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## Part 3: Strategic Framework

OK, so you have a third party. It is set up and running, but struggling. Membership growth is stagnant, and there are few partisan victories to show for your efforts. What do you do? Do you recruit more candidates? Pull stunts to get more press coverage? Sue for easier ballot access? Work on your database? Go on a massive membership recruitment campaign?

In this part I will propose a framework for intelligently answering these questions. I will focus on the framework, vs. the particular answers, because the actual answers will depend on circumstances. With the following framework in mind, it is possible to actually *measure* what should be done.

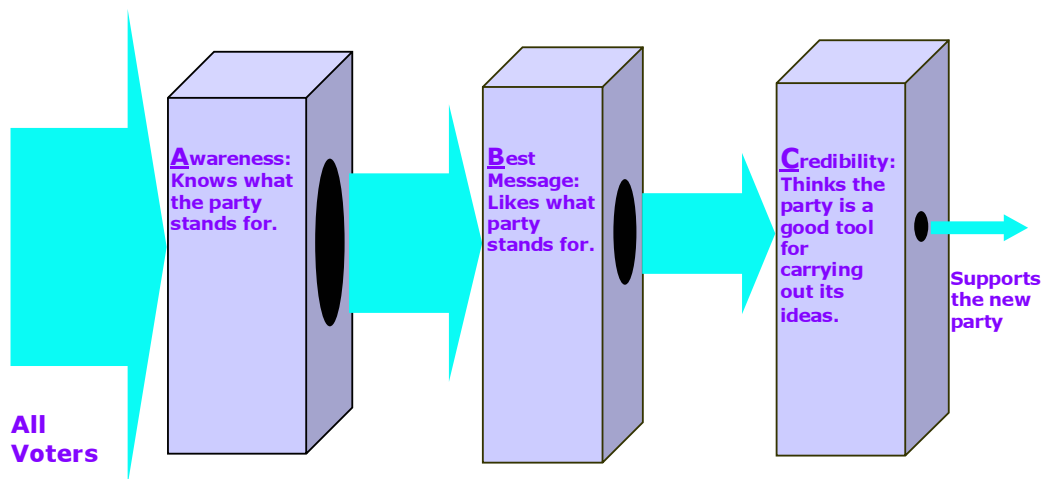
That said, I will cheat and make a few suggestions to the existing parties, and criticize the advocates of some strategies that I consider inefficient, ineffective, and/or expensive. I will especially take to task those who consider the Libertarian Party's problems to be primarily that of lack of money and publicity. With proper strategy it may be possible to grow primarily through viral marketing, achieving explosive growth with a relatively small advertising budget. Only after such growth is achieved is it then necessary and possible to go after the marginal vote using expensive advertising and publicity.

After I present the basic strategic framework, I will take a close look at the possibility of viral marketing using the insights of this framework and those presented by Malcolm Gladwell in his book, *The Tipping Point*.

### Bottlenecks to Membership

There are at least three semi-independent factors that lead a voter to becoming a member/supporter of a new political party.

## Bottlenecks to Supporting the New Party



**Fraction that supports the new party =  $A*B*C$   
(in the linear approximation)**

They are:

- A. Awareness. Is the voter aware of the party and what its message is?
- B. Best Message: Does the voter consider the new party's message to be better than that of the other parties?
- C. Credibility: Can the party carry out its message? Can it actually win elections? (This includes the lesser of two evils dilemma.)

For a voter to identify with a new political party, the party must meet *all three criteria*. Failure at any one of these three bottlenecks means failure to recruit the voter.

Because this is an "AND" relationship, we can express the fraction of voters that support the new party as the product of three fractions. Suppose that we get the message out to 25% of the voters, 25% of the voters like the message and 25% of the voters are unconcerned with the lesser of two evils dilemma, or are otherwise convinced that the party is credible. We end up with a support base of:

$$.25*.25*.25 = .015625, \text{ or about } 1.6\% \text{ of the voters}$$

Wow! You think you are  $\frac{1}{4}$  done and you only get 1.6% of the vote! This looks rather grim, but it matches many of the results seen in the field.

Fortunately, it is quite straightforward to do better with a similar amount of effort. I assumed that the three factors are completely uncorrelated in order to justify multiplying the three factors together. In reality, there are correlations. If you target your advertising to those who likely agree with your message then factors

A and B become correlated. If you do a media blitz in a district where your candidate is in a two-way race, or your candidate is outspending at least one of the major party candidates, then you get a correlation between A and C. If such a race is in a district that leans in your direction ideologically, then you get correlation between all three factors.

