



# FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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## Campaign Tips From Cicero

The Art of Politics, From the Tiber to the Potomac

By Quintus Tullius Cicero

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In 64 BC, the great Roman lawyer and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero ran for consul, the highest office in the republic. Marcus was 42 years old, brilliant, and successful. But he was not a member of the nobility, and that would ordinarily have eliminated him from consideration. The other candidates that year were so unappetizing, however, that he had a chance of winning -- at least, thought his younger brother, Quintus, if Marcus could run a good campaign. At this time in Rome, any adult male citizen could cast a ballot, but voting was done in a complicated system of groups. The richest citizens had disproportionate power, social and political patronage was crucial, and campaigns were accompanied by some bribery and occasional violence, but the electoral process was orderly and usually reasonably fair. The *Commentariolum Petitionis*, or "Little Handbook on Electioneering," purports to be a memo written by Quintus to Marcus telling him how to proceed. Some scholars believe it is just that; others think it was written by another ancient writer. Either way, the author clearly knew a lot about Roman politics in the first century BC, which turn out to have a distinctly familiar feel. What follows are excerpts from a new translation of the *Commentariolum* by Philip Freeman, with some observations on its contemporary relevance by James Carville.

To my brother Marcus,

Although you already have all the skills a man can possess through natural ability, experience, and hard work, because of the affection we have for one another I would like to share with you what I have been thinking about night and day concerning your upcoming campaign. . . .

It is crucial that you take stock of the many advantages you possess. . . . Few outsiders have the number and variety of supporters that you do. All those holding public contracts are on your side, as well as most of the business community. The Italian towns also support you. Don't forget about all the people you have successfully defended in court, clients from a wide variety of social backgrounds. And, of course, remember the special interest groups that back you. Finally, make good use of the young people who admire you and want to learn from you, in addition to all the faithful friends who are daily at your side.

Work to maintain the goodwill of these groups by giving them helpful advice and asking them for their counsel in return. Now is the time to call in all favors. Don't miss an opportunity to remind everyone in your debt that they should repay you with their support. For those who owe you nothing, let them know that their timely help will put you in their debt. And, of course, one thing that can greatly help an outsider is the backing of the nobility, particularly those who have

served as consuls previously. It is essential that these men whose company you wish to join should think you worthy of them.

You must diligently cultivate relationships with these men of privilege. Both you and your friends should work to convince them that you have always been a traditionalist. Never let them think you are a populist. Tell them if you seem to be siding with the common people on any issue it is because you need to win the favor of Pompey [a popular general], so that he can use his great influence on your behalf or at least not against you. . . .

Another factor that can help you as an outsider is the poor quality of those men of the nobility who are competing against you. . . . Who would believe that men as pathetic as Publius Galba and Lucius Cassius would run for the highest office in the land, even though they come from the best families? . . . But, you might say, what about the other candidates, Antonius and Catiline? Surely they are dangerous opponents? Yes, they certainly are, but not to someone like you. . . .

You should be grateful to run against men like those two. They have both been brutes since they were boys, while even now they are notorious philanderers and spendthrifts. . . . Remember how [Antonius] was expelled from the Senate after a careful examination by the censors? . . . When he ran for praetor he could only muster Sabidius and Panthera to stand beside him. . . . After he was elected . . . , he disgraced himself by going down to the market and openly buying a girl to keep at home as a sex slave. . . .

As for Catiline, . . . [he] was born into a poor family, brought up in debauchery with his own sister, and shed his first blood killing Roman citizens and businessmen as a henchman of [the dictator] Sulla. . . . He even murdered his own brother-in-law, Quintus Caecilius, a kindly old fellow and good Roman businessman who cared nothing for politics. Catiline . . . took a club and beat poor Marcus Marius, a man very popular with the Roman people. . . . Catiline afterward was a friend of actors -- can you imagine? -- and gladiators. He lived a life of debauchery with the former group and used the latter as hired thugs in all his crimes. . . . He was so impudent, so wicked, so skilled in his licentiousness that he molested young boys almost in the laps of their parents. Do I even need to remind you what he did in Africa? It's all recorded in the indictments, which you should take the time to review carefully, by the way. . . .

## **KEEP HOPE ALIVE**

I want to talk about the details of how you should run your campaign. . . . To speak bluntly, since you are seeking the most important position in Rome and since you have so many potential enemies, you can't afford to make any mistakes. . . .

