Losing and Winning

THE CRAFT AND SCIENCE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

(1)

*There are three people that I want to acknowledge
tonight because if it wasn't for them, we would not be
here . . . whenever the history is written about Alabama
politics, remember those names, Giles Perkins,
Doug Turner and Joe Trippi.*

**—DEMOCRATIC US SENATOR-ELECT DOUG
JONES CREDITED HIS UPSET VICTORY TO HIS
CAMPAIGN MANAGERS IN A NATIONALLY TELEVISED
VICTORY SPEECH ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 12, 2017.[1]**

Political campaigns are like new restaurants: Most of them will fail. Of the more than 140 campaign managers we interviewed for this book, nearly all had lost elections—and many of them more than once. Even the most experienced and successful campaign manager can lose unexpectedly and even spectacularly.

Consider the case of a campaign manager we will call "TW." For three decades, he managed his candidate—his client and his best friend—rising from the New York legislature, to the governor's mansion, and on to the US Senate.[2] Along the way, TW had worked for other candidates who were nominated for or won the presidency.[3] TW's skills as a campaign manager had earned him national renown and a very comfortable living. He was the undisputed American political wizard behind the curtain.

Now at the peak of his craft, TW was in Chicago at the Republican Party's nominating convention. His client of thirty years was the front-runner to win the nomination. TW was so certain of the result that he had sent his candidate out of the country on a preconvention tour of European capitals. The news media and the buzz on the convention floor held that TW's candidate was assured the nomination. But when the voting finally got under way, TW and his candidate were stunned when they led the first roll call with only 37 percent of the delegates and

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were forced into a second ballot.[4] The aura of inevitability so carefully cultivated with the media and party leaders began to dissipate, and there was no Plan B. On the third ballot, a dark-horse candidate wrested the nomination from TW's grasp.[5] The political wizard was no more.

The dark-horse candidate was Abraham Lincoln, and the year was 1860 (see Figure 1.1).[6] It was only the second national convention for the Republican Party, and Senator William H. Seward of New York had been expected to emerge with the nomination. Seward's manager was fellow New Yorker Thurlow Weed, who had earlier worked on the presidential campaigns of William Henry Harrison (1840), Henry Clay (1844), Zachary Taylor (1848), Winfield Scott (1852), and John Charles Fremont (1856).

Weed was a national figure, but even the most successful managers rarely achieve that status. This book is not about celebrity campaign managers and consultants who achieve notoriety on presidential campaigns—although we've

FIGURE 1.1

Presidential Balloting at the 1860 Republican National Convention, Chicago, Illinois
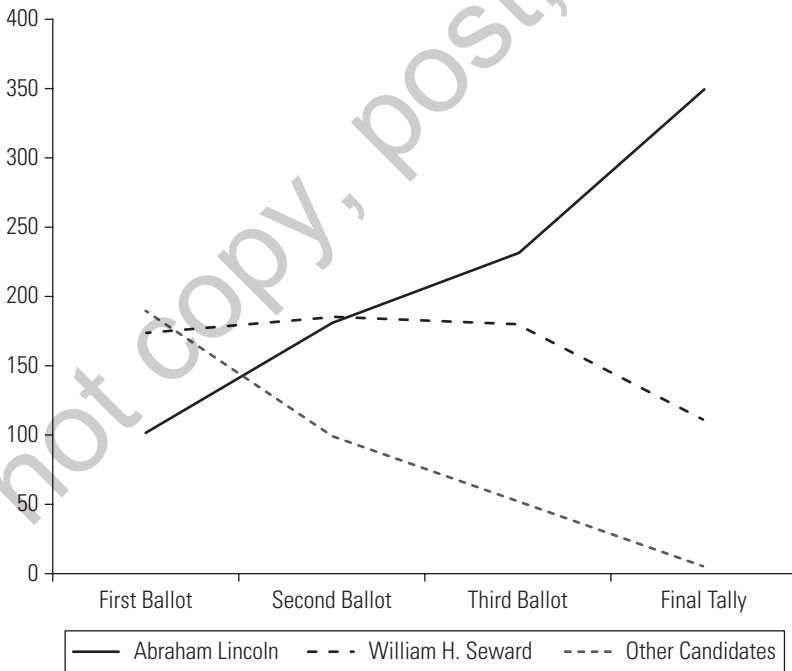
Source: Data from the Proceedings of the Republican National Convention held in Chicago, May 16, 17, and 18, 1860, https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofrep00repulala.

interviewed a number of those. Instead, we aggregate the insights of a wide swath of people who have run winning and losing races for both parties and at all levels of politics—from the courthouse to the White House.

The managers we heard from share a number of common traits and skills, including the ability to play multiple roles in the pursuit of victory on election day. And, in this book, we examine the many responsibilities, decisions, and experiences that managers can—although don't always—use to drive the success or failure of campaigns. This is not a how-to handbook but instead the collected insights from scores of political professionals, supplemented with our own knowledge of campaign mechanics and core scholarly findings about the fundamental factors that influence campaigns and elections in America. Through this synthesis, we can gain not only a greater understanding of what managers do and the array of roles they play but also the workings of the most important mechanism in a democracy—free and fair elections.

A TALE OF TWO MANAGERS

The science and mechanics of political campaigns have changed since Weed's heyday. Yet many of Weed's skills remain essential in twenty-first-century electoral politics. For example, compare Weed to President Barack Obama's adviser David Axelrod, one of today's best-known political strategists.