Suppose we have a district where half the voters prefer your message, and you are in a two way race. Outreach to  $\frac{1}{4}$  of these voters yields something like:

$$.25 * .5 * .8 = 0.1, \text{ or about 10\% of the vote}$$

By choosing our battles, we do over six times better! Actually, I am a bit pessimistic in the above formula. In a two-way race you just have to be preferred over one of the major parties, so doing better than .5 is possible (if you aren't overly radical). The credibility factor is hard to judge. There is no lesser of two evils dilemma, but if you are new, you still have some questions about your credibility. Some people will simply push the straight ticket lever. On the other hand, you get a nice chunk of protest votes.

Oh, I neglected to mention that this formula shows the *earned* votes. You need to tack on the protest vote as an addend. In a three-way race, about 3% or so tends to go to non-major party candidates simply as protest votes. You can get these votes even if no one knows who you are. (Amount depends of level of race. It goes down for high level races like president.) You just need to be on the ballot. Sean Haugh, former executive director of LPNC, has told me that active LP campaigns often get *less* votes than paper campaigns because they lose some of the protest votes because some of the potential protest voters don't like the message. It takes an extra effort for the earned votes to outweigh the loss of protest voters.

Between correlations and unearned votes, it is safe to say that current third parties are doing less well than factors of  $\frac{1}{4}$  for at least one of the bottlenecks. I would venture to state that fewer than 1 percent of the voting public would prefer the pre-2006 Libertarian Platform to what the Democrats and Republicans offered (Bottleneck B). That the LP has done better in many races stems from the fact that many voters did not know what was in the platform and/or they voted on the individual LP candidates who ran on considerably less radical positions. One weapon used by major-party candidates when Libertarians threatened to win or play the spoiler was to *widen* the first bottleneck by publicizing select portions of the LP platform.

## Nonlinearity and the Bifurcation Fantasy

12. *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath..*

--Matthew 13

I have treated the three factors as independent, and at times it is useful to do so. But in reality there is coupling. If you widen the first two bottlenecks, the third

can widen automatically. That is, if your party and its candidates are well-known and well-liked, then they will be taken seriously.

Likewise, if you are taken seriously, then you will get more press coverage, which increases awareness. If you are taken seriously, and you are getting your message out, then people will take more time to study your message. Some will get converted to your point of view (Bottleneck B).

We have the potential for what is called a bifurcation in chaos theory. That is, we have two or more semi-stable states for our system which depends on our initial conditions.

For example, if enough people who like the message were to donate heavily, advertising could be bought which could increase both awareness and credibility. This could increase the donor base which could buy more advertising, causing positive feedback to bring the party up to the next level.

This is the Bifurcation Fantasy. Many within the Libertarian Party buy into it. It is a compelling fantasy because it is potentially true. All else being equal, a bigger party has more credibility and awareness, which can sustain a bigger party. It is possible for the party to be small simply because it is small.

For this reason the Libertarian Party has gone through several cycles of hype-growth-collapse. Hype is generated by talking about the party's potential vs. its actuality. This is used to achieve growth. However, should the growth be insufficient to match the hype, the party then collapses due to disappointment. I can think of at least major hype cycles in the history of the LP:

**The Crane Years:** During the 1970s the LP achieved exponential growth just because it was new. The party was able to economically recruit early adopters who were ideologically aligned, had little preference between the D's and R's, and were amenable to Blue Sky arguments. Ed Crane was able to point to the resulting exponential growth to the media and to big donors, which resulted in coverage and a rich VP candidate for the Ed Clark presidential race. The LP hit a high point in 1980 and then collapsed. Ed Crane and many in his faction let themselves be muscled out by the radicals. In an interview in *Liberty* [November 1990] Crane openly stated that credibility required continued exponential growth. Once growth tapered off, the party was doomed in his opinion.

**The Harry Browne Campaigns:** Harry Browne was articulate, looked presidential, and had best-selling books to his credit. This provided a burst of new hope. Furthermore, Browne was masterful at self-promotion. His letters from the campaign trail were thrilling to read. His campaigns produced slick ads. His fundraisers were impressive. The fundraising goal thermometers indicated that funding was going up to the next level. Alas, reality crashed in when the polls closed. It turned out that the thermometers indicated gross receipts, not size of war chest – which was mostly already spent on fundraising. There was little money left to actually run the ads.

**Project Archimedes:** If you can acquire members at less cost than the donations that the members contribute, then you are on the road to exponential growth. After this growth produces a large robust party, then productive action is possible. The gimmick behind Project Archimedes was to attempt profitable direct

mail by demographically filtering direct mail lists in order to boost the response rate. That is, look at the current LP demographic, filter likely mailing lists by this demographic and send out the mailings. Alas, this trick did not work. (And as a long-term strategy it was dangerous, since a limited demographic political party cannot succeed.) The promise, however, did bring in enough money to fund a significant direct mail campaign which did temporarily boost party membership.

If conditions are right, such a hype campaign can take a political party to the next level. However, if conditions are not right, such hype campaigns result in expensive boom-and-bust cycles. The expense is not just in terms of money, but also in internal trust and credibility. A hype campaign that fails proves itself to be a lie. Writing a good hype-based fundraising letter requires skirting on the edge of the truth, which at times results in going beyond that edge.

