

Keys to a Successful Campaign

Consistent, positive message and listening skills are crucial



SESSION: HOW TO MAKE YOUR SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION CAMPAIGN A SUCCESS

Presenters: Port Washington-Saukville School District: Michael Weber, superintendent; Carey Gremminger, board vice president (pictured)

After having run unopposed in two election cycles, Port Washington/Saukville school board member Carey Gremminger garnered opposition in the spring of 2012, prompting reflection on why — or if — she wanted to continue on the board. She concluded she still wanted to serve.

“I want to give back and be of service,” she said. She stressed that once you decide to run, “you’ll have a part-time job for three months, on top of all the things you normally do.”

She highlighted the basic campaign message as critically important, suggesting a candidate “write it down, memorize it” and believes “positive communication is more meaningful to voters than negative talk. No one likes a complainer.”

Your communication style is important and she advised “making a commitment to be a good listener,

relatable, friendly, optimistic and willing to communicate. You have to be all of these things,” she said, offering that listening is extremely important. “A lot of people just want to be heard.”

She set her campaign committee in January, prior to the April election. She recommends finding the right person for the right job. When someone asked if she needed help, “I seized that offer immediately. Throw out some ideas, so they know you have a plan. Find out what they’re comfortable doing.” She said once someone offers to help, it is essential that you follow-up on their offer.

On the campaign trail she suggests, “Be prepared for anything,” recounting questions about her work habits and who she voted for in other elections (questions she declined to answer, telling the person it didn’t have anything to do with

being on the school board). She avoided one-issue candidate forums (lower taxes) and communicated via email to ensure a record of why she declined.

She enthusiastically embraced door-to-door contact with voters. “I think it’s really awesome for people to open the door and be able to talk to the candidate. I had a blast.” Contrast that “can-do” attitude with her opponents who “were very gloom and doom. Taxes and staff compensation were their only issues. Your scope has to be wide. They saw obstacles; I saw opportunities.”

She said, post-election, you need to send out personal thank you notes to your supporters, retrieve your yard signs (“That’s money sitting out on people’s front lawns!”), and win or lose continue to be positive. “This has to be fun. It is what you make it. You want it to be memorable.” ■

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