
The political consulting field is full of qualified, experienced, energetic young and old political pros. But consultants are not gods. They should be interviewed, screened, asked questions of, and generally shopped for in the same way that a printer or any other service is found. In this article, the author tells you what to expect from which type of consultants, what to ask them, how to hire, help and manage them. It also dispells the many myths campaign managers and candidates have about consultants.

degrees from well known universities and exude self-confidence and success. Whatever they say or do or whatever image they project, remember that they are not magicians, soothsayers or above criticism and aggressive cross-examination by a candidate and his staff.

Political consultants are fallible businessmen and women with specific, technical and analytical skills who make their living providing campaigns and political organizations with a service. Some are more talented and more honest than others; some

How to Hire and Manage Political Consultants

By Scott Wolf

It is not unusual for a political consultant to intimidate a candidate and his or her campaign staff. Consultants may read computer printouts they way you read the Sunday comics. They may use terms that sound impressive but mean nothing to you—G.R.P.'s, cross tabulation, market segmentation, area random probability sampling, focus group session, multivariate analysis, cinema verite, a self mailer, prospecting, GOTV, switch/split index. They may have impressive, advanced

are even brilliant. But any consultant your campaign is considering hiring should be carefully evaluated before a final decision is made.

Campaigns waste millions of dollars every election by having a deferential approach to consultants. Sometimes they purchase services they don't need. More often, they purchase potentially useful services, but fail to get what they should from them. This usually happens when no effort is made to work with the consultant and integrate his or her services into the overall strategic plan and organization structure.

This article is designed to demystify and rationalize the role of political consultants in election campaigns, and to help campaign managers and coordinators understand how to evaluate and use consultants effectively.

Scott Wolf is a political consultant specializing in public opinion polling, communications strategy, voting record and issue research, and interest group/PAC liaison. His recent clients have included the Democratic Senatorial and Congressional Campaign Committees, the National Committee for an Effective Congress, NBC Television News, Democrats for the '80s, U.S. Senator Gary Hart of Colorado, and U.S. Representative Bob Edgar of Pennsylvania. He has also been the research director for the Carter-Mondale Presidential Committee and the Democratic National Committee

Who Are Consultants?

Before you hire any political consultants you should rid yourself of the illusion that political consulting is a well-defined, uniform, self-regulating profession. Unlike law, medicine or accounting, to be a political consultant requires no specific

degrees, courses of study or apprenticeship programs.

A political consultant ultimately is anyone who describes him or herself as a political consultant. Some are Ph.D.s or Harvard law graduates while others have never attended college. Complicating matters further, the most effective and insightful political consultants are as likely to be college dropouts as they are to be former law review editors. (Creativity, analytical ability, a keen understanding of society and social psychology, extensive practical, political experience, and attention to detail are some of the main qualities of good political consultants.)

Much of political consulting, like politics, is visceral; the best statistician in the world may be a second-rate pollster, and a top film producer may be an ineffective political media consultant. Good consultants need to be adaptable, resourceful and "quick studies." They seldom have the time or control over their research and projects enjoyed by their colleagues in academia. Theirs is a world where unpredictable events are the norm. A news story may allege a scandal about their client's past, or an unexpected issue may be introduced into a campaign as "ethnic purity" was in the 1976 presidential campaign or controversies like Billy Carter's dealings with Libya in 1980, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, or the seizing of American hostages in Iran may occur, posing problems that require quick solutions.

Confronted continuously with unexpected events, consultants often have to react promptly with incomplete information. They must help answer questions such as the following: should a particular charge be rebutted, and if so, how? Should a debate challenge be accepted? Should a press conference be called on a particular subject? Should the campaign switch its best organizers from one section of the state to another for the last two weeks of the campaign? (The premium placed on quick, thoughtful responses to confusing and chaotic situations makes it imperative that your consultant have a good political antennae and lots of experience.)

Types of Consultants

Good consultants (and bad consultants) come in many varieties. Some only dabble in the consulting business and derive their main source of income from a less seasonal, more stable occupation such as law, accounting or teaching. But even the best known full-time pollsters and film producers sup-

plement their political work with projects for banks, television stations, corporations, and non-profit organizations.

Most political consulting firms are closely identified with one party or another. Some are even identified with a particular ideological wing of the party of their choice. In the polling field, for example, Richard Wirthlin of Decision Making Information Systems Inc., Lance Tarrance, and Arthur Finkelstein work almost exclusively for conservative Republicans. Bob Teeter of Market Opinion Research works primarily for moderate Republicans.

(Whether Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, almost all political consulting firms have relatively small staffs. The image of the 300-person political consulting firm with its own high-rise headquarters and a computer in every office is a myth. Few political consulting firms, including the best known and most prestigious, have more than 30 or 40 employees; many have less than 10.)

Most consultants not only specialize in one or two areas, but subcontract out part of their work to other firms. In the field of polling, for example, the actual interviewing, particularly door-to-door interviewing, is frequently conducted by local market research firms rather than by full-time staff members of a polling firm. Key-punching and data processing of survey results is another activity that pollsters frequently delegate to subcontractors since the costs of maintaining an in-house data processing computer system are great.

