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Part 4: Lessons Learned in the Libertarian Party

I have been a member of the Libertarian Party for a quarter of a century. For the first decade or so, I was an outsider member: someone who paid dues, read the literature, and promoted the party and its ideals to friends, family, coworkers, acquaintances, but had very little interaction with local Libertarian activists. Then, in the 1990s I slowly began to be active in the Fairfax County VA LP: working on campaigns, doing some petitioning, working booths etc. By the late 1990s, I had really caught the bug, and started my own experiments: Quiz2D and the Economy of Scale Project. This led to my becoming the Region 5 Alternate Representative for the Libertarian National Committee during the 2000 term. I ended up attending more meetings than my primary, and participated in the Strategic Planning Team. Since then, I have worked on more campaigns, been active at the county level, including several years as county chair in Asheville, NC, and as a recent member of the Libertarian Party national bylaws committee.

So, I have many years of experience with third party politics--the Libertarian Party in particular, from multiple viewpoints. The ideas in this business plan as a whole were inspired by real life experiences. I did not derive them from *a priori* reasoning; they manifested themselves to me – many, many times – and eventually I noticed them.

The core ideas in Part 2 are not easy for hardcore libertarians to accept. They were not easy for me. When I first broke away from the dogma that you could derive a complete moral and political system from basic metaphysics, I actually experienced vertigo.

But once freed from party dogma, I began to look at the process of third politics more scientifically. As a result I have been able to learn many lessons. The most important lessons are covered in Parts 2 and 3, but there are also many smaller lessons, some of which are mainly applicable to reforming the Libertarian Party, while others are applicable to third parties generally.

Others in the LP have learned many of these same lessons. Some have stayed in the party long enough to apply them. Others have given up and taken their knowledge with them. Without a catalog of lessons learned, Libertarians, and third party activists in general, can end up reinventing the flat tire.

So here is my catalog, for those who want to fix an existing party. Those who want to start from scratch may want to skip on to Part 5 first. Feel free, but do come back here afterwards, as many of these lessons would apply to a new party as well.

One thing to keep in mind: many of the lessons that follow are useless without the lessons in Part 2! In fact, some can be worse than useless! Better execution of a bad plan is dangerous; it can postpone fixing the really important things.

Also, I will not cover here all the lessons I have learned. This business plan is getting thick enough already. If you want more, go to www.quiz2d.com/essays, and read my “Incrementalator Essays,” essays written for www.LibertyForAll.net after my participation on the Strategic Planning Team (SPT).

General Motors vs. McDonalds

The automotive industry is a huge overhead business. If you are not selling millions of cars, you are on the way to bankruptcy. It can take hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars to develop new automotive technologies, and hundreds of millions more to build the assembly lines that implement the new technologies. It can pay to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in robots and specialized tools to shave pennies of the price of certain parts.

Given this high overhead and huge economies of scale, it pays to reuse parts in multiple models. It pays to have dealer networks targeted to particular demographics. It is critical to have a very large geographic market in which to spread this overhead cost. Auto manufacturing is an international business.

Niche marketing is very difficult in this industry. There are few small independents in the business. Such small independents survive generally by selling very expensive sports cars, catering to small demographics, but still, usually over multiple countries.

McDonald's has the opposite business model. The unit of investment is a single franchise; and the capital comes from the franchisee.

Yes, McDonald's has some high overhead operations. They achieve huge economies of scale in advertising, purchasing, printing, etc. But all this is icing on the cake.

McDonald's became successful by perfecting the operation of *one restaurant*. Once the single restaurant was made wildly successful, the formula was simply copied repeatedly. The marketing and purchasing economies of scale came later.

So, guess which marketing model the Libertarian Party adopted?

The answer: GM.

From the beginning the Libertarian Party has run presidential campaigns. From the beginning, the LP has struggled with large overhead tasks such as getting 50 state ballot access, getting national media attention, paying full-time national staff.

And since the LP has always been under-funded, the results have been poor. Overhead costs have resulted in a high average cost of doing real politics. Money spent on actual advertising has been very small compared to the overall donations raised. The LP's economics are like the expensive sports car, but with one difference:

if you spend a huge chunk of money of the sports car, you actually get the car; if you spend a huge chunk of money on an under-capitalized campaign, you get next to nothing.

I submit that a third party should model itself more on McDonald's. The emphasis should be on perfecting the individual franchise (the county level party), and then replicating that success. The national office should exist to help spread the knowledge of running a good franchise, and provide economies of scale where appropriate, such as producing quality video ads, large scale printings etc.

Over the years many in the party have learned this lesson, and the party has moved more towards the McDonald's model. On line schools and Candidate Tracker are excellent examples of using the central office's resources to support the "franchisees." I am by no means the first or the loudest advocate for moving emphasis away from presidential campaigns and other under-funded national level outreach. Others have taken the lead some time ago, and would have had more success except for the fact that the McDonald's model... doesn't work!

Currently, the LP targets a tiny niche demographic. Franchises are not stable; they come and go. An over emphasis on local organization would be the death of the party without fundamental change. Given the LP's current market segment, the GM model is appropriate.

Successfully adopting the McDonald's strategy requires adopting one of two possible fundamental changes which could make the local organization model viable:

- Reach a wider demographic so that political success is more likely, and the pool of volunteers at the local level is high enough to allow rotating officers without losing continuity. Apply the lessons of Part 2.
- Scrap election victory as a goal and focus on getting the word out. Have fun! This could keep local clubs going. This is the Ernie Hancock approach to LP activism.

These are mutually exclusive options. Either one could work. I pushed the first with insufficient success. Today, my own efforts are aimed at a new party, but those of you who still dream of turning the LP into a real political party are welcome to keep trying. Otherwise, the LP would do well to take the second option.