Running for office can be divided into two kinds of activity: securing the support of your friends and winning over the general public. You gain the goodwill of friends through kindness, favors, old connections, availability, and natural charm. But in an election you need to think of friendship in broader terms than in everyday life. For a candidate, a friend is anyone who shows you goodwill or seeks out your company.

Do not overlook your family and those closely connected with you. Make sure they all are behind you and want you to succeed. This includes your tribe, your neighbors, your clients, your former slaves, and even your servants. For almost every destructive rumor that makes its way to the public begins among family and friends. . . .

There are three things that will guarantee votes in an election: favors, hope, and personal attachment. You must work to give these incentives to the right people. You can win uncommitted voters to your side by doing them even small favors. So much more so all those you have greatly helped, who must be made to understand that if they don't support you now they will lose all public respect. But do go to them in person and let them know that if they back you in this election you will be in their debt.

As for those who you have inspired with hope -- a zealous and devoted group -- you must make them to believe that you will always be there to help them. Let them know that you are grateful for their loyalty and that you are keenly aware of and appreciate what each of them is doing for you. The third class of supporters are those who show goodwill because of a personal attachment they believe they have made with you. Encourage this by adapting your message to fit the particular circumstances of each and showing abundant goodwill to them in return. Show them that the more they work for your election the closer your bond to them will be. For each of these three groups of supporters, decide how they can help you in your campaign and give attention to each accordingly, reckoning as well how much you can demand from them.

There are certain key men in every neighborhood and town who exercise power. . . . Be sure to distinguish these men from those who seem important but have no real power and in fact are often unpopular in their group. Recognizing the difference between the useful and useless men in any organization will save you from investing your time and resources with people who will be of little help to you. . . .

Seek out men everywhere who will represent you as if they themselves were running for office. Visit them, talk to them, get to know them. Strengthen their loyalty to you in whatever way works best, using the language they understand. They will want to be your friends if they see that you want to be theirs. Small-town men and country folk will want to be your friends if you take the trouble to learn their names -- but they are not fools. They will only support you if they believe they have something to gain. If so, they will miss no chance to help you. . . .

You should pay special attention to . . . businessmen and moderately wealthy citizens. Get to know the leading members of these groups, which shouldn't be difficult as they are not great in number. . . . It will [also] help your campaign tremendously to have the enthusiasm and energy of young people on your side to canvass voters, gain supporters, spread news, and make you look good. . . .

### **KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE, BUT YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER**

You must have a wide variety of people around you on a daily basis. Voters will judge you on what sort of crowd you draw both in quality and numbers. The three types of followers are those who greet you at home, those who escort you down to the Forum, and those who accompany you wherever you go.

As for the first type, they are the least reliable since many will make domestic calls on more than one candidate. Nonetheless, make it clear to them that you are pleased to have them drop by. Mention your gratitude for their visit whenever you see them and tell their friends that you noticed their presence as well, for the friends will repeat your words to them. Even if they visit several candidates, you can win them to your side as solid supporters by taking special notice of them. If you hear or suspect that one of your callers is not as firm in his support for you as he might appear, pretend this isn't the case. If he tries to explain that the charges are untrue, assure him that you have never doubted his loyalty and certainly won't in the future. By making

him believe you trust him as a friend, you increase the chances that he really will be. Still, don't be foolish and accept every profession of goodwill you hear.

For those who accompany you to the Forum, let them know that you appreciate this even more than their coming to your house each morning. Try to go there at the same time each day so that you can have a large crowd following you. This will impress everyone greatly.

For the rest who accompany you throughout the day, make sure those who come of their own free will know how grateful you are for their company. For those who follow you because of obligation, insist that they come every day unless they are too old or are engaged in important business. If they can't make it, have them send a relative to take their place. It is vital that you have a crowd of devoted followers with you at all times. . . .

Since I have been writing so much on the subject of friendship, I think now is the time to sound a note of caution. Politics is full of deceit, treachery, and betrayal. . . . Your good nature has in the past led some men to feign friendship while they were in fact jealous of you, so remember the wise words of [the playwright] Epicharmus: "Don't trust people too easily."