Media consultants also rely on subcontractors in many instances. Technicians and camera crews are often hired to shoot spots under their supervision and the actual buying of advertising time on TV and radio is sometimes subcontracted out to an ad agency or a firm specializing in time buying.

*Subcontracting is so common in the political consulting world that campaigns should not hire a consultant until they have evaluated both the consultant and his or her subcontractors.

Will A Consultant Help You Win?

Before you consider hiring any consultants, you should have a basic understanding of the role different types of consultants can play in increasing your chances of victory.

If evaluated, supervised and served properly, political consultants can be helpful to a campaign in a variety of ways. They possess know-how that

is sometimes lacking on a campaign's staff: technical skills, experience, knowledge of statistical and substantive information, and the ability to analyze situations from a detached perspective. They can make significant contributions to the two principal activities of any successful campaign: communication and organization.

In the field of communication, the consultants with the most to offer are generally pollsters, issue research specialists, and media advisers.

The Role of Pollsters

Good pollsters will provide a campaign with information about the electorate's mood, issue attitudes, issue priorities, attitudes toward major political personalities, candidate preferences, demographic characteristics, and recent voting history. In some cases, they will also furnish information about the electorate's media habits and preferences, attitudes towards the major parties, and attitudes towards other significant political groups.

Too many prospective clients of pollsters, however, assume that polls only collect one type of information at a time. Campaign operatives discuss "issue" polls, "name recognition" polls, "horse race" polls and "candidate-image" polls as if they were separate entities. Any good poll, even a short, ten-minute phone poll, can and should provide information about all of these topics. It makes little sense economically, logistically or strategically to commission separate polls for any of these topics.

Attitudes and characteristics uncovered by a poll should be analyzed according to key voting blocs such as men, women, black, white, regional groups, Democrats, Independents, Republicans, age groups such as 18-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65 and over, blue collar, white collar, professional/executive, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and others. The appropriate voting blocs to be analyzed will vary from one constituency to another, but in all cases there are usually many that should be taken into account. Dividing the electorate into relatively discrete groups helps to rationalize and clarify a campaign's overall strategy. No properly managed campaign pays equal attention to all segments of the electorate. The more well defined a campaign's targets are, the more rational and manageable the campaign's communication and organizational strategy will be.

A good poll will provide much more than a set of numbers and a computer printout; it will provide

an outline of the campaign's strategy. Results should be translated first and foremost into the campaign's suggested targets for the campaign. They should also tell you how to communicate most effectively with these targets: what themes to stress, what tone to adopt—upbeat and casual or very serious and straight-laced, conciliatory or confrontational—what issues to emphasize, what aspects of the candidate's and the opponent's personality and background to emphasize most and least, what aspects of your opponent's background to emphasize most and least and other strategical information.

It is the pollster's job to not only construct a good questionnaire, but to make sense out of the results, and to demonstrate their practical application in campaign strategy. (How well a pollster predicts the outcome of a race is far less significant than how well his information and analysis influences the outcome of the race.) Accurate, informative and well-analyzed poll results can not only help you immensely in scheduling, media content and targeting, but in brochure development, speechwriting, debate preparation and fundraising as well.

Unfortunately, most campaigns do not reap the full benefits of a poll because they are unaware of its strategic potential.

The Role of Media Advisers

Whether your campaign is spending \$5,000 or \$5 million on media, you need to develop messages and communicate them effectively. (By working closely with pollsters and issue researchers, media advisers can help to create the general themes of your campaign as well as design the methods of communication through which these themes will gain positive exposure.)

A good media consultant is both a strategist and a technician. He or she will not only know how to produce high-quality ads, but will also know how to produce politically effective ads that will reach key target groups as inexpensively as possible.

Many of the most effective media consultants developed an interest in politics and campaigns long before they became experts in advertising. But regardless of the sequence of events in a media consultant's career, those with at least some political experience are likely to be far more helpful than those whose most controversial ad was for Ken-L-Ration or Ivory Snow. The political marketplace is more emotional, complicated, volatile, and likely to be influenced by historical and cultural factors

than is the commercial marketplace. So, be wary of ad agencies with no political knowledge or prior political advertising experience.

Media consultants, like other types of political consultants, should not be looked upon as gurus or magicians. They need to be provided with in-depth information about the candidate, the constituency, the opposition, recent local political trends, and other factors concerning the election. If you expect them to create an ad without this information, you are expecting too much. When choosing a media consultant, it is also very important to gauge their potential degree of rapport with and understanding of the candidate. This is especially important in television advertising, where the consultant will often be almost "directing" the candidate in an attempt to capitalize on the candidate's personal and issue strengths.

The Role of Researchers

Any credible campaign needs to develop a set of positions on major issues and to distinguish at least

some of these positions from those of its opponent. This may sound simple and logical, but it is seldom done correctly and often not given the attention it deserves.