Danger! Overhead!

The bane of a small enterprise – including a small political party – is overhead. Expensive tools, nice offices, professional advice are all very useful, if you can afford them. If not, they are an incredible waste.

If you are manufacturing specialty cars, you are better off buying more labor and less fancy automation. High tech sports cars are generally built using more old fashioned hand labor per car than the cheap econo-boxes.

Time and time again I have seen the LP think big and crash because of overhead costs. When I first took note of such actions, I found them exciting. I, like many others, had bought into the Bifurcation Fantasy. The new overhead – be it a better office, better software, professional expertise, etc. – promised to increase

overall productivity. And such things would, *if* there had been sufficient remaining funds to make use of such overhead. Otherwise, waste was the result.

I began to get suspicious when I attended my first LNC meeting as an alternate. At the time, my primary was there so I had no vote, and I was still a starry-eyed newbie so I thought the others fully knew what they were doing. Also, I didn't, and still don't, speak accounting fluently. Anyway, I saw big expenditures and budgets ratified at the same times as my calls for little experiments were ignored. I saw pointy-haired reasoning in action, reasoning which may have made more sense in a corporate environment. I saw the party's reserve funds get depleted without action being taken in time to stop the monetary hemorrhaging. (The proposed solution was to have an exciting plan which would increase fundraising. This might have worked, but the Strategic Planning process took too long and didn't produce enough excitement. I can take some of the discredit here. I was and am more interested in longterm strategy than generating short term excitement.)

The litany of examples of being sucked dry by high overhead is huge, including:

- The expensive Watergate office
- Presidential campaigns which spent most of their contributions on fundraising and airplane tickets
- Huge marginal costs for 50 state ballot access, for presidential campaigns which would get less than half a percent of the vote
- Wonderfully produced ads where the cost of producing the ads was on the order of the amount spent running the ads
- National conventions which lost money because insufficient hotel rooms were purchased by the membership
- Expensive database software that is incompletely tailored to the job
- Expensive marketing studies
- Huge numbers of press releases with limited pickup
- Campaigns which spend a large fraction of donations on headquarters, professional consulting and fundraising

There are some within the party who cry foul at the money wasted and opt to vilify and accuse well-intentioned activists of dishonesty. This is a major mistake.

All of the above would be useful to a bigger party. A prestigious DC location provides credibility and access to the press. Flying a presidential candidate around the country is a good way to raise money, *if* you can raise tens of thousands of dollars per stop. 50 state ballot access is very useful for a presidential campaign that is on the verge of credibility. A big national convention looks great on C-SPAN. Professional consultation, paid staff and a headquarters are practically standard for a winning congressional campaign.

But the Libertarian Party is small. So is the Green Party. So is the Constitution Party.

You don't get big by pretending to be big. You get bigger by first being good at being small.

A small party should scrimp on overhead expenses even if that means a higher marginal cost going out. Fixed costs are hard to change when there is a funding downturn. Variable costs are easy to adjust. Furthermore, it is easier to raise money for variable costs. The membership loves to pay for advertising and publicity. Keeping the office staffed is boring. If you cannot do it with membership dues, then change is in order.

There are three primary avenues to slashing overhead expenses:

1. **Just don't do it.** If you cannot do something well, perhaps you shouldn't do it at all.
2. **Eat the inefficiency.** Sometimes it is better to have higher marginal cost in order to save on overhead.
3. **Centralize to get economies of scale.** I'll save this one for the next chapter.

Were I in control, I would do things like:

- Move the office out to Arlington the next time the lease runs out. Might even go out farther if rent savings justify it.
- Maybe even consider scrapping the DC area presence and have the office in the center of the country. This would save big on mailing expenses. Also, staffers could get around the country easier.
- Go for ballot access only in states which have an active affiliate, and maybe even drop some of them where the costs are too high.
- Do Rose Garden style presidential campaigns. Instead of recruiting an activist willing to crisscross the country at a burnout pace, try to find someone more prestigious even if all that person is willing to do is be a talking head and write some position papers.
- Hire a database guy instead of buying expensive not quite off the shelf software. Tailored SQL solutions aren't that hard to do from scratch.
- Use my quiz2d data and the theories in Parts 2 and 3 instead of expensive professional marketing studies.

Such measures would cost the party some prestige. Gross fundraising would likely drop. However, I think the *net* usable funds for getting the word out, recruiting members and winning campaigns would be increased.

I could be wrong, but I would rather waste a smaller amount of donor money failing in a small way, than wasting big glops of money as has often happened.

And if I am right, the party/movement could eventually grow the point that could do more things the professional way.

Oh, before I leave, let me pass out a few kudos. Aaron Russo put together some cheaply made television ads and *actually ran them* in Atlanta during the 2004 convention. The LP voted to reduce its convention allocations during the 2006 convention. (I think this was Steve Dasbach's idea.) Headquarters has produced/contracted training for local activists, Candidate Tracker to help focus donations on promising local campaigns, and Ballot Base to enlist volunteers to do Get Out the Vote phone banking for low level campaigns. Fortunately other people in the party are learning the same lessons.

Economies of Scale

Libertarians love Adam Smith because he talked about the power of markets and competition.

But Smith also talked about the power of centralization, specialization, and economies of scale.

Even though the LP's overall market plan has historically been very centralized, the members have resisted centralization where it could really be beneficial.

Printing entails significant setup charges. Slick Brochures, bumper stickers, yard signs and the like are much cheaper per item when printed in large runs. Centralized purchasing of such materials would make a great deal of sense.

