



## POLITICS OF CONVICTION: RUNNING AS AN AUTHENTIC VALUES-BASED CANDIDATE

While recent polls have shown a winning majority of Americans embraces a progressive agenda – more affordable, accessible health care, raising wages for working people, investing more in educational opportunities for children of all backgrounds – recent national elections have also shown that agreeing on the issues is not enough to win voters.

While issues are important, voters also need to identify with a candidate's core values – to connect with people they see as “standing for something,” even if they disagree with them on specific issues,

At Wellstone Action we call this the Politics of Conviction – and we believe (and recent elections prove) it's a winning politics for progressive candidates. With that in mind, we've assembled the following tips for running as a values-based candidate.

### **TIP #1: TELL AN AUTHENTIC STORY THAT CONNECTS WITH YOUR VALUES.**

Successful, values-based campaigns connect the voters' own stories and experiences with the candidate's personal story, and more importantly, his or her values. The candidate must be careful to neither self-aggrandize or pander to voters, but instead strike a careful balance, an authentic relationship based on building trust between him or herself and the voters.

**TIP #2: CANDIDATE, KNOW THYSELF.** Know your personal story and understand how your story informs your politics. Understand and articulate your core values and beliefs. What are the things most important to you – and why? What are you passionate about – and why? What are you prepared to lose the election over? Really think through your answer to the question, “Why do I want to run? (See our worksheet on Getting Ready to Run) You need to first be clear with yourself before you can be clear with the media and voters about your motivations.

### **TIP #3: MAKE SURE YOUR CAMPAIGN STORY HAS THREE ESSENTIAL PARTS.**

As progressive candidates, our stories need the following:

- A challenge: What is wrong and needs to be changed, or works and needs to be protected? Again – this needs to be a collective challenge, one that is shared with voters.
- A choice: What is at stake in this election? What different paths can we take? (Presumably, one choice is electing the candidate and meeting the challenge and the other is the opponent's less desirable path.)

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- An opportunity to act: What can the voter do to make the right choice and overcome the challenge? This is your ask: for a vote, for support, to volunteer, to contribute or to join the team.

**TIP #4: TRY TO RE-FRAME WEDGE ISSUES FROM A VALUES FRAME.** If challenged on wedge issues like marriage, choice, guns, or other issues that tap into deeply held beliefs and values, make sure you tell voters what your values are on the issue so your response is framed in terms of a choice of values – not issues. You may **not persuade a voter, but even if they don't agree** with you, a segment of voters will appreciate your authenticity and your story. Using facts and figures or avoiding moral questions will never win voters over – but telling them where you really stand might.

**TIP #5: MATCH AUTHENTICITY WITH STRATEGY.** Authenticity alone doesn't win elections. In the end, campaigns are about voters – their concerns and circumstances – and to win **you'll need to** make conscious, strategic choices about what to emphasize concerning your values and issues – your story. Good strategy is found in the **"sweet spot"** where the candidate's values and experiences overlap with the values and experiences of large numbers of voters.