(Consultants specializing in issue and opponent research should provide the link between the campaign's polling data and its communications strategy.) Although a poll identifies the general themes and issues that should be stressed in campaign communications, such themes and issues are only the skeleton of an effective communications strategy. The flesh and bones of such a strategy can and should be provided by good researchers, individuals who can identify specific policies that address a general concern like inflation, and who can also identify vulnerabilities, inconsistencies, and other flaws in the positions of the opposition.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, a good research consultant is not someone who spews forth reams of information on a set of topics. (Rather, it is someone who extracts from reams of information *the most politically relevant and helpful data and translates it into usable language and themes*) In order to determine what is political-

Tips for Low-Budget Campaigns

Many low-budget campaigns cannot afford to contract for major consulting services. By being resourceful, however, nearly all can at least gain some exposure to helpful consulting techniques. Some suggestions for doing so are:

1. Write to your national party committees, their state affiliates, and friendly interest groups for all available campaign training manuals.
2. Inquire at your party committees and friendly interest group headquarters about the possibility of having such services as polling, targeting or media production performed at no or low cost through consulting programs sponsored by the party or interest groups.
3. Inquire at your party committees and friendly interest group headquarters about campaign management training schools that are open to you and your staff.
4. Read other articles in this journal, the contents of the bibliography at the end of this article as well as the contents of other bibliographies on campaign techniques available from parties, interest groups and academic institutions.
5. Ask larger campaigns in your area if they will provide you with a day or two of their consultant's time in return for some local organizational support from your staff.
6. Hire at least one staffer who knows something about sophisticated political consulting techniques.
7. Recruit free or low-cost consulting talent from local institutions such as colleges and universities, but only recruit those people whose formal credentials are supplemented with extensive, practical political experience.

ly relevant and helpful, the research should understand something about public opinion, major interest groups, and the communication process in political campaigns. (In other words, a good political researcher is also a political strategist, not simply a diligent collector and recorder of facts.) (But a researcher should have basic research skills as well, particularly knowledge of how to identify and use good informational sources, writing ability, and the ability to organize a major research project.)

There seems to be an almost infinite amount of use for good political research in a campaign. Research information can not only help tremendously in getting press coverage, preparing a speech, press releases, letters to the editor, or debate statements, but also in selection of media events, candidate meetings with editorial boards, and talk show programs. Facts learned from research are also invaluable in defining the differences between candidates in paid media. Research provides facts and figures to support positive or negative themes, as well as the information needed to make decisions on sites and audiences for TV spots or formulating copy for campaign brochures and newspaper advertisements.

But research is an organizational tool as well. It can persuade groups to give you their endorsement, provide them with information with which to persuade their membership and educate canvassers about campaign issues so that they can answer voters' questions. It is crucial to conducting effective fundraising. Information gained may persuade people from certain industries or professions to contribute to your campaign. It can also be extremely helpful in gaining contributions from organized interest groups, or in neutralizing groups that might be predisposed to support your opponent.

But despite the numerous significant uses of research information, it is usually assigned a low priority in many campaigns because collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing large amounts of information lacks the glamor and appeal of producing media, planning events, fundraising, or organizing grass roots voter-contact programs. *But these and other campaign tasks cannot be performed adequately without good research.* As leading media consultant David Garth has noted: "When we start a campaign, the first question I ask is, 'Who's doing your research and what have they done?' Second question is 'Who's doing the press?' Before you spend a dime on media, you have to have good material. You have to do the issue stuff. Every damned campaign I see proves it."

The Role of Fundraising Consultants

Since very few people like to raise money, many campaigns need outside assistance in developing and executing a successful fundraising strategy. But because the field is an unpopular one, there are not as many experienced, political fundraising consultants as there are political consultants in such fields as media and polling.

Fundraising consultants fall into two broad categories: those who raise money from large, individual and organizational contributors, and those who raise money from small contributors, usually through direct mail. Large contributor fundraisers tend to be political generalists, while direct-mail fundraisers tend to be more technical in their background and approach. "Fat-cat" fundraisers generally plan events or direct a group of volunteers to conduct one-on-one solicitations. They should have a thorough knowledge of the political action community—the concerns and decision-making processes of various PACs, as well as the past contribution patterns and the key personnel at these PACs. (They should be able to determine who your candidate's prime fundraising constituencies are, and the best ways to reach them.)

They should also understand thoroughly the major provisions of whatever election law governs your race, whether it's federal, state, or local. The kinds and amounts of contributions you can accept, and the disclosure requirements for these contributions should be known by any fundraising consultant you hire.

(In the field of direct-mail fundraising, you should be looking for someone who can identify and formulate an effective message, determine the best targets for this message, and ensure rapid, efficient delivery of the message to the target audience.) In some cases, you may need to hire several different individuals or firms to obtain this range of expertise. Good copywriters may have no involvement in list acquisition and brokering, and list brokers may have no involvement in packaging and mailing the finished solicitation.

If you have a relatively small, predetermined set of friends and past contributors to mail to, then you may be able to avoid the expense and complication of hiring outside direct-mail consultants. But if you want to develop a large number of new contributors to provide a major share of your campaign's revenues (e.g. 25 percent or more), then you should seriously consider hiring a direct-mail firm.