Demographically targeted advertising through magazine advertising needs to be done through the national office, if at all. It would be interesting to couple such advertising with mailing list rentals from the respective magazines. (Of course, a party should target a variety of demographics. But different demographics can see different ads.)

Quality radio and television ads take money to produce. If the central office pays for such production, affiliates can run the ads paying only the cost of airing the ads.

I got on the LNC as part of an effort to get headquarters to take advantage of these opportunities. My efforts had some rather limited successes.

And yes, there are problems with some of my ideas along these lines. Distribution costs money. So do warehousing and taking orders. My economy of scale idea for yard signs (see quiz2d.com/essays/scale) worked well enough in Northern Virginia, but would not work well in areas that crack down on signs on the public right-of-ways.

This admitted, I still contend that such efforts should have been tried. They were *cheap* experiments compared to many of the LP's efforts during the past few years. The successful experiments could have been repeated; the failures written off without threatening the party with bankruptcy.

It is true that having a propaganda store at the national office in DC was an expensive pain in the butt. My solution: give the stuff away! Give out bumper stickers as premiums to donors. Give the state parties boxes of brochures, bumper

stickers and other doodads to distribute to county affiliates. Create outreach kits for student groups, county affiliates, and individuals wanting to do something.

Yes, such a generous policy would result in wastage. Maybe only one in twenty bumper stickers would actually end up on a car. So what! The economies of scale would justify the other inefficiencies. If only one bumper sticker in 20 gets used, you still get a bargain in advertising. (Last time I bought bumper stickers, it was about 12.5 cents each for one color in lots of 5000.) A run of Legalize Hemp posters to give out at rock festivals would bring in a tremendous return on investment. (I had a few Legalize Hemp/Vote Libertarian signs left over from a campaign when I worked an alternative rock fest in DC. Pierced and tattooed young adults were begging me for signs to wave in the audience. The previous year, we had deployed many of these signs, only to have them stolen by teenagers, for later posting in college dorms.)

To win, you must do better than the competition *somewhere*. It is impossible for a third party to match the D's and R's in national media and press coverage. It is possible to deploy a better outreach booth at local events. I have done so (along with fellow volunteers). Large centrally produced print runs would make such outreach tables more economical. A generous policy would inspire more volunteers to work such outreach tables.

Professionals: not a Panacea

Small party politics is largely a game of volunteer amateurs. Amateurs make mistakes; they lack expertise in critical areas. Volunteers are not always reliable; they put their paying jobs first.

For these reasons there have been various attempts to professionalize the party. Fancy consultants have been enlisted, campaign managers hired. Repeatedly, I have seen calls to get all the state parties to hire an executive director.

Some of these moves towards professionalism have been successful. More often, the results have been disappointing. There are several reasons.

Professionals are expensive.

Whatever the benefits of professional advice, it comes at a price. Oftentimes, it is more economical to just make the mistake and learn things the hard way.

There are areas where a professional can do a much better job. A good example would be that of producing a commercial. On the other hand, if you use up your entire advertising budget producing the commercial, the net benefit is negative. You are better off making a cheap, amateurish commercial and using the savings to actually run the commercial.

A state party with a paid executive director can do a better job of fundraising, but a large fraction of those funds must then go to paying the executive director. There are examples where this has paid off, but often this was because the executive director was willing to work hard for a pittance. Such professionals were really more (barely) compensated volunteers.

Professionals Give Expensive Advice

Any field that can support professional experts has money to pay them, and profitably use their advice. This means that most outside specialists are used to having a decent budget to work with. Professional campaign managers are used to working on big budget campaigns. Marketing experts are used to working with corporate budgets; they work in a domain where a few percentage points in sales performance can mean millions of dollars in new revenues.

For this reason, the prescriptions of outside experts, or experts brought in to work in house, can be overly expensive for a struggling third party. This can also apply at times to volunteer experts who bring in wisdom from their workplace.

Third Party Politics is Different

There are very few true professional experts in the field of third party politics. Most relevant professionals are professionals in somewhat related fields. While some of this expertise can be extremely useful, it is not always applicable. Third party politics is different and the differences are significant.

The rules of third party politics are different from major party politics. For example, before I became super-active in the Fairfax County LP, I attended the Leadership Institute's Candidate Development School. (The Leadership Institute is a non-profit organization that teaches political skills primarily to conservatives. They have a good record of teaching principled conservatives how to wrest power from the remoras* in the Republican Party and get elected to Congress.) I learned many useful lessons by going to this school; however, some of those lessons were *very wrong for Libertarians!*

A big one: the LI fundraising expert taught that early money should be used to raise more money. This money, in turn, should be used to raise more money yet. Only after several cycles of fundraising should the campaign divert money to public outreach such as yard signs, billboards, mailings, radio ads, etc. This is good advice for Republican or Democratic candidates. It is a recipe for disaster for third party candidates.

Third party donors are more sophisticated in some ways than the average major party donor. They tend to be more willing on to give money early in the election cycle. Also, they are easier to reach, since most of the third party donor pool can be found in a single database. It takes relatively little money to reach and extract the money that this pool is willing to give. Then the money dries up! Using money to raise money yields diminishing returns. Attempts to do professional style fundraising usually result in campaigns that spend a large fraction of their money raising money, which leads to a very bitter donor base afterwards.

This happened with the Harry Browne campaigns, especially the second one. The poor showings have led many in the movement to cry "corruption" and to craft conspiracy theories. What these conspiracy theorists fail to realize is that such

* A remora is a fish that attaches itself to sharks using a suction cup on the top of its head. In politics, the remoras are the non-ideological interests which attach themselves to political parties in return for access and special favors.

professional style fundraising works when the donor pool is huge and expensive to reach.