It is my goal in this business plan to devise a growth model that requires a minimum of unsupportable hype, to reach the point of positive feedback through a safer route, based on solid actions that are worthwhile in and of themselves, even if they do not prove to be sufficient to get to that next level.

To see how such can be achieved, let us next look at the three bottlenecks in more detail, at ways to open them up with limited resources, and at ways to measure which bottlenecks are tightest.

## **Awareness, a Closer Look:**

“It’s not the platform! We just have to get the word out!” Such was the response I often received at the 2006 LP Convention when I and the other members of the Libertarian Reform Caucus tried to move the LP closer to the center. This contention is demonstrably false.

So press coverage is weak, advertising budgets are small, etc. It doesn’t matter. The Libertarian Party has been around for 35 years. During that time party members have talked to friends, family and other contacts. An increasing number of people have been made aware of the party’s existence and its general ideals. The process is deterministic. Even with zero party growth, we should expect at least a linear increase in party awareness due to the ongoing efforts of existing party members.

No advertising budget is necessary!

If awareness was the growth limiting factor, then the party should be growing. Awareness is deterministic and cumulative. People don’t forget what a party stands for once they learn. The LP (and other third parties) have motor-mouths who make it their mission to inform others.

For a new party, awareness is a bigger problem. This is also true for an existing party that changes its message. If the Libertarian or Green parties were to moderate their messages, it would take a significant marketing campaign in order to convince people this has happened. In fact, marketing a new and improved message for a party that has been excessively radical for decades is more expensive than marketing a new party. Such extra effort might still be worthwhile because the existing party has a donor/activist base, however.

All this said, there is room for growth in awareness by the various third parties. Most people don't listen that carefully to either political ads or to individual blow-hards. We can measure how wide the awareness bottleneck is by asking polling questions such as:

- Who was the Libertarian Party candidate in 2004?
- Who was the Green Party candidate in 2004?
- Which parties call for legal marijuana?
- Which parties stand for bringing our troops home from Iraq?
- Which parties call for socialized medicine?
- ...

In doing such a poll I would include answers relevant to several parties, including the major parties in order to get objective answers. Actually, answers regarding major party candidates/positions can provide a valuable baseline to determine the norm for awareness. Some people just aren't interested in politics.

Even if such polling shows a large gap in awareness between the major parties and your third party, I still would question the wisdom of putting too much resources into an awareness campaign. I would look at the other two bottlenecks first.

**B.** If people don't like your message, they won't listen to all of it. And they are likely to forget what they did listen to.

**C.** If people think you are a loser for supporting a fringe party, they are much less likely to listen to you. This especially holds for the press. You will get little free coverage without having some credibility.

## **Best Message, a Closer Look:**

What is the point if making people aware of your message if people don't like it? How can your campaign be credible if people don't like your message?

The most important foundation of a political party is its message. If the message appeals to a sufficient fraction of the electorate, victory is possible. If it doesn't, victory is highly unlikely, regardless of the level of effort.

It stuns me how many party activists within the Libertarian Party are in denial. When I spearheaded an effort to moderate the LP platform, I was confronted with many LP activists who told me that I was wasting efforts that should have gone into campaigns, that no one reads or cares about political platforms.

There are a couple of grains of truth to their assertions. Most people do not read platforms. And there are many people who vote purely out of name recognition, personal contact etc.

But such people are exactly the sort of people who do not work on campaigns, donate to campaigns, or even vote regularly. To have the resources to do a name-recognition campaign, to have the volunteers to knock on doors in order to ask for votes as a personal favor, you have to have members and activists. Such people are

aware of what is in the party's platform. Even if they don't actually read the platform, they hear about its contents through the party's messages and/or through other activists.

Issues count. They motivate people one way or the other. I found it stunningly ironic to hear people scream bloody murder about the gutting of the LP platform with one breath and then with the next say the platforms don't matter. Platforms obviously matter to activists. And a political party needs activists.

It is possible to measure the tightness of this bottleneck by doing polls asking questions such as:

- Do you think medical marijuana should be legalized?
- Do you think recreational marijuana should be legalized?
- Do you think all recreational drugs should be legalized?

You can treat as favorable all those who agree with your party's stance and those who are more radical than your party (unless there is a different party that is more radical yet). Some of those who are less radical may also vote for you on the issue in question if they are closer to your position than they are to the position of the Democrats and Republicans.

Proper scientific polling is expensive. However, you can get a feel using friends, family and focus groups. Or, you (libertarians, at least) can look at my data from quiz2d.com at [www.quiz2d.com/stats](http://www.quiz2d.com/stats). There you will find the results from tens of thousands of quiz takers. Yes, there are biases in the data: many come to the site via libertarian web sites; takers tend to be younger, since the poll is on the web; and takers tend to be those searching for an alternative.