Before entering politics, both Weed[7] and Axelrod[8] worked in the newspaper business where they learned the degree to which the news media can shape public opinion. During Weed's career, the printed newspaper was king. In his media world, all newspapers were partisan organs like today's Fox News Channel, Drudge Report, MSNBC, or the Huffington Post. With almost no formal schooling, Weed started out as a teenage typesetter and press operator for the *Albany Register* in the state capital.[9] There, he learned the ways of the political machine that ran the state legislature and government offices of New York. Much like
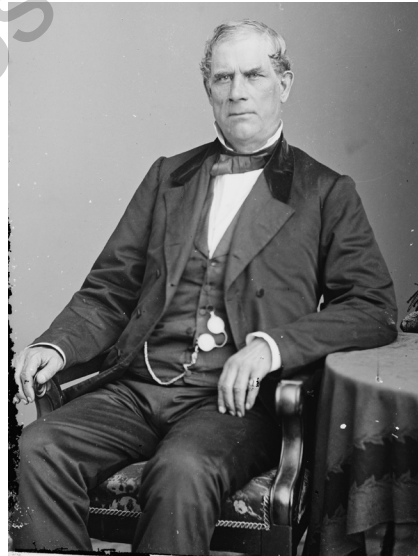
Thurlow Weed was stunned along with the rest of the political establishment when his candidate, Senator William H. Seward, was upset at the 1860 Republican convention by a dark-horse member of Congress named Abraham Lincoln.

Thurlow Weed's client, Senator William H. Seward.

today's political bloggers, Weed launched his own *Evening Journal* in 1830, using the paper and his bylined column to first support the Anti-Mason Party, then the Whig Party, before finally joining the newly formed Republican Party in 1856 in opposition to the Southern-dominated Democratic Party.[10]

Senator Seward himself said, "Weed is Seward, and Seward is Weed, each approves of what the other says or does."[11] No candidate today would publicly say such a thing, but trust and mutual dependence between candidate and manager remains essential in politics. Even after the wrenching 1860 defeat in Chicago, Seward reached out to console Weed and sustain their relationship. "You have my unbounded gratitude for this last [campaign], as for the whole life of efforts in my behalf. I wish that I was sure that your sense of disappointment is as light as my own," Seward wrote in a letter to Weed after their 1860 defeat in Chicago.[12]

After losing the 1860 Republican nomination to Abraham Lincoln, Seward and Weed both became actively involved in Lincoln's general election campaign. Seward went on to serve as Lincoln's secretary of state.[13] Weed also continued to be politically involved. In fact, Lincoln asked for Weed's help in supporting Republicans in the 1862 congressional elections.[14]

Like Weed, Axelrod's first job was at a newspaper. After graduating from the University of Chicago in 1977, Axelrod worked for the *Chicago Tribune*, becoming the paper's youngest political writer before leaving journalism and joining the 1984 Illinois campaign of Democratic candidate Paul Simon for the US Senate.[15] After starting as communications director, Axelrod eventually was named campaign manager. The underdog Simon went on to upset the popular three-term Republican incumbent, Senator Charles Percy, in a year when Republican Ronald Reagan carried Illinois and every other state except Minnesota. In the same state where Weed lost his final campaign, Axelrod won his first.

Journalism made Axelrod a better manager and strategist, he says now. "Because so much of what modern campaigns involve is about message and communications, having been a journalist was helpful to me." He added, "When I was parachuted into campaigns as a reporter, I went in with some presumptions.
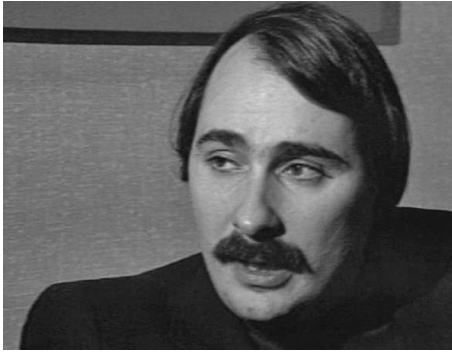
David Axelrod lost his first presidential campaign. He is pictured here in 1988 when his client, Senator Paul Simon, finished a surprisingly strong second in the Iowa caucuses but faltered in the New Hampshire primary.

But to me the job was to get on the ground and really understand what the political terrain was . . . to figure out what people were thinking, what voters were thinking. Those skills were very helpful as a strategist and as a manager."[16]

Those skills came up short in 1988 when Axelrod, now playing the role of campaign consultant instead of manager, was the chief strategist for Senator Paul Simon's (D-IL) campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. Simon's campaign gained early momentum with a stronger than expected second-place finish in Iowa, the first round of the nomination contest. But, in the next round, Simon lacked the cash to put Axelrod's television ads on the air in New Hampshire, which includes the expensive Boston media market. Simon came in third in the Granite State behind eventual nominee Governor Michael Dukakis of neighboring Massachusetts.

Axelrod also lost with his next presidential candidate, Senator John Edwards (D-NC). It wasn't until the third try that an Axelrod client made it to the White House. "You have to choose your candidates well . . . . But you also have to go in knowing that none of that guarantees victory in a very dynamic process in which so many factors can impact on the outcome," said Axelrod. "You're never as smart as you look when you win, and never as dumb as you look when you lose."[17]

LEARNING AND EXPERIMENTING

After President Obama's 2012 campaign outmaneuvered challenger Mitt Romney, the postelection coverage and conversation was dominated by talk of how much more sophisticated Democrats were with modern campaign mechanics and tools like big-data analytics. And, when it came to the use of the Internet, just about everybody thought the Democrats would have an enduring advantage in this new world of new media.[18]

But consider the case of Gary Coby. Coby was Donald Trump's director of digital advertising and fundraising in 2016. Perhaps his family background primed him to be receptive to Trump's message—"Pops works at AFL-CIO," Coby says of his father's job at the pro-Democratic labor organization. Coby's first exposure to Republican politics and to the digital work that is now so crucial to running a strong campaign was Mitt Romney's 2008 run for president. At the time, he was "working at some stupid job, just paying bills." He got connected to Romney's digital director through a former colleague and ended up running Romney's e-mail marketing program.