In third party politics, donations plateau quickly. Maximizing *net* funds requires careful attention to minimizing fundraising costs. Since the donor base is small, a campaign must return to it multiple times and/or establish pledge programs. To keep the money coming in requires providing evidence that the campaign is doing useful things with the money already raised. A third party campaign should print its yard signs and bumper stickers earlier than the major party campaigns. Doing so reassures the donors, and provides a small head start advantage for the campaign.

(Such a head start advantage can provide credibility outside the third party's donor base as well. When I did the Economy of Scale project – printing issue signs to go with name signs – our signs came out early and strong. This *may* have been the trigger that caused the Republican opponent of participating Libertarian candidate Garry Myers to print up a flier which included Garry's name and positions. We got more publicity from the opposition than from any other source!)

Similarly, the non-profit world has many similarities to the third party political world, but the differences are important. FEC reporting is not 501c(3) reporting. (Did it really pay to buy off-the-shelf non-profit database software? Or would the LP have been better off using in house talent to create a solution tailored to its needs? From my out the office perspective, it appears to be the latter. However, I could be wrong. In the long run the outsourcing of database services to an outside vendor might pay off.)

Also, third party politics has many threshold effort situations that are different from many charities. For a food bank, each donation can provide additional meals. Each dollar provides positive marginal value. A third party is confronted by challenges such as ballot access, where 70,000 signatures can get you on the ballot in a tough state, whereas 68,000 signatures are utterly useless.

The Best Experts

Experts have very important knowledge and skills, but they can also lack important bits of knowledge that is critical for success in third party politics. Paying an expert to learn this knowledge can be extremely expensive, both in payments and mistakes.

The best experts are those who have specialized outside knowledge *and* experience with the particulars of third party politics. The best way to get such people is to recruit them as volunteers first. Let them see the workings and challenges of third party politics. Then, if you need more of their time, hire them as contractors as the need arises.

Otherwise, you might do just as well having your existing volunteer amateurs read airplane books and experiment in the field.

It's Coke or Pepsi Time

After the Strategic Planning Team did its thing, the LP hired a marketing professional to figure out how to market the LP. \$50,000 later, he concluded: target small businesses.

This was a very informed decision, stemming from several factors:

- The LP had limited resources, so it couldn't target everyone.
- The LP should target people with a high likelihood of joining. Many members were already small business owners.
- The LP should attract a group which would help attract other groups. This spoke against targeting groups such as drug users.

All this was intelligent, based on measurements, and very useful for targeting initial adopters. I will use similar reasoning in Part 5 on starting from scratch.

However, in the grander scheme of things, this prescription overlooks of the Libertarian Party's most important marketing mistake: you cannot win elections in the United States by targeting only a narrow demographic. The party's radical stances rule out significant victories even if there were sufficient resources to target all sympathetic groups.

Here is an important example of the difference between politics and marketing a typical consumer product: there is no prize for third place, and little for second.

Politics is not like selling a fine wine or liquor, where you can target a particular market segment and be successful. Politics is like selling mass-market soft drinks, where you have to be popular enough to support a local bottler or you get priced out of the market. Politics is about Coke vs. Pepsi; not Absolut vs. Stolichnaya.

A political party must market to men and women, old and young, black and white, rich and poor...or it will lose.

Yes, a party can write off a few significant demographic groups -- the Republicans scrape by with very few black votes -- but such failures must be made up for by high success elsewhere.

A party that successfully recruits every small business owner in the country still has way too few votes to win anywhere. Throw in hardcore science fiction readers, marijuana activists and gun people and you still don't have enough to win. (Yes, if you get all marijuana *users* and gun owners, you might have a big enough demographic base, but these are heterogeneous markets.)

Too much demographic focus is a prescription for disaster! (And this criticism applies also to the attempted "demographic filtering" used during Project Archimedes.) It is far better to do a mediocre job of reaching a broad demographic than it is to do an excellent job of reaching a narrow demographic.

This presents a problem. If resources are limited, and we cannot focus our marketing materials, what is a small startup party to do?

One form of targeting is possible: *geographic* targeting. A political party need not be strong everywhere in order to win elections. It merely needs to be strong in one or more political districts.

Many libertarians are realizing this, but the favorite solution is rather inefficient: The Free State Project. Moving is expensive. Unless you are coming right out of college, an interstate move can easily cost \$5000—and that's without hiring professional movers. Then, there is the cost to one's career, distance from family and old friends... and New Hampshire is *cold*. But let's keep the \$5000 figure and multiply by the desired 20,000 members. We get \$100 million dollars! And that's just setup fees! The cost of doing actual politics comes afterwards.

I think there are cheaper ways to geographic targeting. I will describe some of them in Part 5.

But before leaving the subject, I will concede that the Free State Project approach is probably the only viable approach for an ultra-radical libertarian party that wants to win elections. It is the best bet for those who resist the lessons of Parts 2 and 3.

But back to the marketing study: there was wisdom there. Some demographic focus can be used to get early adopters, but it should be rapidly followed up with marketing materials for those early adopters to reach a broader demographic in their home areas, in order to actually win elections. The marketing expert cannot be blamed for overlooking this fact; in fact, he probably didn't. Making the more important recommendation was outside of his mandate. This is a decision that a national convention has to make.

Use the Volunteers!

As I have said before, qualified professionals are expensive, and even when you can afford them, they can make expensive mistakes if they haven't had particular experience in third party politics.

That said, there are times when a third party needs specialized expertise. Often the place to get such expertise is within the ranks of volunteers. The volunteers often know more about the particular needs of a third party than outside contractors. While the amount of time these people can provide is limited, the quality is high. And should a project be too large to be done voluntarily, pay a proven volunteer for putting the extra time as a contractor.

