

# How To Become a Local Political Power Broker Using 15 Simple Strategies

*Blog for Arizona*

Everyone likes to be appreciated and sought after, and one way to make that happen is to wield political influence and power. However, some folks in local politics go about seeking power and influence in negative ways; by withholding information, excluding others, playing head-games, and generally making life unpleasant for everyone. All of us know some folks who behave like this if we've spent any time participating in local politics. Frankly, folks like this are one of the reasons lots of people don't participate in local party politics. But you can become a power unto yourself in local politics by following a few simple and fun strategies that help everyone and have a positive impact on your community and the electoral chances of your party and your favored candidates - and few of them require a quorum or a copy of Robert's Rules of Order.

**1) Be Present:** Woody Allen was spot-on when he said that 80% of success is just showing up. If you never show your face at political events, people won't have a chance to know who you are. Don't overdo it, though. You can suffer from overexposure. Be there. Be excellent. Be gone. Don't let people take you for granted, let them court you a little. Show up at the nitty-gritty working events such as neighborhood association meetings, city council study sessions, or legislative district party meetings, not just the glitzy fund-raisers where you get to take your picture with famous people. Volunteer to do a few things that you are really good at - and actually do them and do them really well. Don't take on responsibilities you won't, or can't, follow through with. If you bite off more than you can swallow, let people know and withdraw with grace, don't just pull a fade. Don't let anyone waste your time. Don't suffer fools, but don't make enemies who will want to sabotage you. Always be on the look-out for people who are smart, capable, and realistic, and cultivate those relationships assiduously.

**2) Map People's Networks:** The secret of political power is understanding and using social networks. The connections of sympathy, obligation, self-interest, allegiance, and affection that flow through the networks of social connections between people is the key to persuading people to help you and those you represent. Human social maps are a very complex and ever-changing landscape requiring diligence, social adroitness, and constant attention to maintain and use: dealing with the complexity of human relationships is why we have such enormous brains in the first place. Investigating and understanding people's social networks is a key asset for any political power broker. You must understand the social networks to which your neighborhood is connected, who are the key influencers in those networks, and what those influencers' motives and needs are. As to what you have to barter with in order to get those influencers to utilize their networks on your behalf, keep reading...

**3) Deliver an Audience:** There is nothing any politician loves more than an audience. If you have a reputation for being able to create successful events that people will spend their valuable time to attend, you become a sought-after commodity. Whether you can throw down a coffee-klatch in your dining room for a dozen, or a party for fifty, the ability to quickly motivate your social networks to shake out appropriate and, hopefully, influential folks to listen to a political hopeful will make you a treasured political asset. It's not very hard to scare up folks to hear a person who already has power and/or fame (and probably get them to pay for the privilege), but it much more rare and useful to be able to bring folks together to listen to someone who wants their help getting formal political power and doesn't yet have any.

**4) Learn to Ask People for Money:** Having the combination of emotional intelligence and bulldog-like determination to extract money from a people who would rather spend it on another pair of shoes or an evening out, without leaving anyone feeling rolled, is rare. Anyone can pass a hat and collect a few bucks, it takes balls and brains to make an appropriately-sized ask face to face and make it stick. If you can learn to wield the velvet-wrapped, ball-bearing-filled cash that is the fund-raiser's persona, you will not lack for political friends who owe you favors: at least until America wises up and institutes public financing of campaigns nationally. But, as we shall see, even then, this skill will still have a place in the power broker's arsenal.

**5) Deliver Qualifying Donations:** This one is specific to those jurisdictions, like Arizona, that have a public campaign financing system. Such systems generally require candidates to gather a minimum number of token donations to demonstrate community support for their campaign in order to qualify for public financing. Gathering hundreds, or in state-wide races, thousands, of small donations can be quite time-consuming and tedious. Those who have a political network ready to be able to deliver many such small donations in short order are a valuable asset to a campaign. Having Identified those in your networks who can't afford large donations or big commitments of time, but want to be able to make a difference, you'll be set to deliver large numbers of qualifying donations in short order.

**6) Know the Terrain:** Geography is queen of the battlefield - and political warfare is no different than the real thing. You have to understand the terrain of your domain in order to defend it, or to lay siege to some else's. In this modern world, mastery means understanding the use of voter databases like the VAN/Vote Builder. If you are not trained in use of such powerful programs for understanding the political terrain and planning a campaign, you are a dinosaur and the big meteor just hit. You have to know who is persuadable, and who will just sic their dogs on you; if you are the one providing information to the VAN, rather than just relying on the VAN to know who's behind the next door, you are the neighborhood general that would-be kings will seek out. If you understand the lay of the land so well enough that you can marshal your marching army of canvassers efficiently through enemy territory while capturing all the available votes, you will be master of all you survey.

**7) Know Your Neighbors:** People are much more amenable to persuasion by people whom they already know, like, and trust. A deep and wide personal social network in your neighborhood is a priceless asset. The explosion of media choices means that the era of mass-market campaigns is coming to a close and the micro-targeted persuasion campaigns of tomorrow will be carried predominantly door-to-door, face-to-face, and mailbox-by-mailbox (whether snail mail or email). In such an environment, the person who already knows the people behind those doors, can recognize their faces and be recognized, and doesn't get spam-filtered or recycled immediately, is a new media kingpin. Familiarity doesn't breed contempt - it breeds votes for your chosen candidates.