Afterward, he stayed in the digital marketing agency world, which was still essentially brand new, and thoroughly explored that frontier. He experimented a lot, and learned more. "I taught myself a lot there. I did a lot of Facebook, a lot of acquisition, a lot of PR, direct response advertising," remembers Coby. "Just kind of learned the ropes because no one there knew what they were doing. I didn't have a lot of oversight, I would just wander and learn."

Eventually, he wanted to come back to campaigns. He also saw how complex the digital landscape was (and still is) and he knew he needed to learn more about the sales side, and the publishers who sell ad space as a business model to fund their journalism. He combined these two desires by going to work for a company called Inner Markets, which represented conservative publications, including Drudge Report. "It was good to get a lot of knowledge from that side and how they work their deals and what they care about," says Coby. "It gave me a lot of good insights." He took those insights with him to his next job, which was a big one: running digital advertising for the Republican National Committee.

From that perch, he also garnered early insight into the phenomenon that was Donald Trump. During the primary, few people in the party were taking Trump seriously. But because of Coby's skill in using digital tools to experiment and get quick feedback, he could see that they were making a big mistake. "I was doing a lot of the ad buying to build our lists for the eventual nominee," says Coby. "We're Switzerland, we can't favor any candidate. So we did a straw poll where we asked the users, the voters, who they would vote for. Very basic, but a great acquisition tool because everyone wants to share their opinion. Trump would crush that straw poll for us."

He also talks about the e-mails the RNC would get from voters, full of palpable enthusiasm for Trump. "We get a lot of insights from those on what people are thinking, and the excitement for him versus everyone else was just off the charts," remembers Coby.

So he started "skewing subsequent buys toward Trump people around the end of October [2015]"—a smart move. Once Trump clinched the nomination, Coby formed important partnerships with people on the Trump campaign, first Brad Parscale, Trump's digital media director, with whom he worked to

build a 100-person operation in San Antonio, encompassing teams from various vendors, and, later—once the money started rolling in—Jared Kushner.

Coby also worked nearly around the clock. And, when others couldn't keep up, forged ahead alone, making decisions without asking for permission from above. "I'm sleeping an hour or two a night and I feel like I'm moving like molasses," Coby remembers. "I'm like, well, we need like three dozen more people moving at this pace, and that didn't exist. I was about at the end of my wits. But obviously it was a great opportunity for me. I could never just walk away from it. So my mind-set became, *just do whatever the hell you think is best. Don't care about the consequences. What's the worst case, they send me home? So what.*"

Working for the RNC, and not the campaign itself, emboldened him, though "obviously, if the presidential campaign wants me gone, I'm sure they could have gotten me fired," says Coby. "But it freed everyone up and everyone started thinking differently." Coby's "test everything" mentality spread.

Another trick to keep things moving fast was using Trump's tweets as ad copy—no approvals necessary, one coherent message. "When stuff was breaking, we were up that day. Hillary's folks, they were taking a day or two. This is the fastest news cycle any of us have ever seen. Stuff that would last a week was lasting hours. One of the biggest things that drove action, or drives action, is relevance to the user. So if I'm thinking about the things that are popping right now, they're much more likely to engage with the content."

The central idea was "screw the stuff that isn't working. I'm going to maximize what is working," says Coby. And a number of things worked very well. The campaign relied heavily on text messaging, the fastest way to reach users, and to reach them on a device where they're likely to share what you're sending them. The campaign gathered high-quality phone numbers by asking people to double opt-in for rally tickets. "You had to put in your phone number, then you got a text message and you had to confirm. That was your only way to get a rally ticket. For some reason, protesters didn't want to give up their phone number. Or at least a real phone number, right? They probably put in a phony one. Because of this, we had a massive SMS list of our best users, the people going to the rallies. We had, we got up to about 50,000 users. That list was the most fruitful list that we had on the campaign."

The campaign raised more than $11 million with simple text messages (SMS) and sent the first-ever video text message (MMS) from a campaign, where a single message once raised half a million dollars on its own. It also created a "Big League Truth Team" for rapid response during debates, texting a select group of supporters and pushing out links for sharing on social platforms.

They also innovated with live-streaming on Facebook and YouTube—sparked from Kushner's idea to stream a millennial event in Ohio—mainly around the debates. The "Trump Tower Live" program was "basically doing a

newscast in Trump Tower," says Coby. "We knew we weren't getting a fair shake in the media, so the whole mantra of Trump is direct to the people. That's what Twitter is, right, so let's keep rolling that ball down the field. When you can produce content that is very raw and authentic, people trust it way more. That's essentially what we're doing. It's unfiltered, unmanipulated. We're honest. We really hit a home run when we did that for the third debate, which was our biggest online fundraising day of the campaign. We raised nine million that day."

There was more. "Snapchat did really well for us. Twitter was hit or miss. AOL was great for us," says Coby. "We did a ton of Google search, obviously. We spent like six figures every day, net positive, on Google search."

Coby also pressured big traditional tech vendors—Google, Twitter, Facebook—to commit time and personnel to the campaign's effort, particularly the Republican National Convention in Cleveland. "I told them that if they didn't put people on the ground with us, we weren't spending money with them," says Coby.

The volume of messages the campaign sent out, the spirit of experimentation, and most of all the pace of the campaign was a significant change for the Republicans from past elections. "You know, I worked on the last couple presidential cycles and was on the ground with the Romney campaign, and other campaigns. There's so much bureaucracy. There's so much slow-moving decision making, and safe decisions," says Coby. "In this campaign, we just embraced following the numbers and whatever worked, worked. We had this amazing cover fire of a candidate that drew a lot of attention. Press was heavily focused on him. If we did some stupid ad or stupid e-mail that might traditionally get an article, no one was paying attention to that. So we were free to really test and run wild. Also, expectations were very low. They expected us all to just suck."