Example: the LP has many qualified computer people. Why do we need outsiders to do so much of the database and web work? As a computer professional, I am well aware that retrofitting specialized software for a new purpose is often more difficult than starting from scratch with general purpose software. Setting up a database tailored to a political party is not that difficult. Creating a mechanism for state and county leaders to update their segments of the national database is not

that hard. I could do it myself given the time, and database programming is not my specialty. I wrote my first lines of SQL as part of the reformthelp.org web site. A true expert could do much better.

I think the Ballot Base effort is a good example of using in party talent. Yes, the party paid money for this service, but it was paid to someone inside the party, someone who knows what the party needs.

The party keeps contracting out marketing experts where there is cheap data to be had: from quiz2d.com. My data is certainly not perfect. It has a lot of noise and there is a bias towards those willing to take the quiz. But the data is plentiful, and free. And polling data that is biased towards those willing to take such a quiz is probably more useful than a truly random sample, anyway. It shows how to attract early adopters.

My experience on the Strategic Planning Team was particularly irksome. On the team we had a set of experts with diverse backgrounds and knowledge of the party's particular challenges. Yet, most of the time we were not allowed to actually argue like rational adults. Instead, we spent most of our time shuffling and categorizing a database of one-liner suggestions. When we were done, we had a set of goals and metrics, and left it to staff to choose between the strategies. While we did have competent staff, we also had expertise on the SPT that was *way* underutilized.

Paying for outside specialists is expensive, as I pointed out before. But sometimes you can get such expertise for free, if you ask.

Morale vs. Motivation

Some time back, when reading a tome of Peter Drucker's management wisdom, I came across a comparison of morale vs. motivation. I don't remember the details of his arguments, but he did make it clear that the two terms, while sometimes related, are quite different. It is possible to have low morale and still plug away, getting the job done. It is possible to have very high morale and be very under motivated.

I have seen a fair number of examples of this difference in life in general—not just politics. I have known many a procrastinator who used overconfidence (excessively high morale) as an excuse to put off doing unpleasant work. I have known successful people and organizations who self-motivate through fear: think of Intel. I have seen successful fundraising letters which told of imminent disaster.

Thus, I have a significant contempt for positive thinking gurus.

Yes, in third party politics, there is a definite need for morale boosting (Bottleneck C). Whenever a third party sends out a “send money now or we close shop” fundraising letter, it calls into question the viability of the whole enterprise.

For this reason *LP News* has historically been more of a morale building tool than a motivational tool. Bill Winter was masterful at making it so. Under his tenure *LP News* gained a truly professional look and was filled with glowing articles about Libertarian celebrities. The paper grew in size under his tenure, which gave

longtime readers a positive feeling that the party was growing. (Some of us remember the mid 1980s when *LP News* collapsed in size and printing frequency as the party collapsed.)

LP News has always been a morale building tool for the party, but how effective has it been at motivation?

My personal feeling is: not very. This feeling comes both from my active years in the party, when I tried to get *LP News* reading members to do something, as well as my own memory as a passive member who read *LP News* regularly but never showed up for local party meetings.

I once tried to make *LP News* more of a motivational tool. I wrote up a detailed article on one of my in the field experiments. My theory was that people were more likely to act when they had detailed knowledge of what to do.

Bill Winter said he liked the article well enough but considered it inappropriate for *LP News* – too technical -- that it should go in *The Libertarian Volunteer*.

Thus I was irked, perhaps unduly. Keeping morale up was a critical task for keeping the national office funded, and Mr. Winter performed this task admirably.

The real question is: would adding more motivation to *LP News* detract from its morale-building function? I could see how repeated clarion calls to get out there and petition could be irksome to those who support the cause by donating. But how irksome would it be to have detailed articles on different petitioning strategies?

When I go to the grocery store, I do see a fair number of celebrity based news magazines filled with puff pieces on celebrities. These magazines are the ones that get featured at the checkout aisles. However, when I look at the wide array of magazines offered in the main magazine area, *most* of the magazines are of the hobbyist variety. There are magazines on woodworking, crafts, bodybuilding, hot rodding and computer operation. Obviously, a great many people enjoy reading about the technical details of their field of interest.

In fact, as I got actively involved in the LP, I found that people were more interested in what I had to say on politics because they were interested in the operation of a political party. Non LP members were more interested in the operation of the LP than what it stood for.

Method thinks LP members might be interested as well. This includes passive members. As a donor, I am interested in the details of how my donations are spent, and I don't think I am unique in this sentiment.

And had *LP News* provided more such detailed articles, I probably would have gone from passive to active member much sooner. Knowledge is motivating. The more you know about how to do something, the more tempted you are to try doing it. It may take a passive member years of reading such articles before the moment of action occurs, but so what?

Proof by Definition

Let's go back to the subject of the purpose of the national office. Part of the resistance to making effective use of economies of scale stems from a bad thinking habit that is endemic within the libertarian movement: proof by definition.

Ayn Rand did it "best." She started with "Man is a Rational Animal," and proceeded to develop an entire system of ethics, education and aesthetics based upon this definition – despite the objective fact that men are frequently irrational. What is especially ironic is that Rand points out numerous cases of humans acting irrationally. In fact, irrationality dominated human religion and political thought throughout history according to Rand.

But don't let overwhelming data to the contrary get in the way of a good theory. And Rand didn't.

And neither do the *a priori* economists at mises.org and lewrockwell.com. They build definitions and derive conclusions and damn anyone who checks their results with actual references to the data. I have been accused of "scientism" by several such thinkers. And I accept their "insult;" I am a scientist.

