

My foolproof tips for canvassing

By Junkyard Dem

Tuesday Oct 14, 2008 · 4:37 PM EDT

I noticed that many people on DailyKos are going to spend their next few weekends canvassing.

I have canvassed in four out of the last six presidential elections and I've canvassed in each regional and midterm election over the past six years. Canvassing is how I feel I can contribute best in an election. Unfortunately, some serious health problems are keeping me from hitting the streets this year. Still, I've learned a lot about canvassing over the years and I feel it would be a waste if I did not share what I've learned with others.

You might have heard many of these suggestions from field coordinators already; I've been told that team Obama has some savvy field ops. Who knows, your field coordinator may even disagree with some of my tips. But I thought I might share them anyway:

- 1 Work in teams with people of various ages. Split up the canvassing list by age, if possible. People being canvassed respond much better to their age peers. The Young Voters Project did a study and found that voters under 29 years of age respond better after being canvassed by someone in the same age group. I have always imagined that this theory works with all age groups.
- 1 Assume it will rain. Have an umbrella, boots, and a raincoat in your car. Also, an extra pair of socks helps keep your feet dry in all types of weather. It doesn't hurt to bring Band-Aids, foot powder, and bunion pads, either.
- 1 Bring a few dog treats. Use them only if a seemingly menacing dog comes toward you. The treats are not bribes for other's pets, they're purely for self protection.
- 1 Shut off your cell phone (or put it on vibrate). A ringing cell phone is turns people off, whether or not you answer it.
- 1 Don't jump to conclusions about potential supporters based on the house, the street, or the neighborhood.

- 1 After ringing the bell or knocking on the door, take a giant step back. A stranger standing too close to the door when it opens can be off-putting to the person opening it.
- 1 Smile. Smile even if you're getting a tongue lashing.
- 1 Get your information out quickly. Practice using the "who, where, what, and why" format. "Who" is you and "where" is where you are from or what group you represent (this is very important and puts people at ease when they know why a stranger is at their door). "What" is that you're canvassing for Barack Obama. "Why" is when you give them your pitch on why they should vote and why they should vote for Barack Obama.
- 1 Talk about the issues until you identify a "hot button" issue with that voter. Many times, they'll tell you what concerns them, but often, you'll have to pick up facial cues like a furrowed brow or a nod. Continue to talk about this issue. If you can't identify which issues are important to them, don't be afraid to ask.
- 1 Try to reach an agreement on an issue with the potential voter. No matter where people may fall on the political spectrum, it is not difficult to find common ground. Once you do, highlight that you're in agreement with them. I like to use phrases like "that's a problem, don't you think?" or "so we both think we'd better off with...." to establish that we're in agreement. Once you've established this common ground, talk about Barack Obama's stance on this issue and how it's applicable.
- 1 Don't talk about your pet issues. Talk with the potential supporter about their important issues. Also, don't offer up your personal theories on issues. Stick with Barack Obama's platform.
- 1 Always ask potential supporters if they have any questions or anything that they'd like to share with you. Demonstrating that you care about someone's thoughts is more effective at swaying voters than reciting the virtues of your politician. In addition, you're likely to get some background on the area that you're in, so that you can better identify with other people that you canvass. For example, you're likely to find out that a school has cut programs, the river is polluted, or the axle plant closed. So, these regional issues give you another opportunity to fine tune your message to either education, the environment, or the economy, respectively.

- 1 Tell everyone that you've canvassed that you appreciate their taking time to talk to you and that you enjoyed talking to them.
- 1 Take scheduled breaks with other canvassers and share your experiences (and change your socks while you're at it). Just as you become better at canvassing after your first several houses, you'll become even better after you find what your colleagues have learned.

UPDATE (Wed. a.m.): Thanks Elise, for finding this diary and putting it on the diary rescue list. There are a lot of good tips below (I don't think there's a bad one at this point, in fact). I especially agree with the tips on body language, how to handle your clipboard, and finding an emergency bathroom. So, instead of adding them to my list now, I'll let these tips build and I'll write a sequel diary. Someone suggested running shoes. I'll agree and add that any flat rubber soled shoes that breath well will likely do. Shoes and socks are very important and shouldn't be overlooked. I can't count the amount of times I've joined canvassing parties where people were wearing sandals, leather dress shoes and a few times some women wore shoes or boots with heels. These people don't last long. I don't think some people realize just how much walking they'll do.