WHY CAMPAIGN MANAGERS DO IT

Most managers and staffers suffer lows between the highs—and only a handful enjoy the high of winning a presidential election. As Gary Coby discussed, they talk about insane work schedules and a world in which the news media loves, then hates; supporters believe, then doubt; and campaign decisions are second-guessed by the press and by everyone else. Candidates are subjected to personal attacks that seem unfair, there's never enough money, and there's always a good chance of ending up an unemployed loser. So why do most campaign managers and staffers keep coming back for more?

For many, it's the prospect of the thrill of victory. "I mean, it's just sickness, we're all infected with it," said Joe Abbey, who ran Democrat Ned Lamont's unsuccessful campaign for governor of Connecticut in 2010. "The rush of a campaign, man, election night, when you win. There's no other feeling like that in the world. . . . You're exhausted, you haven't eaten real food in months, and

you've poured your whole life into a cause and you win."[19]

Win or lose, campaign managers also are rewarded by the chance to develop an uncommon bond like Seward and Weed shared, almost a codependence, with a candidate they believe in. In exchange for investing life and career in electing their candidate, the manager becomes the candidate's whisperer and keeper. This bond provides its own sort of high. "Campaign managers get a bad rap that they're mercenaries. Well, we're not," said Martha McKenna, who ran Democrat Sheila Dixon's winning 2007 race for mayor of Baltimore.[20] "I think of it as the most brave and courageous thing to do to put your name on the ballot. And it's something that I don't think I could do. But when you're the campaign manager and you're entrusted with that person's name and reputation, that comes with seriousness and a responsibility that's both important and exhilarating"[21] (see Box 1.1).

Gary Coby, a digital staffer at the Republican National Committee, was sent from Washington to San Antonio for a weekend of first-round meetings with Trump's digital team. He ended up spending weeks there, camping out on a sofa in Texas while raising millions of dollars online.

BOX 1.1

David Axelrod's Three Key Qualities in a Candidate–Manager Relationship

"If you have these three elements, you have the makings of a strong manager and a strong candidate–manager relationship":

1. **Values:** The manager and the campaign must consistently reflect the candidate's values.

2. **Competence:** The manager must be strategically and tactically sound.

3. **Control:** The candidate trusts and delegates control of the campaign organization to the manager.

Some campaign managers do it clear-eyed as a career-building investment that can pay off with other professional opportunities. There's always the prospect of a staff job after a winning campaign. Managers also come into close contact with the lawmakers, businesspeople, and wealthy donors who make up a candidate's surrogate bench or inner circle. Losing a race doesn't preclude a campaign manager from making a good impression with these future potential employers or clients. "I can't tell you the millionaires that I know that started doing campaigns," Screven Watson told us.[22] Watson ran Democrat Rod Smith's unsuccessful 2006 campaign for governor of Florida and was later hired as a lobbyist. "I'm not one of them, not smart enough, but the people that got involved in the campaign and got identified as a talent, they got sucked up."[23]

Campaign managers are the field marshals in America's ceaseless war for governing power. Many people understand that elections have significant consequences, but few have any idea of what it takes to win one. Most scholarly work on the subject has focused on factors that drive how people vote. In the process, some scholars have concluded that campaigns don't much matter (see Chapter 2, Political Math: How Campaigns Matter). Other research has been conducted on the effects of big-ticket campaign tactics such as television advertising and voter mobilization.

BOX 1.2

From the Campaign Manager Survey: The Candidate–Manager Relationship

Like Seward and Weed, and Obama and Axelrod, the right relationship between a candidate and their campaign manager is an important part of electoral success.

There were never two men in politics who worked together or understood each other better. . . . Neither controlled the other in any objectionable sense. One did not always lead, and the other follow. . . . They were like two brothers with whom nearly all interests are common.[24]

—Thurlow Weed Barnes, grandson of
Thurlow Weed, *Memoir of Thurlow Weed* (1883)

[Thurlow Weed] always thinks I am driving everything to the devil. But throughout my public life he has told me to do this or that

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particular thing, and I have done it. He told me not to do that and I have refrained from doing it.[25]

> —Senator William H. Seward, R-NY,
> speaking of Thurlow Weed in 1857

I think it has to be like a sibling relationship. I think you need to know each other well like siblings do, but also siblings aren't afraid to call each other out.[26]

> —Adam Bodily, campaign manager, Duane Snow for
> Albemarle County Board of Supervisors, 2009

A lot of times, your job is just to [let them vent] when they've had a bad day. . . . But that also means that when I'm getting yelled at [by someone else], they've got my back, which leads to trust. So you [need to] have that relationship where you can speak your mind in private.[27]

> —James Cauley, campaign manager,
> Barack Obama for Senate, 2004 (IL)

You know, it's not about managing the candidate, but it's about having a kind of partnership. You respect the candidate. You each understand what your roles are. And you respect those boundaries. You're in constant communication. You understand what decisions you're going to make, what decisions the candidate will make, and you operate based on those agreements.[28]

> —Katie Merrill, campaign manager,
> Phil Angelides for Governor, 2006 (CA)

You never saw a horse turn around and tell the jockey which way to run. [The] candidate is the horse and the manager is the jockey. And so the manager needs to run the campaign. The candidate obviously has input . . . but at the end of the day, the candidate can't be digging through the research, can't be talking to the hierarchical leadership and the grassroots leadership. The manager's got to do that.[29]

> —Haley Barbour, chairman, Republican National Committee,
> 1993–1997; governor of Mississippi, 2001–2009

