



THE VALUE OF CAMPAIGNING IN DEAD RED SEATS

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Campaigning means many things depending on the circumstances and what the objectives are.

If it is a military campaign then lives are at stake and the objective must be worth fighting for.

If it is a product it means identifying your audience and making your product as attractive as possible in order to make a profit. If it is a political campaign, you do what it takes to win the public's attention. Are all three any different from each other or do they follow unseen guidelines that mask their true intentions. What I propose to do is to demonstrate that campaigning on a political level has its similarities with the former two.

To demonstrate further I will use a campaign that is normally called in liberal circles, campaigning in a dead red seat. A dead red seat is one that is considered a safe Labor seat. Labor in this case is the equivalent of what a Democrat and a Liberal is what is commonly known as a Republican in the USA. I am using these two nations as examples because the way I see politics in Australia is one of emulating our North American brethren the USA. As much as I admire the Americans, their style of campaigning in my view is not for an Australian environment.

The early settlers of this nation came from very humble beginnings and don't take kindly to the tall poppy syndrome and voting for one leader without considering others who have taken up the cudgel to serve the people. Those who are considering using campaign tactics that have similarities with North American politics are doomed to fail and the recent Federal election is an excellent example of what can go wrong using those methodologies and campaign concepts. Gathering of information using new technologies is one thing but to apply those same techniques on a massive scale without human interaction is another and fraught with hidden and unforeseen dangers.

Consider a campaign in a dead red seat, where the margin is so great that you wonder why on earth even bother campaigning in the first place. Well that's the first mistake to make before the campaign has even started. Some 26 years ago when I first joined a political party I spent time observing, monitoring and identifying the issues that mattered. I came to the conclusion that one did not have to operate in a safe electorate working with the converted to contribute to the overall political campaign. I realised that working within a dead red seat provided opportunities that were beyond my wildest dreams.

At that time I was operating as the secretary for our local branch called the Rosanna branch within the electorate of Jaga Jaga and it is there that I realised that those with whom I was working with had their own long term agendas which I felt were rather selfish and not in the interests of the Liberal party. There was chap since passed away who worked tirelessly for the party, using his life savings for the betterment of the party he so loved and yet did not seek any remuneration or compensation for his troubles. Here was one bloke who led by example and I for one learnt many valuable lessons from his selfless attitude.

Those were heady and joyful times and the rot had not yet set in. We had Bruce Skeggs, running the show, Vin Heffernan, Michael Kroger at the helm, Jeff Kennet was in his element and Petro Georgiou, whether you liked his style of administration or not is immaterial; but he was superb administrator. To add to the mix, we can throw in Frank Hangan who was always there to provide good solid advice to young men and women and I must confess looked up to Frank Hangan. Harold Eather bless his soul was an ex-Army chap of the Korean war and a no nonsense man, taught me never to show fear when faced with a hostile Policy Assemble (State Assembly) on matters that needed someone to stand up alone and call a spade a spade or in defence of another. Michael Kroger on the other and was in a league of his own and it was to him that I and many others looked to leadership and sought out his advice for the future.

Michael Kroger pointed me in the direction of Scullin, knowing that I lived on the outskirts of Jaga Jaga another Northern suburb held by Labor. I was brimming with ideas, concepts, and methodologies and wanted to practice them. The first thing on our plate at the time was to identify our manpower resources and assets if any, followed by identifying the positive aspects of campaigning in a strongly held Labor seat. After a number of brainstorming sessions we decided upon the following as being important to the longevity of a Liberal Party presence in a dead red seat.

In hindsight, raising four sons, a political career was not on the horizon and in any case I had three very good ladies who were also instrumental in giving me good advice. Their names are Vi Hurley, Eva Nagy and Rae Kennet who sadly passed away some years ago. I guess keeping the Liberal flag flying in the north and being a father of four was more important than pursuing a political career. I have no regrets.

Senate votes	Funds for every vote	Training new members
Labor resources exhausted	Creating networks	New campaign tactics
Roles and responsibilities	Positions and delegates	Liberal Presence
Intelligence gathering	Identification of issues	Pre-selection support
Assistance to electorates	Introduction of technology	

On reflection, looking back on the past I have often wondered whether it has been worth it and has our contribution been of any value to the Liberal party and did we make a difference. The answer is in the positive as over that period we somehow maintained a Liberal party presence against all the odds, faced and overcame many political challenges, withstood the strength of time, battled for political supremacy, witnessed friends come and go, weathered the factional battles and changes in leadership and reforms that unfortunately allowed the rot to enter through the back door, by the slow erosion of the branches that contributed much the fabric of the Liberal party.

Prior to the David Kemp reforms we as a branch would conduct events, raise funds and use those funds collectively at the State and Federal election campaigns. After the reforms, many branch members lost heart and stopped coming to meetings. We raised funds only when required and that was only for State and Federal elections. The reforms truly ripped the heart out of many branches and slowly without those responsible realising it, the rot set in.

Those in the know, realised that by creating State and Federal Electorate councils they could manipulate the votes at State Council and thus gain control. Without sounding egotistic, those responsible for the changes and taking control, were successful in every dead red seat except for Scullin. Promises were made to delegates, jobs were given to young and aspiring leaders through three month stints at senators of other members of parliament electorate offices, others identified at leadership and/or Candidate training programmes. Many if not most of these young men and women worked very long hours for their political masters just to have on the resume that they worked for a Minister or a Senator.

While this was occurring, others who I name the whisperers and sycophants would utilise these young men on election days and have them stand for hours in all kinds of weather handing out How to Vote Cards with the promise of a job or a favour that will assist them to be employed within the political system. I have had many of these young men and women travel to my home in the Northern suburbs seeking help and advice after finding out that they had been misused and abused. These same youngsters were given support with their resumes, advice and mentoring that assisted them to recover and move forward with some degree of confidence.

If readers read between the lines they will recognise that I have given the game away and that we who operate in the dead red seats are also a haven for those used and abused. I guess I can confess at this point in time what drives me to assist a new generation to come in and take the reins of power and influence from those whose reforms have brought the Liberal party into disrepute and reduced the membership of a once thriving political community. Have I written enough or does more need to be said, why we operate in dead red seats.

I will close off by commenting on a recent vicious attack on me personally. Although the comments were uncalled for and un-Australian, they made a mockery of my generation who had travelled this path long before they were born and the disrespect demonstrated by them left a very bitter and sour taste in my mouth. I wondered why on earth I was battling to usher in a political generational change in the first place. Did my retractors not realise that when I criticise their generation it was to help them look through the trees and not at them. There is always something different and wonderful if one looks hard enough.

I must say that knowing me, I will go down fighting for the values of my generation in order to prepare the next generation with the knowledge and tools to meet the challenges of the future. It is a responsibility I am glad to bear. After all, are we not all same under one flag and nation we call home - Australia.

As always, my apologies for the poor grammar, punctuation and savagery of the Aussie English language. All that I can say is that it is great to be alive and one does not give up in the face of adversity.



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