Once you have figured out who your true friends are, give some thought to your enemies as well. There are three kinds of people who will stand against you: those you have harmed, those who dislike you for no good reason, and those who are close friends of your opponents. For those you have harmed by standing up for a friend against them, be gracious and apologetic, reminding them you were only defending someone you had strong ties to and that you would do the same for them if they were your friend. For those who don't like you without good cause, try to win them over by being kind to them or doing them a favor or by showing concern for them. As for the last group who are friends of your rivals, you can use the same techniques, proving your benevolence even to those who are your enemies. . . .

## **PROMISE THEM ANYTHING**

Impressing the voters at large . . . is done by knowing who people are, being personable and generous, promoting yourself, being available, and never giving up. . . . Nothing impresses an average voter more than having a candidate remember him, so work every day to recall names and faces. Now, my brother, you have many wonderful qualities, but those you lack you must acquire and it must appear as if you were born with them. You have excellent manners and are always courteous, but you can be rather stiff at times. You desperately need to learn the art of flattery – a disgraceful thing in normal life but essential when you are running for office. If you use flattery to corrupt a man there is no excuse for it, but if you apply ingratiation as a way to make political friends, it is acceptable. For a candidate must be a chameleon, adapting to each person he meets, changing his expression and speech as necessary.

Don't leave Rome! . . . There is no time for vacations during a campaign. Be present in the city and in the Forum, speaking constantly with voters, then talking with them again the next day and the next. Never let anyone be able to say that he lacked your earnest and repeated attention during the campaign.

Generosity is also a requirement of a candidate, even if it doesn't affect most voters directly. People like to hear that you are good to your friends at events such as banquets, so make sure that you and your allies celebrate these frequently for the leaders of each tribe. Another way to show you are generous is to be available day and night to those who need you. Keep the doors of your house open, of course, but also open your face and expression, for these are the

window to the soul. If you look closed and distracted when people talk with you, it won't matter that your front gates are never locked. People not only want commitments from a candidate but they want them delivered in an engaged and generous manner. . . .

When someone asks you to do something impossible, such as taking sides against a friend, you must, of course, refuse as a matter of honor, explaining your commitment to your friend, expressing your regret at turning down the request, and promising that you will make it up to him in other ways. . . . If you refuse a man by making up some tale about a personal commitment to a friend, he can walk away without being angry at you. But if you say you're just too busy or have more important things to do, he will hate you. People would prefer you give them a gracious lie than an outright refusal.

Remember [the politician] Cotta, that master of campaigning, who said that he would promise everything to anyone, unless some clear obligation prevented him, but only lived up to those promises that benefited him. He seldom refused anyone, for he said that often a person he made a promise to would end up not needing him or that he himself would have more time available than he thought he would to help. . . . If you break a promise, the outcome is uncertain and the number of people affected is small. But if you refuse to make a promise, the result is certain and produces immediate anger in a larger number of voters. Most of those who ask for your help will never actually need it. Thus it is better to have a few people in the Forum disappointed when you let them down than have a mob outside your home when you refuse to promise them what they want. . . .

Finally, as regards the Roman masses, be sure to put on a good show. Dignified, yes, but full of the color and spectacle that appeals so much to crowds. It also wouldn't hurt to remind them of what scoundrels your opponents are and to smear these men at every opportunity with the crimes, sexual scandals, and corruption they have brought on themselves.

The most important part of your campaign is to bring hope to people and a feeling of goodwill toward you. On the other hand, you should not make specific pledges either to the Senate or the people. Stick to vague generalities. Tell the Senate you will maintain its traditional power and privileges. Let the business community and wealthy citizens know that you are for stability and peace. Assure the common people that you have always been on their side, both in your speeches and in your defense of their interests in court. . . .

Our city is a cesspool of humanity, a place of deceit, plots, and vice of every imaginable kind. Anywhere you turn you will see arrogance, stubbornness, malevolence, pride, and hatred. . . . In such a chaotic world, you must stick to the path you have chosen. It is your unmatched skill as a speaker that draws the Roman people to you and keeps them on your side. It may well be that your opponents will try to use bribery to win your supporters from you, for this can often work. But let them know you will be watching their actions most carefully and you will haul them into court. They will be afraid of your attention and oratory, as well as the influence you have with the business community. You don't have to actually bring your opponents to trial on corruption charges, just let them know you are willing to do so. Fear works even better than actual litigation. And don't be discouraged by all this talk of bribery. I am certain that even in the most corrupt elections that there are plenty of voters who support the candidates they believe in without money changing hands. . . .