Until now, almost no attention has been paid to the unique role of the manager and what it teaches us about elections in America. This book is not intended as a substitute for hands-on experience but as a means to
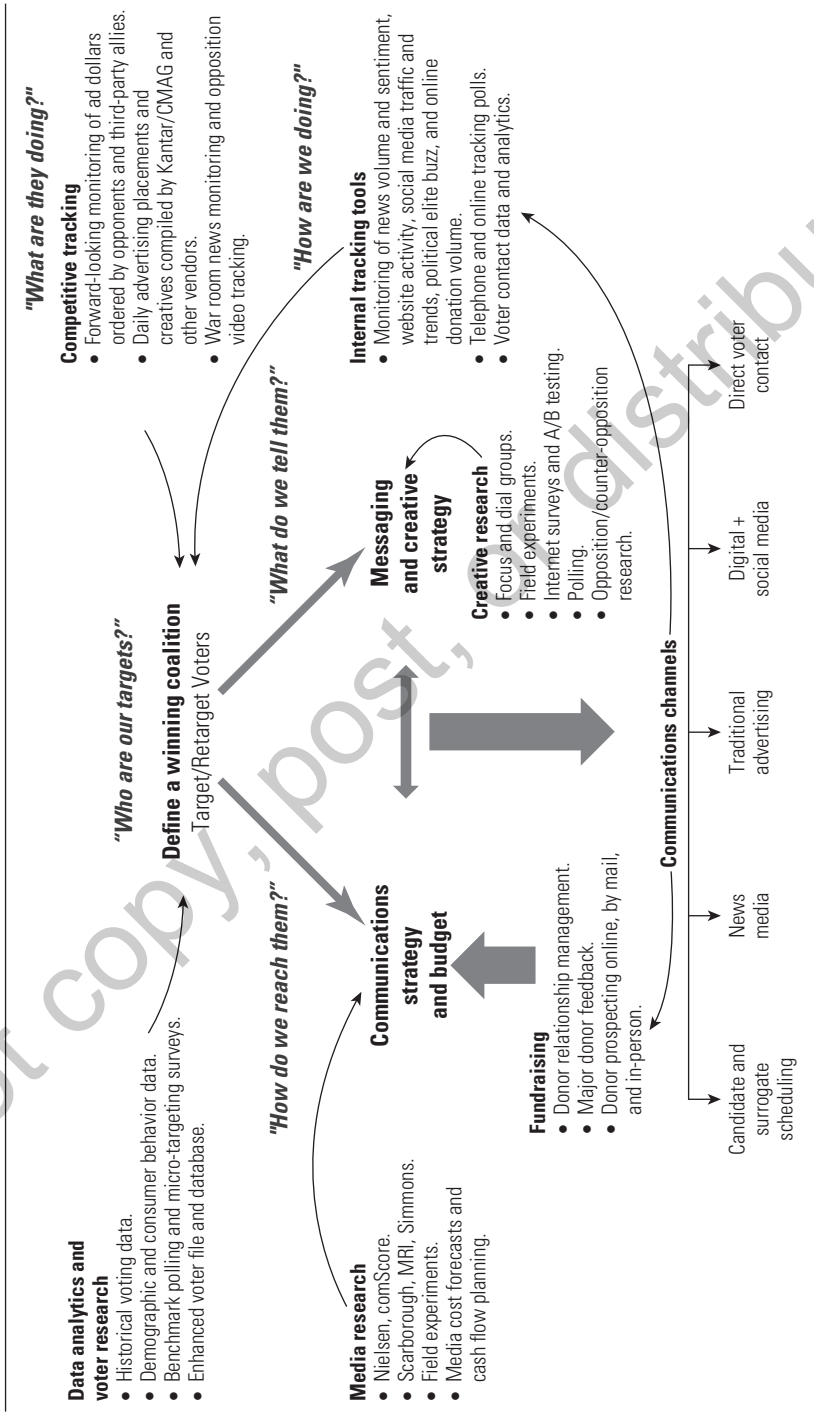
constructively share managers' experiences and to understand campaigns and elections through the eyes of those who manage them. This book also serves as a window into how campaigns affect who wins and who loses and the struggle for power in modern American democracy. According to Steven Law, manager of Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell's (R-KY) 1990 campaign and now of American Crossroads, one of the highest-spending advertisers in Republican politics today, "You just don't get campaigns until you work on campaigns."[30]

WHAT CAMPAIGNS DO

Based on our conversations with campaign managers, we developed a flowchart model describing what happens in campaigns (see Figure 1.2). This is not an organizational chart describing jobs and personnel. Instead, it is a dynamic model showing what campaigns do on a day-to-day basis, describing key activities, five core questions that drive the campaign, and the tracking loops that campaign managers use to measure their expected performance on election day. These feedback loops are critical to the success of a campaign and are another area in which political campaigns differ from consumer marketing campaigns. The consumer brand manager has the luxury of daily sales data, but the political campaign manager can never be sure of which voters are sold on their candidate and will not see any hard sales numbers until election night.

The questions are ones that virtually every candidate running in a competitive election—whether it's a presidential or city council race—must ask and answer to be successful: (1) "Who are our targets?" represents the coalition that the campaign must assemble in order to reach 50.1 percent of the vote (assuming a two-person race). (2) "How do we reach them?" involves the methods available to a campaign to mobilize and persuade their targeted voters with their limited resources. (3) "What do we tell them?" reflects a need on every campaign to drive a clear message about why its candidate deserves a voter's support and why the opponent would be harmful to the voters' interests. (4) "How are we doing?" encompasses the feedback loop that helps managers track their progress and adjust the campaign's tactics and strategy according to how they're faring. (5) "What are they doing?" sheds light on what the opposing side is doing to target, mobilize, and persuade their own voters and whether attacks by the opposition need to be answered; increasingly, nowadays, "What are they doing?" also spurs a conversation about the influence of super PACs (political action committees) (friend and foe) on voters' views of the candidates and the issues. Taken together, these questions guide the strategic decisions and tactical choices that each campaign manager and their team must make. These five questions structure each campaign's quest to win the election.