But actually, such a biased demographic study is more useful to the LP than a proper scientific poll! It shows where people stand among those who interested in considering a third party, or the Libertarian Party per se.

See the web site or the addendum for some data on areas where the LP could greatly increase its acceptability.

There are three avenues available for opening this bottleneck:

1. Change the message to better fit the voter's desires.
2. Educate the voters to change their minds.
3. Spin the message by using alternative wording. Bullshit the voters.

The first avenue is the cheapest in theory. It is a factor that is purely in the control of the party's activists. The LP can have a better message by scrapping the anarcho-capitalism focusing on shrinking the size of government where doing so would have short term positive impacts. The Green Party can have a better message by cutting back on the socialism and anti-civilization rhetoric and focusing on efficient ways to clean the environment and decentralizing the economy.

In practice, doing this is expensive, as the radical base can resist heavily. Some will bolt should such changes occur. That said, if a third party is excessively radical, there is no viable substitute for Option 1.

Option 2 is definitely worth pursuing. The status quo forces are doing a great deal of education in the other direction. Education towards your message can have some effect. It is worthwhile to rely somewhat on education vs. changing the message so you don't have to water down your message excessively.

That said, excessive reliance on voter education is a mistake. Education takes time. For many people the only effective education is a demonstration of a principle in action – and that requires electoral victory somewhere. (This point is made by the Free State Project advocates.)

Option 3 is useful for getting some swing votes. But don't get too dependent on word-smithing. If people support the current drug war, it isn't going to matter whether you call for "legalization," "re-legalizing," or "decriminalization." Mastering sound bites is a somewhat useful political skill, but it can be easily overrated. Both the Democratic and Republican coalitions have their non-sound bite channels for communicating with their respective bases. Sound bites are for swing voters. New parties need to be mostly concerned with acquiring their bases.

Once again, I have been astounded by the degree with which fervent extremist activists think they can get away with bullshitting the voters. This attitude comes from people who loath the BS that the major party politicians use.

Many voters *do* hear what you are saying. A major reason why the ideological third parties fail is that these same voters dislike what they hear. Rearranging some sentences will not change this.

## **Credibility, a Closer Look:**

If you are running a campaign, it really helps to be covered by the media, to be invited to debates, to be listened to when you speak your message.

Welcome to the credibility bottleneck.

You are an activist for a third party. You have lots of friends and acquaintances. You are willing to work a table for your party. You do these things, yet few listen. You're just this guy, after all.

Something very interesting happened to me when I went from solo Libertarian Party member to officer in the party: people started listening to me more when I talked about my political ideas. But the reason they did so was that I stopped focusing on the ideas. Instead, I talked about the process of doing politics. Most people found this more interesting. And once I became interesting in the political context, people became more interested in why I was doing what I was doing.

Credibility matters even in one-on-one conversations.

Many an LP activist has complained about bias in the media, on how the media shortchanges Libertarian campaigns. They have it wrong. The media may well be biased, but that is not the reason for lack of coverage. The lack of coverage comes from the fact that few Libertarians win. If the Libertarian candidate is threatening to win, then said candidate is newsworthy, even if the reporter in question is a die-hard statist. Dangerous enemies are worth reporting, more so than powerless friends.

We have a Catch-22 situation. Such situations inspire the Bifurcation Fantasy. This can lead to very wasteful activities as I already mentioned. Before we try to jumpstart credibility, let us make sure that the second bifurcation level exists!

Suppose Harry Browne had succeeded in growing the party to 200,000 members and raised \$5 million. Would this have made him a credible candidate?

For the purposes of winning an election, the answer would still be a screaming “NO!” Anything less than \$50 million is peanuts. \$5 million might have been enough to play the spoiler, which would have generated some media attention. It may have been enough to get into the debates. This would have been a wonderful opportunity to get world attention and get the libertarian message out. Such a goal would be considered good by die-hard libertarians, but for most people, this still would not be a credible campaign.

Suppose Browne had \$50 million or even more. Would this make him a credible candidate?

No. His ideas were still too far out. \$50 million would have bought quite a lot of attention, but this attention would bring out the ideas he was promoting: too much liberty too fast. Important data point: Pat Buchanan had a big chunk of money from the Reform Party’s public campaign funds, was a national celebrity going in, yet was unable to achieve breakout. His vote totals were in the same league as the Libertarian candidate who had much less money. People didn’t like Buchanan’s message.

There is no point in jump starting a car that is out of gas.

At the bare minimum a candidate or party has to have a message that is sufficiently appealing. In a three-way race, Bottleneck B needs to be open by at least 25%. (You can win some votes on pure name recognition, GOTV efforts, etc.) This assumes you have massive resources.

If you don’t, it is hard to raise those massive resources, since people wonder if their donations are going to be wasted.