Myths and Misconceptions

There are many misconceptions about political consultants and their profession. Many of these have been created by political journalists who try to impose rationality and sophistication on the political world that is often illusory. Some of the misconceptions are created by political consultants themselves, particularly those misconceptions about how to evaluate a consultant's ability. What follows is a list of some of the most common myths about the political consulting profession.

1. Most consultants have large staffs and can draw on tremendous in-house technical resources such as computers and audio-visual equipment.

2. Consultants are hired guns with no significant political philosophy or party preference.

3. Good statisticians generally make good pollsters.

4. You can judge a consultant's ability by his win-loss record.

5. The primary purpose of a poll is to predict the outcome of an election.

6. Almost all it takes to raise money through direct mail are good lists and some seed money; the message is of secondary importance.

7. Local consulting firms can always provide greater insight about your campaign than consultants from outside the area.

8. You can usually judge the quality of a consultant by the prices he or she charges.

9. The more obscure and technical terms a consultant uses, the better qualified he is to help your campaign.

The Role of Targeting and Grass Roots Organizing Consultants

When dealing with a constituency that is too large for the candidate to contact individually, you should think about targeting and grass roots organizing. (Targeting tells a campaign who it should contact for various purposes, and grass roots organizing ensures that the contact is made, recorded, and followed up in an appropriate way.) The ultimate goals of targeting and grass roots organizing are to identify and persuade undecided voters and identify and bring to the polls your supports, including those who upon first contact are not registered.

Targeting research should be conducted early in a campaign, long before an extensive grass roots organization is recruited. It should be done by

someone who enjoys working with numbers, but who also understands something about how these numbers should be translated into voter identification contacts and election day get-out-the-vote programs. (Ideally, the person deciding which voters to target should also have some role in the implementation of a voter contact strategy.) If not, the voter contact strategy may have little relationship to the targeting results.

By analyzing past election results for small geographic areas, you can see where ticket splitting is most likely to occur, support for Democrats or Republicans is likely to be greatest, and turnout and registration is likely to be highest or lowest.

A targeting consultant should supply campaigns with lists such as the following:

1. A list of all counties or towns in the constituency in order of their Democratic or Republican voting propensity.

2. A similar list for all precincts.
3. A list of all counties or towns in the constituency rank ordered by ticket-splitting propensity.
4. A similar list of all precincts.
5. A list of all counties or towns in the constituency rank ordered by turnout rates (percentage of registered voters voting).
6. A similar list of all precincts.
7. A list combining rank orderings for partisan propensity and turnout arranged in descending order of partisanship.
8. A list combining rank orderings for ticket-splitting propensity and turnout arranged in descending order of ticket-splitting.
9. In races where "drop off" is a real concern, a list should be provided of all the counties or towns in the constituency rank ordered by their drop-off rate from the top of the ticket to the position you are seeking.
10. A similar list for all precincts.
11. In races where voter registration is a high priority, an attempt should be made to compute the proportion of "eligible" voters who are registered in each county or town. This can be done by determining from U.S. Census Bureau data the total number of individuals 18 years of age and older in each major geographical subdivision and dividing this number into the number of registered voters in each subdivision. Once these statistics are computed, they should be combined with data on level of partisanship. Key registration targets for a candidate would be those areas with low registration rates and very high rates of support for candidates of his party.

One of the prerequisites for successful targeting is intelligent selection of past elections for targeting computations. Inclusion in any targeting formula elections that were gross deviations from normal patterns, may render your results worthless and misleading. A targeting consultant can help in the selection of the most appropriate races, but only after he or she has been provided with background information from the campaign.

Once the targeting is completed, a campaign should be ready to implement a grass roots, voter-contact strategy. Increasingly, such strategies are being supervised by consultants who are filling the vacuum created by the weakening of local party organizations and party loyalties. Since few party volunteers are available to contact voters, and

since voters are less committed to party labels, the need for elaborate, paid phone banks and volunteer recruitment efforts has been increased dramatically.

Grass roots consultants now frequently do some or all of the following:

1. Recruit, train and supervise volunteers or paid canvassers.
2. Locate and install phone banks.
3. Prepare messages and coding systems for various voter-contact programs.
4. Tabulate, analyze, and organize the results of voter-contact efforts.
5. Develop and execute a system of follow-up mailings to both undecided and committed voters.
6. Prepare and execute an Election Day Get-Out-the-Vote program.

Evaluating Consulting Services

Clearly, a candidate for a state legislative seat with a total budget of \$10,000 and a total constituency of 20,000 people cannot afford and does not need most of the consulting services outlined so far. It is just as clear that a candidate for the U.S. Senate in California, New York or another large state with a million dollar-plus budget would need to purchase most of the services discussed (polling and media at a bare minimum). But for candidates who fall between these two extremes, decisions about which consulting services to invest in depend on a number of factors: The talent available on the campaign staff, the projected campaign budget, the image and personality of the candidate, the physical size and population of the constituency, and the availability of volunteers. The availability of free, professional assistance from friendly interest groups or party organizations is also important, as is the size of a donor file from a previous campaign, the degree of emphasis to be placed on media and grass roots organizing, the expected level of turnout, and the expected activities and expertise of other, allied campaigns. There are no ironclad rules for determining whether or not to contract specific services, but there are some general guidelines that apply in most cases.