FIGURE 1.2

What Campaigns Do in Five Questions

Data analytics and voter research
- Historical voting data.
- Demographic and consumer behavior data.
- Benchmark polling and micro-targeting surveys.
- Enhanced voter file and database.

Media research
- Nielsen, comScore.
- Scarborough, MRI, Simmons.
- Field experiments.
- Media cost forecasts and cash flow planning.

"Who are our targets?"

Define a winning coalition
Target/Retarget Voters

"How do we reach them?"

Communications strategy and budget

Fundraising
- Donor relationship management.
- Major donor feedback.
- Donor prospecting online, by mail, and in-person.

"What do we tell them?"

Messaging and creative strategy

Creative research
- Focus and dial groups.
- Field experiments.
- Internet surveys and A/B testing.
- Polling.
- Opposition/counter-opposition research.

Communications channels

Candidate and surrogate scheduling

News media

Traditional advertising

Digital + social media

Direct voter contact

"What are they doing?"

Competitive tracking
- Forward-looking monitoring of ad dollars ordered by opponents and third-party allies.
- Daily advertising placements and creatives compiled by Kantar/CMAG and other vendors.
- War room news monitoring and opposition video tracking.

"How are we doing?"

Internal tracking tools
- Monitoring of news volume and sentiment, website activity, social media traffic and trends, political elite buzz, and online donation volume.
- Telephone and online tracking polls.
- Voter contact data and analytics.

The Targeting and Retargeting of Voters

What will the candidate's winning coalition look like? This "Who are our target voters?" question must be the starting point of every campaign. Targeting voters who support a candidate but may or may not vote, as well as targeting likely voters who remain undecided in their choice, remains a central element of any campaign operation. That's why we put "Who are our target voters?" at the top of Figure 1.2. Without knowing what a winning coalition looks like, the campaign can't create a strategy, refine its message, and allocate its finite resources to conduct its campaign activities. When Thurlow Weed was managing William H. Seward's US Senate campaigns, members of state legislatures—not individual voters—did the electing. Weed could keep a list of all the eligible voters in his coat pocket along with updates on each voter's concerns, when they were last contacted on Seward's behalf, and the latest estimate of how they were likely to vote.

Today's campaign manager also can keep a detailed and updated voter list in his or her pocket, but that list could contain millions of names and would be on a mobile device or portable data drive. The growing affordability of computing power and data storage means campaigns can target and track millions of individual voters. They must set aggregate vote goals by precinct and other geography, by party identification, by demographic group, and for other buckets of voters.

Beyond that, today's sophisticated campaigns start by building a voter file that is maintained, enhanced, and updated in a database management program. Based on voting history, party registration (when available), and other individual information, the campaign can describe its winning coalition voter by voter. The voter database is continually updated with results of phone calls, door-knocking visits, and other forms of direct voter contact that can include use of online and social media, volunteering and donating habits, and other one-on-one touch points (see "Internal Tracking Tools" feedback loop in the model). The "human touch" in modern campaigns is very much data assisted.

Axelrod and his team of Obama managers invested millions to build the most sophisticated and dynamic voter database in political history. They also built a culture of data analysis–driven decision making, hiring dozens of data analysts who provided Axelrod and other senior staff the daily intelligence they needed. After most news reports said Romney "won" the first presidential debate with Obama in early October 2012, public opinion polls showed the race tightening with Romney moving ahead in some surveys for the first time. Yet at the Obama headquarters in Chicago, confidence was unshaken. Based on thousands of nightly interviews with samples drawn from their voter database, Obama's analysts concluded that Romney's gains were among voters who should have been supporting the Republican in the first place.

Axelrod publicly offered to shave his mustache if Obama lost the election—but only after checking one more time with the campaign's chief data scientists. Ironically, it was some of these same data scientists who were predicting an even more comfortable Hillary Clinton victory in 2016. Although their math skills were the same, they mistakenly assumed that the structure of the electorate—which voters would show up and in what numbers—would look similar with Clinton on the top of the ticket as it had with Obama on the top of the ticket.

Messaging and Creative Strategy

In twenty-first-century American politics, campaigns—for public office or to influence public policy—are often won and lost at the margins by the side that does the best job of developing, testing, and delivering the most compelling messages possible to their targeted voters. Every campaign needs a narrative arc, both about its own candidate and her positions on the issues, and about the opposing side. What traits, experiences, or positions does the candidate possess that appeal to the target voters? How would the candidate improve these voters' lives, and how would the other side affect voters' lives in a negative way? Getting back to the campaign-as-marketing operation analogy, campaigns need to test what sort of branding (in the form of logos and other graphics) and look and feel (for its events) it should have.

All of this occurs through a creative testing process ("What do we tell them?") that involves the manager overseeing a team of advertising consultants, pollsters, graphic artists, and often the candidate and the candidate's family. This process yields the messages that the campaign uses to appeal to its targeted voters. Although the overarching message is typically held constant and ideally doesn't change much (think Obama's 2008 "hope and change" message or Trump's "make America great again" message), the campaign can tailor messages to discrete audiences based on their distinct concerns and particular political passions.

Communications Strategy and Budget

This is the "war room" side of the communications operation—the constant grind of media and social media outreach, the rapid response operation, event planning. It's also the purse string side of the operation.

