

Morton C. Blackwell's

**Candidates'
Worst Mistakes**



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Ten Worst Mistakes of Losing Candidates

1. Failure to develop in advance a comprehensive campaign plan, including a timetable and a realistic budget. In politics you can start late, but you can't start too early. Losing campaigns almost always misorder priorities, putting too much effort on things which can have little effect on the election outcome.
2. Managing their own campaigns.
3. Spending too much time at headquarters rather than going out personally to solicit votes or raise money.
4. Hiring consultants who personally absorb too much of their campaign budgets.
5. Spending too much of the campaign funds on paid media and polling but not enough on building an organization of large numbers of people in campaign activities.
6. Adopting (and sometimes changing) positions on issues because of pressure from major contributors or the result of public opinion polls. Polls can be useful to determine which of their personal positions on issues should be stressed in their campaigns.
7. Misreading public opinion polls, which usually measure preference but seldom measure intensity. Intensity, not preference, motivates people to act in politics.
8. Failure to stress properly the issues which motivate the core elements of their supporters.
9. Responding to every minor criticism rather than focusing on the carefully considered issue thrust of their own campaigns. Campaigns lose when too much on the defensive.
10. Failure to respond properly to continuing negative information, whether from an opponent, the news media or both. Ignoring a continuing negative issue won't make it go away.

Ten Worst Mistakes of Winning Candidates

1. Hiring staff who don't personally share their policy agendas. Personnel is policy. Staff who lack enthusiasm for their bosses' priorities prevent elected officials from doing what they intended to do in office.
2. Not keeping campaign promises. These days voters have little tolerance for incumbents who break their word.
3. Not paying attention to the interests of the coalition which elected them. Incumbents lose their allies when they don't vote right, sponsor key legislation or sign allies' fundraising letters and aren't there when their friends need them.
4. Seeking approval of their enemies, particularly their media enemies. Many incumbents start craving to have everyone love them and no one hate them. But trying to make friends of their enemies makes enemies of their friends.
5. Failure to handle constituent relations effectively. All politics is personal. Service can be as important to voters as policy. They appreciate prompt, personal service when they contact those elected to serve them.
6. Succumbing to temptations newly present when one achieves some power. Election to office tests anyone's strength of character, family ties, and personal morality.
7. Getting greedy for money or higher office.
8. Becoming arrogant. Many people, constituents who request help and especially the officials' staff, treat incumbents with deference bordering on obsequiousness. A consequent loss of humility can destroy a politician's base.
9. Accommodating opposition incumbents who now are "distinguished colleagues." Excessive collegiality is a trap for incumbents who really want to accomplish things.
10. Not helping to nominate and elect allies in their home states and elsewhere. A well-run team takes care of its own. Serious politicians work hard to elect others who share their public policy agenda.

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