That's more than can be said about Dr. Thomas Szasz, who has somehow managed to define insanity out of existence.

Such intellectual silliness can creep into discussions of strategic matters. I have been reminded by multiple activists that the national party should attend to national elections. Local elections should be handled by local parties. So much for the McDonald's paradigm of having a national organization support local franchisees where economies dictate. By this logic, the national corporation should stick to mail order hamburgers.

There are things that are better done at the national level, and things better done at the state and local level. Multiple considerations should determine which course to take: economies of scale, continuity, need for specialized knowledge, need for local knowledge, need for local presence, etc.

I have witnessed other examples of "proof by definition" but I will stop here.

Lest ye think I am picking on the LP, I would note that other political movements have their own bad thinking habits. For example, many on the Left have the opposite problem: an aversion to abstraction. Many a small-g green has told me "you think it's all about money" when I propose an economical solution to an environmental or societal problem. The reaction is due to a dislike of abstraction and preference for particular solutions. The results of such thinking are unduly complicated "comprehensive plans," unmanageable legal codes, regulatory agencies with conflicting mandates and so forth.

Different movements have different thinking habits. The lesson here is to be on guard against your own bad thinking habits.

There is one bad thinking habit that is common to nearly every political movement, which we cover next.

Vote for me, you Bastard!

Nearly all political factions cluster around a set of values and demand that others treat those values as important. Environmentalists demand that you care more about the environment than about luxury and prosperity. Leftist demand that you care more about equality than about economic freedom. Drug warriors demand that you care more about sobriety than about the Bill of Rights. Civil libertarians demand that you care more about the Bill of Rights than about your religion, and so on.

Such thinking leads to vilification. Such vilification can rally the troops within each movement, but reduces the number of converts from the other side. It also makes negotiations between the factions very unproductive. The result is that the remoras win.

Libertarians take note: it is right that environmentalists focus on environmental concerns. Environmentalists take note: it is right for libertarians to focus on liberty.

Productive political action can stem from listening to the other sides and crafting solutions that match your own values. Environmental Defense helps corporations profitably clean the environment. The Institute for Justice uses libertarian approaches to increase social justice.

Such thinking is important when you are the minority in a legislative body. It is also important for building a political party big enough to get you elected in the first place. No single narrow faction is large enough to win elections. A political party is a coalition or it is a joke.

Practice more harmonious negotiation with other factions and you get more converts to your own, as well as a more harmonious big tent for your political party.

Voter Education vs. Indoctrination

A third party needs to be mainstream somewhere in order to be relevant. What if there is no somewhere? We have two (overlapping) options:

- Water down the platform/message to the point where it is mainstream somewhere.
- Educate the voters (somewhere) to bring them up to the party's message.

I think both options should be applied. (Surprise! I'm not *that* moderate.) Water down the message too much and there is no point in having a new party.

I am a big believer in both educational outreach and internal education. Such activities give a third party purpose even while it is still too small to be able to win elections. (Bottleneck C.)

But here is the kicker: the Libertarian Party does rather little voter *education*. Even those who call for using the LP as a voter education mechanism are not doing much voter education.

The LP – and much of the libertarian movement -- is more about voter *indoctrination*.

Be careful here. I am using the terms “educate” and “indoctrinate” in a somewhat specialized manner. I couldn’t find the words that mean precisely what I want to say here, so I am bending some words which have approximate connotations.

When I say “educate,” I mean providing the voter with information, verifiable facts, repeatable strings of logic. I can educate voters about the true meaning of the Laffer Curve, that there exists a tax rate beyond which tax receipts go down when rates are increased. (Where this maximum happens to be, is considerably more difficult to prove.)

When I say “indoctrinate,” I mean demanding that the voter change his underlying values, that the voter accept unprovable ideas. I can tell voters that taxation is theft, but I cannot prove that this means all taxes should be eliminated. This requires changing underlying values such that the evil of taxation is considered higher than the evils that result from eliminating all taxation.

The libertarian movement has two strains – the utilitarian and natural rights strains – which emphasize education and indoctrination respectively. Within the LP, the natural rights strain is dominant. As long as the membership oath remains in place, I expect this to continue.

A large fraction of Libertarian outreach materials begin with the non-aggression axiom. Even Mary Ruwart’s *Healing Our World*, one of the more friendly and data driven outreach books, starts Chapter 1 with “The Principle of Non-Aggression.”

The non-aggression axiom is an unprovable *value*. To get someone to accept this value as one that should [almost?] never be violated requires getting someone to rearrange their underlying value system. This is difficult! It is akin to a religious conversion.

Ayn Rand understood this difficulty. That is why she considered a libertarian political movement to be extremely premature. She crusaded to change people’s underlying values. She knew that changing underlying values required more than simple acceptance of an axiom from a political movement; such spirit-altering changes require a complete philosophical (or religious, or artistic, or...) framework.

Objectivists reading this should not gloat yet. I read Rand’s works years ago, and found them compelling for while. But they made me uneasy. Many of Rand’s heroes had loathsome attributes, and her attacks on all altruism are an affront to both Christian values and human nature. Do not expect Objectivism to sweep the world; it won’t.

Voter indoctrination is very difficult, but it is largely unnecessary. Education suffices.

Most people already agree *partially* with the non-aggression axiom. They realize that forcing people around is not nice. However, they consider such force to be necessary to maintain public order, feed the poor, heal the sick, preserve the environment, or perform other worthy tasks. Sometimes they are right.

But often they are wrong. Often, they overlook opportunities to accomplish these worthy goals in ways that avoid initiating force. This oversight can be cured through education.