Advertising is typically the single biggest expense of any campaign. Many campaigns deploy a mix of television, radio, and digital along with direct mail. Print advertising is rarely used anymore, though in races in prohibitively expensive media markets, campaigns may forgo TV and invest more heavily in the other forms of advertising.

Opposition research—essentially, a book on the exploitable weaknesses of one's opponent—also falls under this category. The first target for any opposition researcher is the researcher's own candidate. The vastness of the Internet makes this process both easier and tougher: It's easier to conduct extensive research on one's own candidate and identify any potential issues that might be thrown at a candidate. However, one can never be sure she has found everything. Once one has achieved as much certainty as possible, the researcher sets his or her sights on the candidate's opponents.

Fundraising

With advertising typically being the single biggest expense of any campaign, managers can feel at times as though the fundraisers basically exist to pay for advertising. It's actually a more reciprocal relationship (see the "Donor Relationship Management" loop in the model). Advertising, particularly on TV, can be a shorthand way of telling potential big donors that your candidate is "real" or viable.

At the same time, not all advertising is aimed at persuasion. As Gary Coby told us, digital advertising has become an effective way to raise smaller contributions because online ads can link through to fundraising forms that appear alongside information, even videos, about the candidate. As critical as those massive contributions from big donors are for building a substantial financial foundation for a campaign, the smaller contributions become the fuel that keeps the campaign going. Small donors can be solicited over and over again before they reach the fundraising cap; small-dollar donors tend to view their contributions as an investment and are more likely to help in other ways, either financially or by volunteering to knock on doors or make phone calls.

Media coverage of the candidate also tends to boost fundraising—and not just when the news is good. Savvy campaign communicators can turn bad news into effective fundraising pitches, especially over the Internet for the kind of small-dollar contributions that are relatively easy for a candidate's faithful to give.

THE ROLES AND GOALS OF A CAMPAIGN MANAGER

Campaigns are one of the most consistent growth industries in the American economy, with the most recent fundraising and spending totals smashing all records and dwarfing what was conceivable only a few years ago. The total cost of congressional and presidential races combined approached $7 billion in 2016 (see Figure 1.3), and spending will surely exceed that amount in 2020.[31]

FIGURE 1.3

Cost of Campaigns

Total Cost of US Elections (1998–2012)

Congressional Races ▢ Presidential
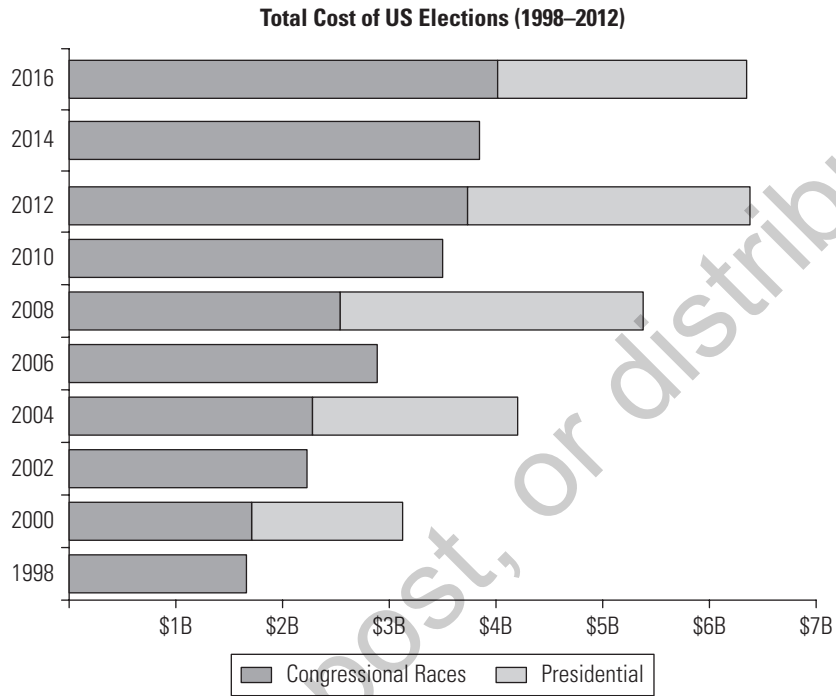
Meanwhile, more and more media outlets obsessively cover how much money is being raised and spent, and they minutely track all of the activities that comprise modern campaigning. Whereas the flowchart model (Figure 1.2) captures the dynamism of a campaign's inner workings, the following chart (Figure 1.4) offers a succinct take on the core activities that appear on any campaign manager's to-do list.

But, stepping back for a moment from the campaign's activities, we must ask some hard questions about the nature of modern elections: Do they matter? Is most of the money raised and spent squandered on useless activities? Do any of the activities referred to in Figure 1.4 have a measurable impact on determining losers and winners? Some political scientists who study campaigns have argued that campaign activities have minimal to zero effect on the ultimate election results. In other words, they say that all of the money raised and spent, and all of the enormous effort expended on electioneering, tend to cancel each other out. They also argue that the fundamentals of the campaign—indicators such as the

What Do Campaigns Do?

✓ Raise Money

✓ Hire Lawyers

✓ Conduct Research on the Electorate

✓ Research Opponent

✓ Research Yourself

✓ Develop Messages

✓ Create Messages

✓ Target Messages

✓ Deliver Messages—Air, Ground, Free, Paid

✓ Gain and Avoid Advantages

Source: Copyright 2015 W. Feltus & NMRPP LLC.

gross domestic product, presidential approval ratings, the partisan distribution of a given state or district—are the biggest drivers that determine election results.

But let's frame the "so-what" issue in a different light: If campaigns are typically humming with activity (raising funds, researching opponents, targeting voters), what does it all add up to? *Do campaigns matter? If campaigns do matter, how do they matter?* Why should we study campaigns? Why *do* campaigns? Why do accomplished women and men devote so much time, sweat, and money to activities that perhaps at best have a meager effect on electing candidates to office?