1. *You should hire a pollster if you plan to spend any substantial amount of money on electronic media (radio or television).* If your projected electronic media budget is \$75,000 — \$100,000 or more, then it would be foolish not to spend some of it on at least

one poll to help you decide which themes and issues to stress in your media, and towards which groups to aim your message. There are some areas, however, where polling would be highly advisable, even though you do not have a substantial electronic media budget. For example, a relatively unknown challenger to an established incumbent probably needs some accurate polling data to formulate an effective, *free media* strategy.

2. You should probably hire a media consultant if you plan a significant electronic media effort, particularly if you plan to stress messages more complex than simple name recognition.
3. A media consultant with time-buying expertise, or a consultant who does only time-buying, should be seriously considered if you plan on airing spots in several different markets with numerous TV and radio stations.
4. If neither your campaign, nor your media consultant has a researcher with good political experience and judgement, then you should seriously consider hiring a research consultant. This is particularly advisable if either you or your major opponents have extensive public records.
5. Candidates running for the U.S. House or Senate for the first time who have no Washington experience and few Washington contacts may want to hire a fundraising consultant to help them stage a fundraising event in the nation's capitol and to help them solicit the political action committees based in Washington.
6. In most cases, direct-mail fundraising consultants and an extensive direct mail program should only be considered when one of the following conditions exists:
 - a. The candidate appeals to a large, identifiable, national constituency.
 - b. The candidate's opponent is anathema to a large, identifiable national constituency.
 - c. The candidate is an ideologue about whom a strong, somewhat emotional, direct-mail piece can be crafted.

But a candidate should probably not hire a direct-mail consultant if his anticipated revenue from other sources and his established donor file is small. Direct-mail fundraising usually requires a fairly substantial initial investment, particularly if outside lists have to be purchased and tested.

7. A campaign that expects to place major emphasis on individual voter contact and get-out-the-vote efforts should consider hiring targeting and grass roots consultants. The latter is particularly important if a large volume of calls and follow-ups is required in a short period of time, and if the volunteer talent pool to handle these chores is slim. Many 1980 losing House and Senate campaigns experienced near-empty phone banks night after night because they relied exclusively on volunteer help.

Grass roots consultants are particularly helpful in multi-candidate, low-turnout primaries, where turnout is crucial.

It is believed by many that Georgia's Lieutenant Governor, Zell Miller, was able to finish second in the 1980 multi-candidate U.S. Senate primary and force a runoff with incumbent Senator Talmadge because he had an extensive, professional, voter contact operation.

(Since targeting and grass roots activities are so closely related, the need for targeting increases as the need for grass roots activity increases. While targeting can be done in-house, it is often not done as well under such circumstances.)

Who Should You Hire?

(Once your campaign has decided which services it needs from outside consultants, it must decide which consultants it should hire for specific services.) Since campaign consulting has become so specialized, the selection and coordination of consultants has become complicated. Campaigns for the presidency, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, governorships, and even for large mayoral or county executive posts often need to hire two, three, even four different consultants — a pollster, a media adviser, a specialist in grass roots organizations, a fundraising specialist, and sometimes others.

Locating, interviewing and investigating firms in each of these fields can be time consuming as well as confusing. No comprehensive list exists of all political consultants operating in the United States, so campaigns must rely on word-of-mouth or the recommendations of friendly interest groups or political party organizations. The national organizations of the Democratic and Republican parties maintain lists of some consultants, as do the American Association of Political Consultants and

major political action committees representing trade associations, labor unions, conservatives and liberals. The Campaign Works in Washington, D.C. also maintains a list. Since no organization has a comprehensive list, it is advisable to seek lists from several different sources.

Interviewing political consultants can be as difficult as locating them. Many campaign staffers lack the political experience and self-confidence to know what questions to ask consultants, or what kinds of services they are entitled to receive from them. Sometimes a consultant takes advantage of a prospective client's ignorance by turning an interview into a razzle-dazzle promotion laden with jargon, charts, and bold claims of strategic brilliance. The prospective client is frequently reduced to a passive, fawning role in such cases and walks away from the discussion thoroughly impressed, but no better informed on how the consultant can contribute to the campaign's success.

This is a serious mistake that can lead either to the hiring of an unreliable firm or to the hiring of a competent firm that goes into the campaign thinking it won't be judged or controlled to any extent by the campaign staff. Both of these situations produce problems for campaigns and should be avoided at all costs.

There are a series of simple, straightforward steps you can take to evaluate consultants and avoid these problems. The purchaser of consultant services should probe for as much information as possible about any prospective consultant before hiring him or her. Applying these steps doesn't require strategic brilliance or a command of consulting jargon; it only requires persistence, assertiveness, and common sense.