**8) Become a Trusted Information Source:** Just as folks are more amenable to persuasion by people they already know, they are more likely to believe and be moved by information from a source they already trust. Be a trustworthy source of information - and take that trust seriously by not abusing it - and you can move people and determine votes with the information you provide. Whether you are dropping off campaign lit on a regular basis, just chatting over the fence, or rolling your own digital newsletter or blog, get people used to being able to rely on you for political information and half the work of persuasion is done. When you are the most politically informed and trustworthy person in your social networks, people will look to you to bird-dog the candidates and the issues for them. People aren't lazy when it comes to politics, they are efficient.

**9) Cut Through the Gobbledygook:** Many people see the thicket of forms and deadlines that come at them at election time and simply throw up their hands and walk away from the process. You can be their fixer. Know the regulations, laws, deadlines, polling-places, form layouts, and all that minutiae well enough to make it easy and effortless to come to you and get answers and assistance. Be proactive in helping people navigate the bureaucratic maze and endeavor to teach them so that they can rely on themselves and help others. Knowledge closely held can be a source of power, but knowledge of how to participate in the political process is not the sort that should be ever be hoarded, to do so hurts your party and limits your influence.

**10) Deliver Petition Signatures:** One of the most tedious tasks, and the one which most new candidates get little help with, is collecting signatures to get on the ballot. If you can utilize your networks to generate a number of valid signatures quickly you are big help to a budding campaign. Whether it is part of your canvassing efforts, through tabling events, or an unusual willingness to stand outside a library or supermarket, the petition signature is the coin of the political realm. Even more valuable is the unusual ability to get others to also gather signatures; that is like having your own mint for coin of the political realm.

**11) Deliver Seed Money and/or Political Contributions:** Having your own fund-raising network of even small dollar contributors will quickly make you a sought-after political commodity. If you can regularly bundle batches of smaller contributions to

direct substantial money to the candidates you champion, you will find yourself on short-lists for campaign committees and tapped to put your prowess to work for party and charitable organizations in short order. Those additional links in your political network will open new vistas in your social landscape and give you further credibility as a political power broker in your locality.

**12) Deliver Volunteers:** Money is wonderful, but especially in local races the real currency of power is people's time and effort. Most local campaigns rely heavily on volunteers to man the phones, canvass the neighborhoods, and keep the campaign moving. If local candidates can come to you and walk away with a pledge of volunteer staff, you become their most valued ally. Whether you provide this service through your formal networks, such as your union, service organization, church, or club, or by personal recruitment of your neighbors and friends, you will be a welcome guest at any political function and people will always be sure to take your calls and answer your emails.

**13) Learn Many Campaign Tasks:** Nothing is worse than a volunteer that wastes time and resources because they know nothing about campaigning. To make yourself valuable, you have to know what you are doing. Take the time to attend trainings with your local party or one of a number of national political organizations that offer grassroots political training. Learn how campaigns work and how to accomplish tasks like organizing a phone bank, or a canvassing, how to organize a voter registration drive, how to host a fund-raiser or rally, how to write a competent press release, how to use campaign software or build a campaign website, or how to host a debate or online chat. You needn't become a campaign manager, but if you understand many facets of the fundamental work that campaigns engage in, you will be much more valuable to your favored candidates.

**14) Train and Lead Volunteers:** Warm bodies are always useful in a campaign, but a trained and experienced volunteer is the best gift you can give a political candidate. In addition to being competent yourself, being able to transmit that experience to your recruits makes you a force-multiplier that everyone will want on their team. During the down-time between campaigns dedicate yourself to training up your volunteers or get them to formal trainings. During campaigns, hone your volunteers into competent and seasoned campaigners. Build team esprit and cohesiveness as you build a local political machine that is capable of simply plugging in the name of a candidate and getting to work.

**15) Get Elected:** Or at just try running for something. If you use even a few of the strategies outlined here, you will have people begging you to run for a leadership position: and rightly so, for you will, in fact, be a leader. Whether it is a party leadership position, a stint on a board of directors or committee, or public elective office, you can make those positions enhance your position as a local power broker. Don't run simply in order to run, and don't do it for the small amount of discretionary

power the position may provide; that is the surest way to ruin the reputation you've built. Run to build your social network. Run to meet and form working relationships with people. And always run with an articulated and thoughtful goal firmly in mind - something that you can accomplish using the position you seek - and make that goal, not your personal aggrandizement, your rallying cry. Lay out what you've accomplished in the past, the good qualities you bring to the table, the recommendations from your social network, and what you would like to accomplish for your constituents. It is vitally important that you make your goals clear in being elected or selected; that is the essence of a mandate and having a clear mandate will make it easier to succeed in office. Even if you aren't successful being elected, however, you can only improve your reputation and name-recognition by playing the game fairly. That means no *ad hominem* attacks on opponents, no dirty tricks, no questionably ethical practices, and no lying about your plans once elected. By participating directly in the electoral grinder, you will have a better appreciation of the pressures on political candidates hoping to be elected.

Veteran political reporter Jim Nintzel of the Tucson Weekly recently wrote a wonderfully concise [guide to running a credible campaign with 10 simple rules](#) - you would do well to memorize it before announcing your candidacy.

Article From Blob for Arizona: <https://arizona.typepad.com/blog/2007/11/how-to-become-a.html>.