Let us consider a more realistic scenario, where we have a third party candidate in a three-way race, and the third party candidate has less resources than the major party candidates. Overall, such a candidate lacks credibility overall, but may be credible to some. But to whom?

In a race between a liberal Democrat, a conservative Republican and a Green, the Green has credibility difficulties even if the Green has millions of dollars in a presidential contest. This is because most liberals will support the Democrat due to the lesser of two evils dilemma. The same would hold for a Libertarian who emphasizes economic issues in such a race.

Such problems hold even if the third party candidates raise half as much money as the major party candidates. Since raising even that much money is challenging, it is hard to raise even a tiny fraction of this amount, since you need a good deal more in order to be credible.

I already gave solutions to this problem in Part 2:

- Triangulate your position. Attract voters who are equally dissatisfied by both the Democratic and Republican positions.
- Or, focus on two-way races.

Either of these options will produce a much bigger credibility boost than any conceivable jumpstart fundraising scheme.

But by themselves, these options are not sufficient. An extremely under-funded presidential candidate is still a joke no matter how well positioned. Other options present themselves including:

1. Focus further down the ticket.
2. Concentrate resources on a limited number of down-ticket races.
3. Run way down the ticket where a candidate can use his own resources and contacts to support a viable campaign.

The second option is trickiest, but can produce the most exciting results. It is tricky because if the national party chooses to focus on limited campaigns cries of unfairness will result, producing dissention. In 2006 the LP came up with a very clever workaround: Candidate Tracker. Candidates are given scores based upon objectively measurable criteria. The scores are posted on the lp.org web site which helps channel funds to the more promising campaigns. The other 2006 development is Michael Badnarik's run for Congress. By running for president first, Badnarik built a fundraising list theoretically capable of funding a real congressional campaign.

The third option produces the greatest number of victories, but excitement is limited. Local campaigns tend to be more about personal qualifications and less about the big issues. Also, such campaigns are often non-partisan, so third parties do not get full credit for winning such races.

For a brand new party, even these options are unavailable. A brand new party must rely on:

1. **Blue sky.** Promises of future success, such as comes from having a well thought out business plan (This one?) or from unrealistic hype that sounds good.
2. **Voter education.** A third party can perform voter education with as little as a web site.
3. **Appearance of credibility.** Slick brochures vs. newsprint. Well done ads vs. Power Point presentations. Well dressed candidates. All these provide the appearance of credibility.
4. **Evidence of growth.** The Crane approach.

All these hold also for established third parties as well. However, over time a third party must do more than these to remain credible.

Credibility can be measured by measuring the other two bottlenecks and comparing with vote totals. If awareness and shared beliefs with the party are independent variables, then separate polls can be used and the results multiplied together. Comparison with vote totals in the race in question can produce a very

rough estimate of how many votes were lost due to lack of credibility. (The results are noisy since there are unearned protest votes and differences in get out the vote (GOTV) efforts.)

On the other hand, if there is a correlation, then the polls need to be taken together. For example, for the last Libertarian campaign you could ask the questions:

1. Do you think marijuana should be made legal (Bottleneck B)?
2. [for those who answered yes] Which presidential candidate(s) supported legal marijuana? (Bottleneck A)
3. Did you vote for Badnarik? (Bottleneck C)

With this method, you don't bother testing for awareness among those who disagree with the candidate being tested. Question 1 should probably be one of a series of questions covering the candidate's positions. To be accurate, it should include some of the more radical stances that the candidate took. You might want to add in a Question 0, on whether the respondent voted in the last election.

Such polling is imperfect at best. You might do just as well with focus group testing.

What won't work is denying that credibility matters. All too often, third party campaigns resort to begging voters to vote their heart instead of gaming the system. *This does not work!*

The most ridiculous variation on this appeal that I have witnessed was a certain presidential candidate pointing out that your vote is statistically insignificant. Thus, you might as well vote to send a message. A rational voter would interpret this argument as one for staying home.

Elections are won by people who take their votes seriously, by voters who believe that their votes make a difference. Even if it is a myth, it is a very useful myth.

Once again Irony shows its wacky face. Such arguments are used by people who put in a hundred times more effort into elections than the average voter.

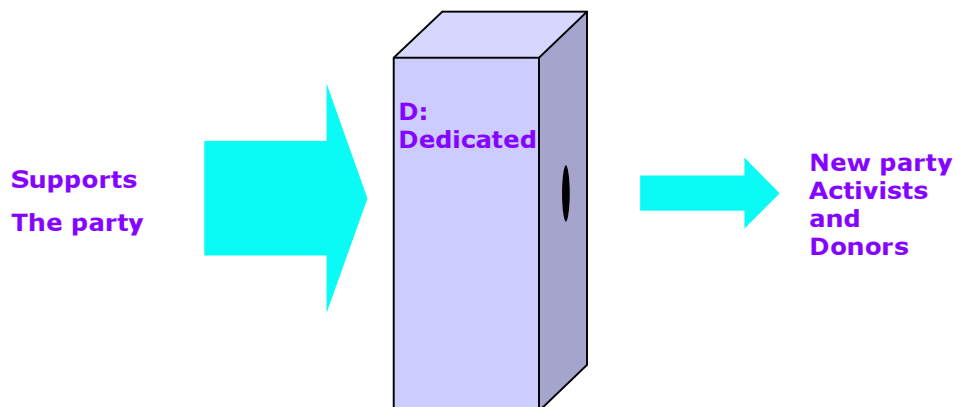
## **Dedication, the Fourth Bottleneck**