Questions for Consultants

Before you hire any consultant, you should feel confident that you know the following information:

- the kind of product the consultant is likely to give you
 - how the product will help your campaign
 - when the services will be provided
 - what the services will cost
 - what follow-up services, if deemed necessary, can be provided
- To gain sufficient information about these general topics, you will need to ask the following questions:

1. *What specific services does the firm provide?* For example, if the firm offers polling, is it conducted by phone or door-to-door? Does the firm provide a written analysis of the survey's results? Can the firm conduct "focus-group" sessions among a small number of people in addition to a survey of a large sample of the population?
2. *Can some samples of the firm's past work be provided for your inspection?* Studying this material can acquaint you with the style, format and quality of the firm's past work. It also enables you to see whether the services that the firm claims to offer are likely to be delivered.

"Subcontracting is so common in the political consulting world that campaigns should not hire a consultant until they have evaluated both the consultant *and* his or her subcontractors."

3. *Who are some of the firm's past winning and losing clients?* This information will enable you to get well-informed, third-party evaluations of the firm's work. It can also enhance your understanding of the firm's philosophical leanings as well as its range of campaign experience both terms of geography and type of race.
4. *What is the firm's partisan and philosophical orientation?* This information is useful, even if the firm claims no ironclad ideology, saying, for example, that it works mostly for moderate Republicans and occasionally for liberal Democrats. By gauging the ideological and partisan leanings of the firm, you can better assess whether the firm will put its maximum effort into your race. For example, if you are a pro-labor, northern, liberal Democrat, you may want to think twice about hiring a firm that specializes in aiding southern, conservative Democrats who advocate right-to-work laws. Complete ideological and partisan compatibility, however, should not always be a prerequisite for hiring a firm, especially if the firm is impressive according to other criteria.

5. *How long has the firm been in business? How has the nature of the firm changed since its inception?* These two questions should at the very least tell you how much experience the firm has had in providing its current services.
6. *What are the professional backgrounds and credentials of the key staffers?* This should help you evaluate the depth and range of the firm's talent.
7. *Which staffers would be involved in work for your campaign?* This information can clarify what talent you are actually purchasing when you contract for the firm's services.
8. *What subcontractors does the firm use, if any, and what are their backgrounds?* Again, this information tells you who would be working on your campaign.
9. *What is the total size of the firm's staff?*
10. *How many other clients does the firm currently have, who are they, and what range of services are being provided for each?*
11. *How many additional clients does the firm plan to add during the current election cycle?*
12. *How many clients did the firm have during the last election cycle, and what range of services were provided for each one?*

These four questions are designed to increase your understanding of the firm's work load, and its likelihood of meeting deadlines and responding to emergency requests.

13. *What is the turnaround time for the firm's various services?* This information will determine whether your timetable for completion of various campaign projects can be met by the firm.
14. *What are the fees for each of the firm's services that are of interest to your campaign? What services or expenses aren't included in the quoted fees (travel, phone consultation, in-person briefings, etc.)?* This information will let you know whether you can afford the firm, and enable you to conduct intelligent comparison shopping.
15. *Why should the firm in question be hired rather than its competition?* The firm's answer to this question can give you some insight into its creativity, self-assessment, and promotional ability. How well the firm can promote your candidacy may be related to how well they can promote themselves.

Special Questions for Pollsters

In addition to the questions just discussed, there are some other questions that should be posed to pollsters. These include the following:

1. *What data will be consulted to design the sample—past election data, registration data, or census data?* Usually, if the sample is supposed to represent a general election voting population, the best data for sample design is past election statistics.
2. *How will the sample be selected—from voter registration lists, regular phone books, reverse phone directories, or through random, digit dialing?*
3. *Who will conduct the interviewing—an in-house staff, or contracted interviewing services?*
4. *What kind of training and supervision will be provided to interviewers?*
5. *On what days, and at what times will interviewing be conducted?* Generally, the best times for interviewing are between 5:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. on weekdays, 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Saturdays, and between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. on Sundays. In large metropolitan areas, weekday interviewing should probably start somewhat later (6 or 6:30 p.m.) and can proceed until about 10 p.m. Optimum weekend interviewing times vary somewhat from place to place, depending on the religious activity and lifestyle of the area. For example, it would be as inadvisable to call people listed in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn on Saturdays as it would be to call people in parts of the Bible Belt on Sundays.
6. *If door-to-door interviewing is to be conducted by outside interviewing services, what sort of validation procedures, if any, will be taken?*

A good polling firm will validate between 10 and 20 percent of the door-to-door interviews conducted by outside interviewing services. Validation usually involves calling up a sample of all survey respondents and asking them if they were interviewed on specific topics on a particular day by a particular person for a specified length of time.

7. *In the analysis of the survey results, what key voting groups will be isolated for individual analysis?* Good pollsters generally analyze the results according to particular

characteristics such as political party, age, race, income, sex, region, occupation, candidate preference, or length of residence in a particular locale. The client should be allowed some input in the selection of these groups.

