

The Hotline

CONSULTANT CANDIDS

CONSULTANT CANDIDS: Running With The Current

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Jon McHenry is the VP of Ayres, McHenry & Assoc., Inc., a nat'l public opinion and public affairs research firm. McHenry has worked with a variety of political and corporate clients. In addition to working with the firm's statewide and Congr. clients, he has worked extensively with orgs. to target resources for multiple state House and state Senate races. McHenry ran the DC Marine Corps Marathon in '05 and '07. And today, he is our "Consultant Candid."

What was your first job?

Picking the rough edges off the cane in Nantucket lightship baskets. It didn't take long for my boss to realize he'd get a better deal by having me stack firewood outside instead.

What is your proudest moment professionally?

Helping Governor Riley's team oust an incumbent governor.

What one event in a candidate's past would pose the biggest problem in a campaign?

It's tempting to say paying a prostitute \$4000 for a night of companionship. But really, it's anything that displays hypocrisy, whether it's employing a prostitution ring like ones you had prosecuted or taking junkets from lobbyists as a state senator when you'd crusaded against them in the campaign.

If you could be in any other line of work, what would it be?

If we're talking about a dream job -- one that you'd like, but aren't necessarily qualified for -- it would be general manager of the Red Sox. More realistically, with a different choice of graduate degrees I would be defending corporations from frivolous lawsuits.

Negative campaigning -- good or bad?

One man's negative is another man's "contrast." If you don't show the differences between the candidates, which is typically seen as negative, what's the point of having an election?

Where is your happy place?

On vacation with my wife and daughters, preferably knee-deep in the ocean.

What is your favorite restaurant to meet clients?

Ten Penh.

What campaign (past, present or future) would you most like to be a part of?

Reagan's campaign in 1980. Now THAT was a campaign about differences.

What is the ideal number of clients to have at one time?

There's not a hard-and-fast rule, because some clients just need an occasional brushfire, and others need tracking several days a week. The "I-know-it-when-I-see-it" rule is that it can't be more than the principles can keep their hands on and interact with clients on a day-to-day basis.

What firm/individual who does your kind of work for the other party do you respect the most, and why?

We've had great success working across the aisle with Dave Beattie and Bryan Dooley at Hamilton Campaigns. They're smart, and appreciate the difference between giving their clients good advice and simply telling them what they want to hear. Thom Riehle commands a focus group like no one else. And we've done some good work leading to good advice with Alan Secret, too.

Straying a little outside our field, John Jameson at Winning Campaigns does a great job working the key message points into voter contact calls (and gives great reports on the outcomes). And Jim Duffy with Strother Duffy Strother is one of the best consultants you'll meet on either side. He always has an insightful observation and good joke at the ready.

What is the first section of the newspaper you read?

Sports, even if I do have to check the Boston Globe's website for additional baseball coverage. I get enough news throughout the day without getting the Post's take on the world prior to my first cup of coffee.

If you could only watch one news show, what would it be?

Special Report with Brit Hume. He's got the best panel going.

We're ending this feature with a question posed by the last interviewee. This is from Goodwin Simon Victoria Research's Amy Simon: What advice do you give to candidates about how to deal with their spouses and family?

A candidate needs to know that the spouse and family are 100 percent on board with him or her running, and that they don't want anything to do with the campaign beyond an occasional cameo on stage or in an ad.

Pose a question for the next interviewee.

Will the Democrats change their nominating process for 2012, and why?