reason is that to choose a United States Senator?”

It is a very good reason indeed – for someone who is not firmly committed to either candidate. If they don’t have any strong convictions, the fact that their neighbor has volunteered to solicit votes for Robert Maxwell will provide them with a sort of second-hand personal identification with the candidate himself.

If they know the neighbor who is doing the soliciting, their regard and respect for the neighbor becomes an additional reason. If they don’t know the neighbor, the fact of their geographical nearness lends strength to the request.

And what about the pamphlet, what does it say? That Senator Maxwell is an expert on atomic energy or has served with distinction on a foreign relations committee or is a member of the Republican Policy Committee? Not by a jugful.

The pamphlet is titled “Neighbors for Maxwell.” The layout is simple. There are pictures of the candidate in a homey atmosphere, pictures of the candidate’s wife, pictures of the candidate’s children.

If the candidate had a humble beginning, it is probable the pictures were taken with the candidate standing on the front porch of his old home. The text emphasizes that neighbors should be for Robert Maxwell because he is a good man who believes in the American family, puts his faith in Almighty God, loves his country and works hard. Corny? Emotional? Yes, indeed.

Is the fact that a neighbor says a particular candidate is a “good man” a good way to make a decision on who will represent that voter in Congress, in the Legislature, on the county commission or city council? Heck, no.

I think we all wish our fellow citizens took campaigns and elections as seriously as we do. But they don't. So our objective shouldn't be to persuade them to be better citizens; our objective is to get who we think is the better candidate elected.

The goal of every political campaign is to...WIN. And if an issue-free, non-partisan neighbor-to-neighbor solicitation moves you towards that goal, then accept reality and just do it rather than howling at the moon.

The great issues of our time absorb the interest of those who are politically sophisticated. Traditional party loyalty will prompt a majority of voters to stay within their own lines.

But the undecided voter, the citizen who pays scant attention to the political wars, who is inclined to think that “his vote doesn't count very much anyway,” can be motivated to respond to the kind of appeal we are discussing here by an emphasis on those qualities which would make the candidate a good and desirable resident of the neighborhood.

Results which can be readily verified from a foot-soldier operation in campaign after campaign argue that when the issues are complex and the competition between candidates is bitter, there is room for simplicity, for neighbor-to-neighbor appeal.

You will find almost every candidate TALKS about the value and importance of a grassroots volunteer component for their campaign. You will find very few who actually put in the time and effort required to building such an operation.

For many, it's because their consultants talk the candidate into putting their time and money into ego-boosting, comparatively easy television and radio advertising (which also make the consultant a boatload of money!)

For others, it's simply because they've never been taught how.

You now know what to do...and how to do it. Even if it's "just" you in your own neighborhood. You now have the knowledge. You now have the power.

Just do it.

(Chuck Muth is a professional political communications and strategy consultant living in Las Vegas, Nevada and the founder of www.CampaignDoctor.com)