8. *Will both a written and verbal report be provided for the stated fee?*

Special Questions for Media Consultants

Because media consulting, like polling, is a complicated field, it requires scrutiny beyond that already recommended for all prospective consultants. Additional questions worth asking media consultants include the following:

1. *Where does the media firm expect to get most of the issue research information that it will need to produce the campaign spots—from the campaign, from a research firm, or from its staff?*
2. *What is the range of the length of spots that the firm has done in the past—10-seconds, 30-seconds, 1-minute, 5-minutes, or 30-minutes?*
3. *What format, if any, does the firm prefer for its spots—cinema verite, documentary, issue-oriented, animation, or other?*
4. *How much experience does the firm have with negative, "attack" spots?*
5. *Who does the firm use as an announcer for its spots?*
6. *Can the firm provide in-house or subcontracted time-buying services?*

More on Evaluating Consultants

Some candidates and campaign staffs may be reluctant to question prospective consultants as intensively and extensively as recommended above. They may feel that aggressive, cross examination of experienced consultants would be impertinent or unnecessary. On both counts they are wrong. Consultants are a diverse and fallible collection of individuals. Some may not be qualified to handle your campaign; others, though qualified, may not offer the right mix of services, staff and approach or your particular needs. The only way to determine whether one is right for you is to follow a set of guidelines like the ones outlined above. Good consultants will respect you for a thorough ap-

proach; poor consultants will be exposed by such an approach.

Managing and Servicing Consultants Effectively

There is no reason to breathe easily or to reduce your scrutiny of consultants once they are hired by your campaign. How much benefit you will derive from them depends as much on your approach as it does on theirs. If you provide direction, information and advice, you are likely to get a much better product than if you adopt a passive role and assume that brilliant strategy will evolve from a vacuum. One of the biggest mistakes campaigns make is to assume that consultants are wizards who run operations that require no outside supervision or input.

Necessary Client Input

If you are hiring a pollster, media consultant, issue researcher, or any combination of the three, it is imperative that you give them extensive information about your candidate, your opposition, your constituency, and your chief political allies and opponents. Some of this information will, of course, be subjective, but all of it can help to frame relevant poll questions and produce relevant analysis, as well as help pinpoint the issues, themes and constituencies for your campaign communications. Such assessments should be frank, blunt, detached and made primarily by the candidate's staff rather than by the candidate himself. (What follows is a list of the main pieces of information and analysis that a campaign should provide any consultant involved in communications strategy.) Most of these items should be addressed regardless of whether or not you hire a communication consultant, since they include many of the building blocks of a coherent campaign plan.

1. *What are the principal strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's personal image—his perceived personality, character, background, and style of operation?* For example, someone drawing up such a list for the 1980 Carter campaign might have identified integrity, compassion, earnestness and intelligence as Carter's strengths, and poor speaking style, ambivalence, softness, and political inexperience as Carter's weaknesses.

2. What are the principal strengths and weaknesses of the opposition's personal image—his perceived personality, character, background, and style of operation?
3. What are the principal strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's issue stands and activities?
4. What are the principal strengths and weaknesses of the opponent's issue stands and activities?
5. What are the issues of greatest concern to the voters in your area? (List in order of perceived importance.)
6. What themes and issues are you considering emphasizing in your campaign?
7. What themes and issues do you anticipate your opponent emphasizing in the campaign?
8. What are some of the most significant political trends in recent years in your area? For example, the election of the first Republican senator in 40 years, the election of the first black to the city council, the recent passage of two tax limitation referenda, or an increase of 10 percentage points in the Republican share of voter registration during the past four years.

“Media consultants, like other types of consultants, should not be looked upon as gurus or magicians.”

9. Who are the major political personalities inside or outside of your constituency that are likely to have some impact on your race?
10. Which other elections occurring at the same time as yours could have a significant impact on your race?
11. What are the major, politically-relevant demographic or interest groups in your area? For example, blacks, military retirees, aerospace workers, organized labor, the National Education Association, the Right-to-Life Movement, environmentalists, Jews, Catholics, builders, farmers, the Chamber of Commerce, renters, government workers, or others.
12. Who are your principal interest group allies and opponents?

13. Which significant demographic or interest groups do you feel least knowledgeable about?
14. What are the principal radio, TV and newspaper outlets in your area and what size and kind of audience does each one reach?

Playing the Devil's Advocate

A campaign should challenge any conclusions and recommendations their consultants make that seem confusing or ill-advised. Campaigns should avoid approaching consultants the way sick people approach doctors—with excessive deference and awe. They should never assume that everything that comes out of a consultant's computer, mind or mouth is brilliant, even after useful information has been provided to the consultant by the staff. A campaign staff should remember that consultants also have to give advice based on intuition, hunches and educated guesses. If the staff thinks that it can make the consultant's guesses more educated, it shouldn't hesitate to do so.

By challenging a consultant's recommendations, the staff is likely to produce one of two beneficial outcomes:

1. The consultant will provide a fuller and better explanation of his or her recommendation, thus convincing the staff of its soundness and increasing the chances that it will be implemented;
2. The staff will convince the consultant that the recommendation is unsound, and then provide the consultant with additional information so that a more helpful revised recommendation can be made.

