

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Stories from the Campaign Trail

By Stephen Somerville

There is nothing in a campaign that beats door-to-door canvassing. It is where the action is. It is that time when the candidates and their emissaries get to meet the jury, one door at a time. Canvassing provides feedback, information on issues, moods and voter priorities.

One can also gain a better understanding of the candidate by watching them deal with rejection, tough questions, voter anger or the occasional embarrassing situation.

One personal canvas story comes to mind.

A number of years ago, I was alone on a nice Saturday morning canvassing on behalf of a candidate in Mississauga. I had just left one house and came out between two cars onto the next property when I saw it, or should I say, we saw each other. The German Sheppard was not very big - about six feet tall and seven hundred pounds!

The problem was that I was scared and the dog knew it. I turned away and ran down the driveway. Neither Ben Johnson nor Donovan Bailey would have caught me. Amazingly, the dog was well-trained and he stopped at the end of his master's property.

The homeowner was in his white housecoat looking at me from his front window having a great laugh. He then gave me a special hand gesture signifying, I guess, good will to all. I, being the good canvasser that I was, placed a notation on the canvass form:

?person at household really interested in policy, please send the candidate to discuss!?

Some anecdotes from the recently completed municipal campaign trail.

From a first time candidate:

?Everything is pretty much the same on the campaign trail, except of course, for 'Sign, Sign, everywhere a Sign', to quote the song. Between wind, vandalism and by-laws it's a nearly a fulltime job to keep up with them.?

One candidate has a novel approach to increasing voter turnout:

?I have been doing a silent survey on the number of pet owners, especially dog owners, and I feel that the dog population is well over 32 per cent and quite vocal! This is equal to and if not over the last elections actual voter population turnout. So, my theory is that if we offered a real special dog owner treat incentive on election night, so as to try get them out, we'd probably top all expectations as to voter turnout overall in this election.?

Obviously from one non-incumbent candidate:

?One guy said, 'All politicians are gangsters.' My wife said that her husband (me) wasn't a gangster because he wasn't a politician, yet.?

From the same candidate:

?To the question, why should I vote for him, my wife once said, 'If I can give him 30 years of marriage, you should be able to give him 4 years.'?

It is nice to see that we have our law and order voters:

?The most unusual occurred last week when a woman stopped me and asked what I was going to do about '...those darn teenagers...' Her suggestions ran the gamut from curfews to (and I'm not kidding) electronic bracelets. I respectfully suggested that electronic tracking bracelets would be perhaps a bit extreme, and she was nonplussed with my answer, saying, 'Well if you're not going to do something about it?' and then walked off. Well, you can't please everyone??

And my personal favourite anecdote:

?? (a voter) asked a canvasser what party the candidate was running for and before the canvasser in question could muster up an answer about this being a municipal election and that the candidate was not affiliated with any one political party the person in question stated adamantly that under no circumstances would they vote for the Republicans.?

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