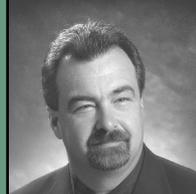


Surveying 'Da Situation



By John D. Matonich, LS

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Lessons from the Campaign Trail

I'm not exactly sure why, but earlier this year I threw my hat in the political ring to run for a county wide office. I live in a relatively large county and even with a low voter turnout I knew it would require between 22,000 & 25,000 votes to win. Well, after the smoke cleared and the votes were tallied I didn't quite make it. I lost by about 150 votes with more than 42,000 cast. In the end, while I may have lost the election, in many ways I still feel like a winner and I need to explain why.

When I asked a few close friends for their thoughts about my running for office, I couldn't believe how quickly they responded with a resounding "Absolutely!" I simply chalked it up to friends supporting friends. But as I worked my way across the county, I discovered that sentiment was shared by people I had just met. People from all walks of life made it a point to show

their support, some through volunteering to help, some by offering their expertise, and some by donating money to support my effort. This was particularly amazing since many of the people I didn't know very well, but they didn't hesitate to attend a fund-raiser when asked. Some didn't wait to be asked—they simply sent a check with a note saying, "Good Luck."

On the campaign trail, candidates have a tendency to see fellow candidates quite regularly. I felt sorry for them as they had to listen to my attempt at explaining what I would like to accomplish at least a dozen times. But each time I did, those other candidates would applaud politely and take the time afterward to tell me how well they thought it went. Many of these folks are veteran office holders and I really enjoyed getting to know them. I've always felt that I am passionate person, but I don't hold a candle to some of the people I was fortu-

nate to meet. It was a great feeling to see the political process at work and how common ideals can bring folks together from all walks of life. While I ran on one particular party ticket, I was amazed at the number of people who told me they crossed over from their normal party to fill in the circle next to my name.

In spite of all this support, in the wee hours of the morning, after the ballots were counted, I still fell short. I've heard losing an election described as being "kicked in the guts." I have to confess . . . I've been kicked in the guts before and losing actually felt a little worse. But, the next day I attended a breakfast with many of the county's candidates and was greeted as a winner, not as a loser. It only reaffirmed what a great process we have in the USA and how proud I am to be a part of it. I may have lost an election, but I have won more friends and gotten to know so many more people, I would call it one big victory. It wasn't hard to do . . . I simply needed to try.

It was a wonderful experience. I wish more people would try as well. One of my fondest memories of the entire experience came shortly after the election while I was at my favorite watering hole. A very good friend of mine approached me, shook my hand and said, "Congratulations!" I kind of shrugged my shoulders and replied, "Thanks, but I lost!" Wally simply smiled and said, "I know. I think you're already too busy without that job. Now go home and take your wife up north for a few days." I laughed, but did what he said. After all, every good politician should listen to his supporters.

And that's the situation as I survey it . . . *A*