If you have your bottlenecks open sufficiently, you have a support base. That support base can then provide resources to increase awareness and credibility, or even educate other voters to change beliefs. End of story. Right?

Wrong. Most of your support base will do little. Few people contribute to political campaigns. Fewer still actually join a party and/or show up for local meetings. Many people don't even bother voting.

For active support, there is another bottleneck: Dedication.

## Supporters to Activists and Donors



**Fraction that ACTIVELY support the new party =  $A*B*C*D$   
(in the linear approximation)**

Here is an area where the Marxists excelled. They had bad ideas. They were hated by the authorities. Marxist writings are difficult to read. Yet they took over a third of the world's population.

Actual Marxists were few, but incredibly dedicated. They ate and slept Marxism. They lived for the dream. The international communist conspiracy was in many ways a cult.

Meanwhile, the Libertarian Party came largely out of the Objectivist movement. People who take to heart such words as, "I swear, by my life and my love of it, that I will never live for the sake of another man nor ask another man to live for mine." [from *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand]

In the capitalist realm, the spirit of rational self-interest usually works (but not always!). In the political realm this is not the case. Political action is not personally profitable unless you are corrupt. Rational self-interest in politics results in handing out the pork to win votes and fancy retirements. Limited government requires self-limitation by those who govern. It requires donors to donate to the common-good candidate instead of the likely winner who is offering special privileges in return for donations. It requires voters to think of the country as a whole over the largesse brought in by their high-seniority congresscritter.

Radical libertarianism has its flaws, but it is not nearly as flawed as forcible communism. It has a literature that requires some abstract thinking, but it is still far easier to read than the works of Marx or Hegel. The bottleneck that has constrained the radical libertarian movement is Dedication.

Yes, the libertarian movement has some very dedicated people. Not all are Objectivists. And many Objectivists manage to rationalize, calling work for the common good self-interest because they derive emotional benefits from such work. This even holds for Rand's fictional heroes. Objectivist ethics were a contradiction from the start.

But the taint of Objectivist thinking has constrained the libertarian movement. Libertarians need to read the words of America's founders who stated from the start that the system they created would not function without morality on the part of the people. The founders were aware of the dangers of special interest and pork-barrel politics. They knew that nobility and self-sacrifice were required of the nation's leaders in order to keep government small.

This is an area where the Green Party is stronger ideologically. Their weakness is excessive contempt for those who pursue their own self-interest. Such an attitude produces evil as well, but of a different variety.

A great deal of social good has been done by people in the pursuit of money and other personal benefits. Such good does not need the same level of celebration as works done purely for the common good, because such good works have already been rewarded. But to forget such good works entirely is a grave error.

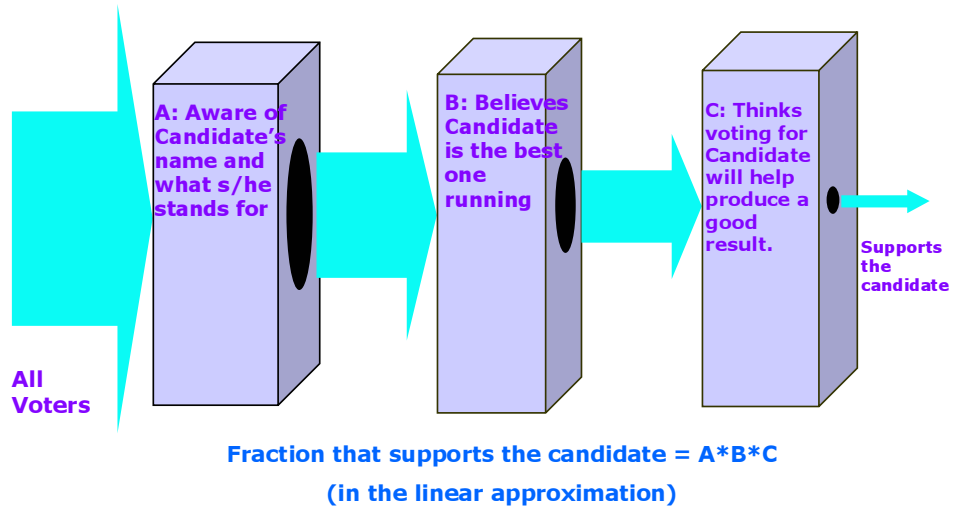
Self-interest is plentiful. Capitalism mostly channels it towards the common good.

