

Winning votes with fire, power and enthusiasm



The United Kingdom is about to conduct its snap election and I've just completed my postal ballot for the exercise. Lagos State, Nigeria's commercial capital is bearing up for its local government election half way through the current political dispensation. In Kenya, East Africa, the country is swayed with political speeches to win the hearts of voters ahead of its August general polls. Lesotho, Rwanda, Liberia and Angola in Africa are warming up for the home stretch.

A few years ago in Bradford, West Yorkshire, I shared the platform with one of Uganda's presidential candidates. Political candidates occasionally give speeches on specific political issues, but most often they deliver a "stump speech". The stump speech is the politician's all-purpose speech that he or she repeats over and over again. It is a public relations speech with a primary objective of getting the audience to like the speaker and take positive action.

The speech should explain who you are, why you're running and why people should vote for you.

Who are you?

What is your name? Are you married? If so, how long? Do you have children? You must display your human side to your audience. What do you do for a living? Let them know you're not some smooth operator but a local lad just like they are.

Why are you running?

During your campaign, the first question everyone will ask is “tell me why you’re running for office?” You’ll spend a great deal of time during your campaign answering this question. Therefore it makes sense to answer it upfront in your stump speech. Though the answer will be different for every candidate, you should be able to answer it in one simple sentence carved from your campaign theme. Follow the sentence with a few brief examples – just enough to interest the voters in what you have to say.

Why should I vote for you?

Your answer to this question should be in two parts. Your ideas & your qualifications. Your ideas should include solutions to obvious problems concerning your audience and your qualifications should reveal how your job or profession makes you uniquely qualified to represent the voters in your area.

Quick tips on how to stage manage your success:

- Use humour sparingly – even if you’re naturally funny, be judicious in your use of humour. Politics is serious business and the good citizens of your constituency may not be thrilled about entrusting their health, safety and welfare in the hands of a joker.
- Be yourself – avoid copying the styles of others because it is easy to detect a phoney. Distinguish yourself by being true to yourself.
- The audience looks for cues the way the baby does its mother. If you appear nervous, they get nervous too. Have your self video-recorded and watch alongside a mentor or coach.
- Smile. Remember the purpose of your speech is to get people to like you. A sincere smile goes a long way towards accomplishing that task
- Have various versions – you should have at least three versions of your speech. One version that is 3-5 minutes in length, one version that is 7-10 minutes in length and one that is about 20 minutes in length. This way, you are prepared for any conceivable speaking opportunity.

Daniel Webster once said: “If all my possessions were taken from me with one exception, I would choose to keep the power of speech, for by it I would regain all the rest of my possessions”.

Wishing you clarity of thought and clarity of expression with enthusiasm and conviction.

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