In dealing with pollsters, there are several procedures that can maximize the positive impact of devil's advocacy. First, clients should insist on seeing a draft of a questionnaire before it is finalized and administered to respondents. Second, clients should insist on a verbal briefing of the poll results before written recommendations are produced.

To ensure maximum client control over media consultants, several steps should be taken:

1. The staff should meet with the media consultant at least two times *before any spots are produced*: once to provide a general overview of the political situation as outlined earlier, and a second time to be briefed on the anticipated themes, formats and scripts of the spots.

2. If a poll has been taken, the staff and the campaign pollster should confer with the media consultant about the poll results before any spots are produced. A similar conference should occur among staff, issue researchers and the media consultant prior to any production.
3. After a series of spots have been produced, a screening should be held for the campaign staff before final decisions are made about which spots to use, and how frequently to use them.

Conclusion

Politicians are fond of saying that in today's world there are no magical solutions or easy answers. But unfortunately, many suspend their skepticism about magic and miracles when they deal with political consultants. Because of this tendency, significant mistakes are frequently made in the hiring and management of political consultants.

As indicated earlier in this article, there are no effective policing agencies, ethics boards or accrediting institutions to screen and regulate political consultants. The profession is the epitome of laissez faire capitalism. The only people who can exert any control over political consultants and establish any standards of accountability for them are their prospective clients. Recognizing this, clients should be somewhat skeptical and cautious when evaluating and directing consultants. They should know what services consultants will provide and their areas of expertise.

Generally, clients get what they deserve from political consultants. If they provide a consultant with a lot of relevant information and make practical, specific requests, they are likely to get valuable assistance. But the computer adage "garbage in, garbage out" can also be applied here. If a campaign, for example, doesn't give a fundraising consultant a thorough evaluation of the groups that its candidate has helped the most, it can't expect that consultant to target these groups very effectively. If a campaign doesn't give its pollster a candid appraisal of its candidate's image, personality, background and issue stances, the pollster will not be able to test adequately the public's reaction to the various facets of his candidacy.

Usually, political consultants should not be hired to manage a campaign. They seldom have the accountability or legitimacy within the campaign's district to be accepted in this role, enough rapport with the campaign staff, or the time to fulfill a

managerial role adequately. Instead of actually managing campaigns, political consultants should be hired to provide campaign staffs with the tools and services required to run campaigns creatively and efficiently.

If campaign staffers lose control over consultants because the consultants intimidate the staff or talk circles around it, the staff is probably at fault. The staff must always remember that they hired each consultant; the consultant didn't hire the staff. Consultants work for the campaign—the staff must make sure that they also work *with* the campaign.

Campaign staffers should also keep in mind that consulting services are expensive and can be crucial to electoral success. Since campaigns have limited resources, it is essential that they get their money's worth from every consultant on their payroll. To ensure that maximum benefit is derived from a consultant, however, the campaign must provide that consultant with good information, guidance and feedback, not excessive deference and *carte blanche*. ★

REFERENCE & BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blumenthal, Sidney. *The Permanent Campaign*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1980.
- Bode, Ken. "Walking Pol," *The New Republic*, June 17, 1978, pp. 8-10.
- Bonafede, Dom. "A \$130 Million Spending Tab Is Proof—Presidential Politics is Big Business," *National Journal*, January 10, 1981, pp. 50-52.
- Cantril, Albert H., and Roll, Charles W. *Polls (Their Use and Misuse in Politics)*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1972.
- "E.P.O. Interviews David Garth." *Elected Public Official*, January/February, 1979, pp. 52-59.
- Fraser, Janet, and Moore, Jonathan, ed. *Campaign for President (The Managers Look at '76)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1977.
- "How a Dozen Candidates Planned to Win and Why Six Did." *Elected Public Official*, January/February, 1979, pp. 34-51.
- Lanouette, William J. "Candidates Turn to Their Pollsters for Advice on Campaign Strategy," *National Journal*, October 18, 1980, pp. 1741-1743.
- Lanouette, William J. "The Selling of the Candidates, 1978", *National Journal*, November 4, 1978, pp. 1772-1775.
- Neustadt, Rick and Paisner, Richard. "How To Run On TV," *New York Times Magazine*, pp. 20, 72, 74.
- Nordberg, Olivia Schieffelin. "Polling 1980: Adrift on the Ocean of Possible Truth," *American Demographics*, June, 1981, pp. 24-29.
- Shields, Mark. "Using Television," *Politics Today*, pp. 12, 13.
- Washington Post*. "In Politics, the Pollsters Lead," May 18, 1980.
- Washington Post*. "The Names and Faces Change, but the Rhetoric Remains the Same," October 31, 1980, p. A4.
- Wheeler, Michael. *Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics (The Manipulation of Public Opinion in America)*. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1976.
- Wiedemann, Harden H. "Post-Watergate Politics Becomes a Boom Industry," *Advertising Age*, April 14, 1980, p. 1.
- Witcover, Jules. *Marathon (The Pursuit of The Presidency 1972-1976)*. New York: New American Library, Inc., 1977.