That is all I have to say, my brother. It is not that I know more about politics and elections than you, but I realize how busy you are and I thought I could more easily set out these simple rules in writing.

*What ultimately happened? After running a campaign along these lines, Marcus won the race for consul, gaining the most votes of any candidate. Antonius narrowly beat Catiline for the second consular spot. Catiline ran again the next year and lost again, prompting him to try to raise an army and overthrow the republic. In his role as consul, Marcus uncovered the conspiracy and persuaded the senate to declare war on Catiline, who was subsequently killed in battle. Both Marcus and his brother, Quintus, were killed two decades later, during the civil wars that accompanied the demise of the republic and the birth of the empire.*

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## **PLUS ÇA CHANGE**

James Carville

In 1972, when I was a law student and just starting out in the business of politics, I worked on a campaign for the district attorney in East Baton Rouge Parish, advising a man named Ossie Bluege Brown. My job was to distribute negative literature on our opponent in strip malls and crowded grocery stores throughout the Baton Rouge area. Over the next 20 years, I did almost anything and everything for candidates at all levels of the political system, working my way up from passing out "hate sheets" in shopping plazas to contributing to Bill Clinton's presidential victory in 1992. Each campaign had its moments, but nothing in the modern political world comes remotely close to the feeling of winning the big one, which I got to share that magical night in Little Rock.

I thought that the advice I was giving my clients was special. Little did I realize that pretty much everything I've said was old news 2,000 years ago, covered expertly in Quintus Tullius Cicero's strategy memo for the campaign of his brother, Marcus, for consul in Rome in 64 bc. The *Commentariolum Petitionis*, or "Little Handbook on Electioneering," is remarkable; it displays as unabashed an appreciation of the harsh realities of politics as the works of that later Italian writer Niccolò Machiavelli.

Quintus starts with what we campaign advisers call "confidence building," assuring the candidate that he has what it takes to win. He moves on to an assessment of the nature and strength of the candidate's base and the need to target specific groups, cautioning against what might be perceived as class warfare. He urges his brother to go negative early, even bringing up the character issue (it must be easier to do when your opponent is a murderer, child molester, and "friend of actors"). He then moves brilliantly back to base development, urges his brother to pander, and anticipates Napoleon's advice that a leader should be "a dealer in hope."

Even without the benefit of modern technology, he suggests microtargeting, crafting specific appeals to the narrowest of segments of the voting public. Then, he recommends what is so often done in modern politics: sucking up and spitting down, that is, paying far more attention to those with great power than to the great unwashed. He stresses the importance of retail politics and offers a fascinating discussion of how and when to say no if you have to.

He recommends George H. W. Bush's courtesy, Bill Clinton's total recall of names and faces, and Barack Obama's focus on getting out the youth vote. He argues for campaigning constantly and incessantly, and cautions against taking vacations during the campaign, since your absence will suggest that you are taking voters for granted. (If Newt Gingrich had gotten such a memo last spring, he might not have lost the bulk of his campaign staff a couple months later.)

Mitt Romney should take heart from the fact that Quintus advocates pandering and overpromising in almost every situation: "If you break a promise, the outcome is uncertain and the number of people affected is small. But if you refuse to make a promise, the result is certain and produces immediate anger in a larger number of voters." Toward that end, he points out the necessity of great advance work to know what people want.

There are always those who say that politics is more negative than ever and that contemporary political consultants are more cynical and unrestrained than their predecessors. Anybody who thinks that just hasn't been paying attention, and should go read Quintus' advice to his brother. He suggests sticking to generalities during the campaign, telling the wealthy you are for stability and peace while assuring the common man that you are always on his side. Oh, and accusing your opponents of "crimes, sex scandals, and corruption." His cynicism, moreover, makes him a trial lawyer's dream: he suggests threatening to take opponents to court at any provocation, no matter how frivolous. He is not particularly interested in the fruits of litigation, but only wants to use it as a tool to produce fear and restraint on the opposing side.

At some point, all high school students ask why they should study history. They are generally told something like, "You need to study it to avoid repeating it." Right. It has been said that history is "one damn thing after another." Reading Quintus' memo, I think the expression should be "the same damn thing after another." I just hope my opponent in the next campaign doesn't get a copy.

*PLUS ÇA CHANGE: A short form (specifically, an anapodoton) of French plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose ("the more it changes, the more it's the same thing").*