True altruism is rare and precious. It should not be squandered on those areas where capitalism can do the job. Use it where it is needed.

## **Bottleneck Analysis Applied to Candidates**

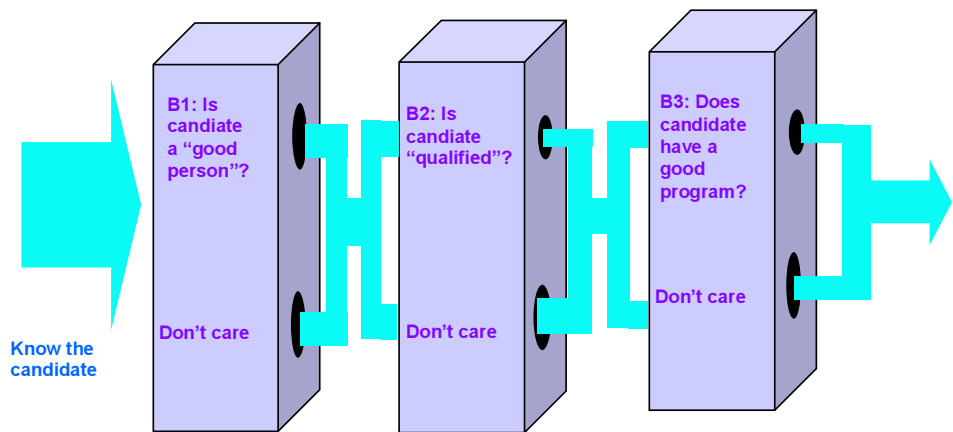
So far, I have centered my analysis on parties vs. specific candidates. When we look at specific candidates, the bottleneck diagram looks rather similar at first:

### Bottlenecks to Supporting a New Party Candidate



However, the second bottleneck is about more than just ideology. Other factors go into determining who is the Best Candidate.

### Expanding Bottleneck B for Candidates



Bottleneck B is actually a series of three sub-bottlenecks. However, the candidate does not have to pass all three bottlenecks for every particular voter. Different voters look at different aspects of a candidate. Some people look for the

“best person” and rely on that person’s judgment. Other’s focus on the candidate’s resume: experience and accomplishments in life. Finally, we have the ideologues (like most of you reading this document) who focus on the ideas that the candidate intends to put into action. Some people look at a combination of two or three of these factors.

Bottlenecks B1 and B2 are especially important for an executive office. Executives have more individual power and flexibility, more opportunities to do bad things due to either corruption or incompetence. Legislators, on the other hand, are elected more for the ideals they represent. One legislator’s lack of experience in a particular domain can be made up for by another legislator’s experience. And it takes a large group of legislators acting cooperatively to be really corrupt.

That said, a candidate who is really bad by any of these metrics will lose votes even of those who generally focus on the metric where the candidate is strong.

It is well worth noting that the first two sub-bottlenecks are of extreme importance when it comes to the office of President of the United States. The President is CEO of the U.S. bureaucracy and Commander in Chief of the armed forces first, and that guy with a veto pen who suggests legislation to Congress second.

Third parties usually overlook this when choosing their presidential contender, and hurt their credibility accordingly. CEO of the U.S. is not an entry level position. Lawyer, engineer, computer programmer or even congressman are insufficient qualifications for the job. To be taken seriously by those who take the office seriously, the candidate should have proven experience running a large organization. The candidate should have been governor, mayor of a large city, CEO of a big corporation, or general. Prior military experience is also very helpful even if low level (for non-generals).

H. Ross Perot was taken seriously as a presidential contender for reasons beyond having a large campaign war chest. He had experience building and running a large organization. He had credit for his activism on behalf of MIAs and even had launched a paramilitary operation to get his employees out of Iran. Perot was considered the best candidate by many despite serious weakness in the ideology department.

A third party would do better to nominate a prestigious figurehead for president, someone qualified for the job vs. an activist willing to run hard in a hopeless election. Such a figurehead candidate would not be expected to run around the country hitting small rallies. Instead, this person would be the national picture of the party for the national press – a taste of what the party intends to credibly offer after growth is achieved – and little more.

Without a huge war chest, a third party candidate for president is not credible. Making a serious effort at running anyway diminishes the party’s credibility. That said, I think having a presidential candidate is worthwhile because one of the first questions out of the mouth of most people in regard to a third party is “Who is your presidential candidate?”

In answering this question, I would much rather answer the name of some CEO, retired general, or even college professor, who agreed to stand for office, than

answer the name of a dedicated party hack who is willing to crisscross the country in order to talk to crowds of 40.