Also, people often suppress the fact that they are initiating force; people don't like making moral compromises, so they hide the compromises using specialized words such as "tax." It is worthwhile to remind people of the moral compromises being made. This is another form education. The underlying values are untouched; we merely remind people of what is already in their minds.

Then, we have some extreme cases, where people boldly reject libertarian values outright. But even there, some education is in order.

For examples of education based persuasion, see www.holisticpolitics.org, or my biweekly column at www.ashevilleplanet.com.

Sound Bites, Anyone?

Now, back to the subject of marketing and selling.

I love the Advocates for Self-Government. They promote a broader definition of "libertarian." Their Libertarian Communicator series has many, many excellent ideas on libertarian persuasion. Buy their stuff.

That said, I have limited enthusiasm for some of their products, especially the sound bites. It's not that sound bites are wrong. It's that they are overrated.

Sound bites are useful for swaying a few swing voters. They are much less useful for acquiring your base. A third party needs to be mainly concerned with acquiring its base.

People generally don't make momentous decisions such as joining a third party, or even voting for one, based on a few sound bites.

Consider Lyndon LaRouche. He's wacky. He's scary. He's not exactly good looking or charismatic. Yet he has more name recognition than the entire Libertarian Party—which gets mistaken as the party of LaRouche because both names start with an "L."

LaRouche put nearly all his chips on a small number of half-hour late night infomercials. Viewership may have been limited, but those who saw those infomercials talked about them.

A real third party would do well to emulate this practice. If buying time on a nationwide channel is too expensive, buy in a few local markets. (Remember, geographical concentration.) Or, such an infomercial could be put on DVDs.

But the lowest overhead way of all to convey information is one-on-one conversations. The key to making such conversations work is not compressing the information into tiny sound bites. It's about being interesting and credible enough to justify a longer conversation. Better yet, multiple conversations.

I have already given one very important key to making such conversations last: educate, don't indoctrinate. Recognize the other person's values and serve them. Convey knowledge and solutions that are useful to the person you are talking to.

25. *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.*
26. *But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

--Luke 22

First, don't be Silly

"Government doesn't work."

"Back to the Pleistocene!"

"Capitalism kills!"

These are all silly slogans stated by various libertarians, environmentalists, and leftists respectively. They feel good to the speaker, but they destroy credibility in the eyes of outsiders.

Government does work. It is frequently inefficient, dangerous and/or criminal, but it does work. I get my mail regularly. When I send a letter, it usually arrives at its destination. If I want to find out who owns a piece of property, the local registrar of deeds can let me know. Even the Soviet Union's government worked, albeit very poorly. Millions of people didn't die of starvation under Stalin.

Libertarians are notorious for making categorical statements that are 80% true and 20% idiotic. A great deal of credibility can be gained by using some fluff. Replace "Government doesn't work," with "Government is inefficient," and you are much more credible. But even there, you will be wrong. There are some areas where the government solution is more efficient than the market solution; national defense comes to mind. Try "Freedom works," or more accurately: "Freedom usually works." You can even use "Freedom usually works better than government." With such technically correct statements, you maintain credibility long enough to back up your assertions.

A particularly persistent form of silliness comes from those anarchists who blame government for all wars, wrongful imprisonments, etc. See L. Neil Smith's writings for examples of such thinking -- thinking that ignores many private and semi-private ventures such as the Vikings, William the Conqueror's freelance mercenary conquest of England, assorted slave traders, pirates, freelance colonialists, pioneers, and lynch mobs. Governments are created to fend off such vile enterprises--as well as other governments.

Government *is* a moral compromise. Making everyone pay for the defense of the realm and for rule of law is a form of theft. But the alternative of anarchy often leads to vastly *more* theft.

It is also true that many reasonably well behaved democratic regimes degenerate into dictatorship and worse. But is also true that conditions of anarchy can do the same thing, though usually much faster.

Government *is* dangerous. This is a defensible statement, easily backed up by examples. But complete lack of government is also dangerous. Government should be kept under tight control, for sure. It is also well to keep it small for other reasons. But to call government the world's worst institution in and of itself is a ridiculous overstatement.

It is better to use understatement than overstatement. But that doesn't mean you have to be bland. It is better to froth at the mouth over taxes being 20% too high than to calmly declare that all taxes should be abolished tomorrow.

Order of Statements

It is possible to be considered silly even when you aren't. When you make a statement that the listener disagrees with, you can get lumped into the enemy/silly category and productive listening ends. This can happen at any moment you make an unsupported statement.

Libertarians fall into this trap frequently because many of us come from a mathematical or philosophical background. In mathematics it is considered proper form to declare the theorem first, then give the proof, and finally present applications. This is completely backwards if you are trying to persuade a non-captive audience! **A theorem stated before the proof is an unsupported statement.** And since no rationale has been given, it is not only unsupported, but it is uninteresting!

Consider this sequence (listener's internal response in brackets):

Theorem:	We should end the war on drugs. [That's wacky!]
Lemma:	Victimless crimes are unenforceable. [Are they?]
Lemma Proof:	Without a victim to report that a crime has occurred, the police need to resort to spying, entrapment and informants to get prosecutions. And even then, most "crimes" go undetected. [What was that? I wasn't really listening]
Theorem Proof:	Since responsible drug use and dealing are victimless crimes, laws against such are ineffective. However, attempts to enforce such laws are expensive. Thus, we have a big expense with little, if any benefit. QED.
Justification:	Our legal system is breaking down. Our jails are flooded to the point that we release violent sex offenders. The police are resorting to paid testimony, forced confessions (plea bargaining), and crime stays high.

Consider simply reversing the sequence above. Should you do so, each statement either stands on its own or is supported by previous statements. The number of statements that leave your listener incredulous goes down substantially.

