

Book Review: 101 Ways to Win an Election

by Blog Admin

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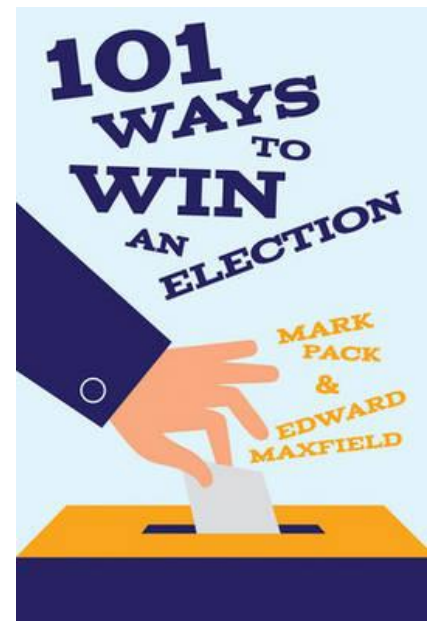
*In politics there are no prizes for second place. Packed with advice and practical examples, this guide reveals the insider secrets and skills from seasoned campaign professionals **Mark Pack** and **Edward Maxfield**. **Paul Brighton** finds that the authors avoid many of the errors made by so-called 'media trainers', and recommends the book for budding Merkels and Obamas.*



101 Ways to Win an Election. Mark Pack and Edward Maxfield. Biteback Publishing. July 2012.

Apparently, it's all down to the left nostril. Well, ok, "all" down may be a bit of an exaggeration: but quite a lot of winning elections is down to nostrils. You see, if your candidate's publicity photograph is taken too far away, they will look like a rather insignificant "billy no-mates". Or, as political communication experts [Mark Pack](#) and [Edward Maxfield](#) put it, they trigger the reaction: "Who is that blob in the distance?" But if you then overcompensate and take it from an inappropriately close-up angle, the potential voter may well be able to see inside the political nostril: and that will make the candidate look not merely pathetic, small and friendless, but – even worse – positively creepy.

There's more. It's ok to have a hole in your shoe. No less a campaigner than the late President Reagan, running for re-election in 1984, was photographed sitting on a political platform with his legs crossed, displaying such a hole. This was ok, we are told, because it showed he wasn't a complacent, well-heeled (pardon the pun) incumbent, but a guy who was putting in the footslogging for YOUR vote. One wonders, however, if that is a universally applicable political photo opportunity. If Michael Foot had displayed similar sartorial standards in the 1983 UK election, it is easy to imagine a rather less charitable interpretation being placed on his footwear.



Some of the classics of modern campaigning are here. The authors rightly extol the ground-breaking "Girl with a Daisy" ad from President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 campaign: the innocent child picking the petals from a daisy and counting them, as an ominous voice overmasters her, counting down to nuclear Armageddon: the implied consequence of voting not for the President but for his Republican rival Barry Goldwater. Conversely, the reader is reminded of the disastrous photo opportunity in a tank undertaken by the ill-fated Michael Dukakis in 1988. Like the badly-photographed candidate in a local election campaign, he too ended up looking like a "diddy" version of billy no-mates.

Inevitably, a lot of the material in the book is simple common sense. Don't overdo the chairs at a public meeting: you want the room to look full not empty, if you're lucky enough to get it filmed or photographed. Mitt Romney forgot that simple rule earlier in 2012 when he addressed a crowd of around 1,500 in a huge sports stadium. In most spaces, that number would be a sell-out: standing room only. But not in a ground seating nearly 100,000!

Another of the seemingly obvious rules advocated by the authors involves a simple truth, although they do not quite phrase it thus, lest it might sound a little too academic: make your communication symmetrical, not asymmetrical. Give the illusion (at least) of a dialogue, not a monologue. Send a survey as well as a sermon. Ask for a response. Give the voter a hook to get involved, rather than simply binning the leaflet or

letter. Here again, the authors are fascinatingly specific. Just as it's "all" down to the left nostril, so it is that three seconds is apparently the crucial time span in political campaigning. Not because three seconds is now the average length of a soundbite (though we must be getting down towards that now). No, it's because typically: "... a leaflet has just three seconds to grab someone's interest as they lift it up from the doormat or out of the letterbox – three seconds in which the decision is made to read it further or place it in the bin."

The media advice in general is well-informed and useful. The authors avoid many of the errors made by so-called "media trainers", such as the assumption that most broadcast interviewers are actively trying to trip up and catch out their interviewees. Twenty years' experience of presenting current affairs programmes on radio taught this reviewer that keeping the needle wagging and the show on the road is usually more of a priority – especially in local and regional radio and TV – than crafting the killer question and making "a name" for yourself. "Remember that, on most occasions, the interviewer will not be rooting for you to mess up.... The interviewer will not want a boring interviewee with little to say so they will usually help you out as much as they can."

Another of the advantages of the book is that it really does cover almost all of the available media openings – from blogs and email, through local radio and regional television, to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Its authors also genuinely get the often-misunderstood art of the effective press release. The acquisition and effective use of voter data, the arcane psychology of election posters and their role in supplying the illusion of inevitability and momentum, along with the trickier parts of building effective campaign teams, are all here. Pack and Maxfield transcend their Liberal Democrat affiliations to make this a book which genuinely relates to mainstream democratic practitioners of all hues.

Underlying it all is their realisation that most of us will have seen the 1972 Robert Redford film *The Candidate* at some time in our lives. Those of us who prefer observing the political scene to being active in it can identify with Redford's election-winning character as he looks blank at the end of the film and asks "What happens now?" But don't worry: Pack and Maxfield have an answer for that one too.

Paul Brighton is Head of Department of Media and Film at the [University of Wolverhampton](#). He grew up in Wolverhampton. He attended Wolverhampton Grammar School, and won an Open Scholarship to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He got a First in English and, after postgraduate research at Cambridge, worked for the media. He was a BBC Radio presenter for twenty years, before becoming Head of Broadcasting and Journalism at University of Wolverhampton. His book "News Values" was published by SAGE in 2007. He is now Head of Media, Film, Deaf Studies and Interpreting; and his next book "Original Spin: Prime Ministers and the Press in Victorian Britain" will be published by I.B. Tauris next year. [Read reviews by Paul](#).

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