## Can Viral Marketing Work?

I joined the Libertarian Party as a college freshman. I very briefly participated with the local (Richmond VA) party but then dropped out of active party participation for about a decade. While I stopped interacting with the party other than by sending in membership dues, I did badger people left and right about the party and its ideals. After about seven years of this, I succeeded in getting one other person to join the party. Numbers like this result in a very slow viral marketing campaign!

One reason for my poor numbers is that I am naturally an introverted nerd. I am less nerdy today due largely in part to my later political activities. Nothing like door-knocking to burn out one's introverted tendencies. And I also read Dale Carnegie's book, books on NLP and listened to the Advocates for Self-Government's tapes. Some of these studies bore fruit.

That said, these qualities were *not* the biggest factor for my lack of success. The LP's message appeals to many nerdy types. Since I gravitated toward those circles, I had a more target-rich environment.

My biggest problem was that I had a message that did not sell. The tightest bottleneck was B. Most people are repelled by pure unadulterated libertarianism (i.e., anarcho-capitalism). Of the tiny fraction who actually liked the full message, only one thought that supporting the Libertarian Party was a worthwhile endeavor. (I did get a few others to vote Libertarian during this time; I just couldn't get them to join the party.)

Eventually, around 8 years after I joined the party, I realized some moderation was in order. I dropped the strident no-compromise approach advocated by Murray Rothbard and Company. A more moderate form of libertarianism was a much easier sell. Selling the party remained difficult, however, because the party still put forth a radical agenda, and of those who agreed with it, most opted to work within the Republican Party.

Today, I advocate a left-libertarian agenda that mixes in some environmentalism, egalitarianism, and Christian values. Acceptance is commonplace. I think Bottleneck B for my agenda is on the order of 50%.

Suppose we had a third party whose agenda had such a popularity rate when properly explained. Suppose also that this agenda is notably different from either the Republican or Democratic agendas. What happens?

As a nerdy college student I probably pitched the LP to around 20 new people per year – possibly more. If half of them had liked what I had to say, and one in twenty had the potential to be an activist at my level, I would have cloned myself every two years. This is conservative. My conversations were more focused on the politically interested. Also, many of the non-activists would have told some friends – especially those who are into politics.

I think the upper-left agenda has the potential for explosive growth. It may be possible to do viral marketing and reach “the tipping point.”

I highly recommend that the reader of this plan read *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell. This book contains many insights into what causes a fad to explode onto the scene, how a product can suddenly become popular without any additional advertising or sales efforts.

Gladwell points out that ideas tend to spread through three types of people:

1. **Connectors** – people who really like meeting other people. These people have thick address books. They collect business cards wherever they go. They have many, many, (necessarily) shallow friendships.
2. **Mavens** – self-appointed experts. In the marketing world, these are the people who read Consumer Reports. They are the ones who can tell you whether Kmart or Wal Mart has a better deal on Crest toothpaste this week. Since such self-appointed experts are unpaid, they are trusted as unbiased and listened to by many.
3. **Salesmen** – those who persuade as their job.

A message of radical individualism has limited appeal to Connectors. Ayn Rand is more popular at a Mensa meeting than at a Rotary club meeting. Libertarianism as voiced by Robert Heinlein is considerably more appealing to Connectors.

The utilitarian flavor of libertarianism is rather Maven-friendly. Libertarians read more economics books than most. Unfortunately, due to the membership pledge, the LP has recruited heavily from the axiomatic/natural rights brand of libertarianism. The non-initiation of force axiom is unprovable, without recourse to one or more other unprovable axiom. Philosophical mavens know this and are turned off accordingly. This Neo Platonic approach to economics and law also can result in truly absurd conclusions, which also results in jeers.

A fuzzier pro-freedom message doesn't attempt to have The Truth. Instead, it humbly offers more freedom to those who want it. By offering to yield to other concerns when cost/benefit concerns arise, it can avoid the *reductio ad absurdum* arguments that can be used against Rothbardians.

As for salesmen, the LP has relied too much on them.

The Green movement is more Connector friendly – at least as long as it stays pro-environment instead of anti-human. The economic ideas portrayed on the party's web site, however, are laughable at times. Maven support is limited.

Gladwell's observations about how ideas spread help us answer the question of whether platforms matter. They do. While most people don't read political platforms, political Mavens do. And Connectors know and listen to Mavens.

## Final Words

OK, so I did end of giving more suggestions that I originally intended. And there are more to come in Parts 4 and 5.

But do keep in mind that this framework is useful for inspiring and evaluating other strategies as well. Where a strategy is controversial or expensive, this framework can be used to *measure* both the need for such a strategy and for measuring the benefit of a strategy.

This framework can also be used to help find a complete set of cheap “low-hanging fruit” strategies. There is great power in exploiting the low-hanging fruit opportunities for *all four* of the bottlenecks. (This is the key to launching a new party from scratch.) Once the low-hanging fruit is consumed, this framework can help determine where it is most productive to reach for higher fruit.