This is no idle theoretical debate. As you will find in Chapter 2 and elsewhere in this book, campaigns matter—and in particularly crucial ways that depend on the political climate, the nature of the electorate, and other variables, some of them under the campaign's control. Our 100-plus interviews with America's foremost campaign managers yield some insights into how and why campaigns make a difference at the electoral margins and show that pundits are prone to overplaying the effects of campaigns, whereas the majority of political scientists tend to underestimate the effects of campaigns.

Looked at another way, all campaign managers need to answer the five questions featured in the workflow campaign model (Figure 1.2), and how well a campaign is able to answer these questions can be, and often is, determined on election day: *Who are our target voters? How do we reach them? What do we tell them? How are we doing? What are they doing?* These core questions,

FIGURE 1.5

What Campaign Managers Do: Ten Key Roles the Campaign
Manager Must Play
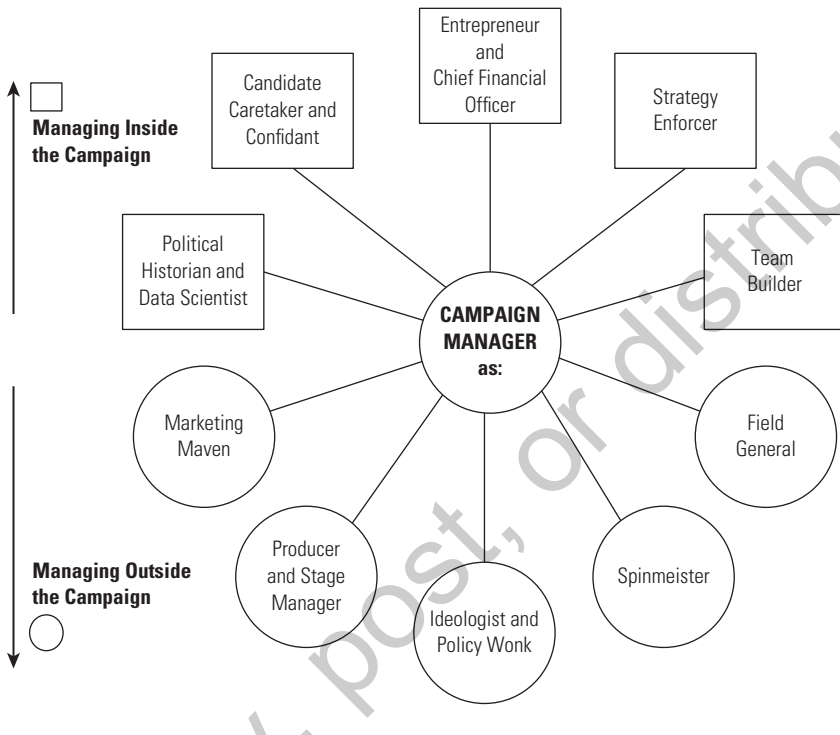
deceptively simple sounding, are actually rather complicated. They frame the
roles that ultimately all campaign managers must fill in order to be effective
at their jobs. In addition, campaign managers not only have to answer these
questions, but these questions are interdependent, and managers must wear
multiple hats as they structure their campaigns to put their candidates in a
position to win their elections.

Campaign managers have to play a series of roles so that they can answer
these questions and run their campaigns effectively. Ultimately, the campaign
manager is responsible for the smooth and synchronized functioning of the
workflow and performance of any campaign. Although a manager's particular
experiences might make him or her an expert in a certain part of the process,
most managers are generalists who can wear many different hats. In their
conversations with us, they have described an array of roles they've had to play
that may be more varied and complex than the expectations for the average
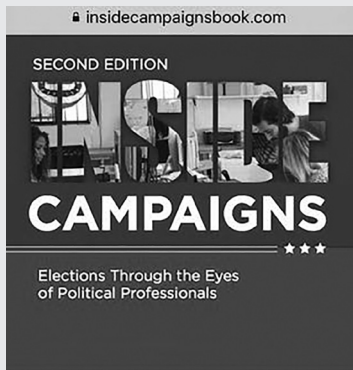
See the most frequently aired 2016 presidential campaign TV spots, watch other videos referenced in this book, and find updated resources at the authors' website, InsideCampaignsBook.com.

CEO of a Fortune 500 company. We've grouped these roles into chapters (see Figure 1.5) that correspond to the ten roles.

These ten "hats" that any successful campaign manager must wear will guide us as we explore how campaigns function and how they can affect the outcome of elections. Managers that excel in these roles and ask and effectively answer the five questions do not guarantee that their candidate will triumph, of course. But they can give their campaigns the kind of organization, messaging, strategic direction, and steadiness that in modern American politics is necessary to compete in some of the hardest contests our society knows, contests with tens of millions of dollars as well as issues of war, peace, the economy, and civic society often riding on the outcome.

NOTES

1. Running in heavily Republican Alabama, Democrat Jones prevailed by 1.5 percent in a special election with GOP nominee Roy Moore, who faced accusations of sexual assault and misconduct against teenage girls. One year earlier in Alabama, Trump beat Clinton by 28 percentage points. http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/12/politics/speech-doug-jones/index.html.
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8. D. Axelrod, personal communication, March 14, 2013.
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12. Elbridge Gerry Keith, "A Paper on the National Republican Convention of 1860" (University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign, June 19, 1904), https://archive.org/details/paperonnationalr00keit.
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27. J. Cauley, personal communication, November 1, 2011.
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29. H. Barbour, personal communication, October 30, 2011.
30. S. Law, personal communication, September 29, 2011.
31. OpenSecrets.org, "Cost of Election (1998–2016)," https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/cost.php.