This is not a silver bullet persuasion technique. But it is very useful, and easily learned. It is also productive to study why this technique isn't more powerful. Why does it often fail?

- The listener may not follow your logic completely.
- The listener may not readily believe a statement of fact without opportunity to independently verify it.
- The listener may disengage before you reach your conclusion.
- The listener may reject your perfectly reasonable conclusion purely on ego grounds; people do not like admitting that they have been wrong.

These failure modes point to a powerful enhancement to this ordering: **be incomplete!** Instead of working your way down the entire argument, just give part of the argument. Leave it for the listener to finish the argument himself and come to your conclusion independently. This gives the listener time to process your facts and logic. It protects the listener's ego as well; any mind changing can occur in private, safe from neener dancers.

In fact, it can be quite productive to talk about *only* the justification. Do this early and often enough, and you can get dibs on how to fix the problem. The socialistic Left does this instinctively. There is no problem too unimportant to justify a new government program. The details and workability of the proposed program is unimportant. The important thing is to get people concerned with the problem. This works. The opposition is often backed into the position of trying to deny the magnitude of the problem, which often results in appearing uncaring.

(A rare example of the Right using this technique is the public school debate. Here, the Left is in the position of trying to say there is no significant problem, while the Right hammers away at the school system's many failings.)

That said, I do think it is also worthwhile to lead at least the interested voters through the complete chain of logic. But still, we need not always present the solution at the end, or even the entire argument leading up to the solution. Often, it is best to focus on only one step of an argument and leave the rest for later. (See <http://www.freeliber.com/archives/002266.html> for an example.)

Speaking of proofs, I have not proven that this technique works. Instead, I merely invite you to try it for yourself. Notice how long your conversations run before they degenerate into arguments or cut-offs. Note who comes back for more discussion. Rejoice when someone changes their mind – especially when they do so on their own.

On Herding Cats

And now, away from outreach and on to internal governance. In the interest of saving labor, I will start with an essay I wrote for *LP News* that never got published:

In the course of spreading the Libertarian message beyond the usual suspects, I have attended the meetings of many other groups, ranging from the hippie left to the pro-business right. In all these meetings one common factor caught my attention:

They behaved.

They actually had members content to go to a meeting to mainly listen and vote. Some of the meetings of the hippie left were particularly striking: people forming circles, holding hands, and feeding off the group energy as everyone nods in agreement with the leaders.

No so with Libertarian meetings! Whenever two or three Libertarians are gathered together, there are three or four opinions on any subject, and everyone has a 500 word thesis ready.

This is fun over a few beers. It can get tiresome during a committee meeting with a dozen people in attendance – which gives only five minutes per hour per speaker. It is downright painful at conventions where discussion on any motion is quickly diverted to a discussion of an off the cuff amendment, or worse, discussion over which amendment is being discussed.

Running a meeting of Libertarians is like herding cats. No matter how well crafted the motion, someone will offer an amendment. No matter how much work is put in by a committee, there is someone who can do a better job from the floor. Meanwhile, some get bored and start mumbling or walk out to attend a breakout session. Others complain about such behavior. Then battles over procedure ensue...

There is no point in complaining or asking Libertarians to behave. We won't. We are Libertarians because we don't like group decision making. We don't go along with the herd. We don't defer to committees. We are cats; it is time to deal with this fact.

Robert's Rules of Order are adequate for running a student government, a local Rotary Club, or for ratifying decisions already made in the back room. They work poorly for determining the consensus of a group of strong-willed intellectuals who don't like being told what to do.

After suffering through many LP meetings ranging from county executive committees, state and national conventions, to the LNC, I have taken to researching and experimenting (at the county level) with alternative procedures. Here are some of the most promising:

1. Parallel consideration of amendments. A committee spends months crafting a platform or bylaws change. Within a minute of its presentation, someone on the floor has an amendment. Most of the time for debate on the committee's report gets used on discussing and voting on amendments instead of on the merits of the motion proper. Worse yet, since amendments are considered on a first come, first serve basis, the most quickly (thus poorly) crafted amendments get consideration. Those who think before amending often get shut out by time considerations.

Why not let all variations on a motion be considered at the same time? This way people can compare the relative merits of multiple options, including the original motion. This also gives people who think before raising their hands a chance to offer their options. Finally, time currently wasted on points of order and procedural votes could be used productively.

2. Parallel voting methods. Robert's Rules call for voting on amendments before voting on the main motion. This is a very serial procedure which disallows full consideration of all the options. Furthermore, people are allowed to vote for amendments to a motion even if they intend to vote against the motion as amended. This is a terrible conflict of interest! It would be far better to let each variation on a motion stand on its own merits.

The Free State Project did parallel voting on all the states under consideration using Condorcet's method. This required all voters to rank each state from most favorite to least favorite. Then, a computer ran a head-to-head vote between each pair of states. The state which won all of these votes (New Hampshire) became the state they pledged to move to.

While Condorcet's method is the gold standard of voting systems, it is too cumbersome for live meetings. A much simpler method is approval voting. There, voters vote up or down on each version of a motion. If none of the versions reaches the required threshold (such as majority or 2/3, depending on the issue), then the motion fails. If more than one version reaches the threshold, the version with the highest approval wins. The beauty of this approach is that the version which is disliked the least wins, which is very good for party unity.

The downside is that voters cannot express degrees of approval. We can improve on approval voting by having elimination rounds if more than one option meets the required threshold.

3. More seconds. Even with these improved procedures, things could get cumbersome if too many options are put up for consideration. One way around this problem would be to require a greater fraction of the body to second a version before it is considered for voting. Since voting follows consideration of all versions, this could be a background process, with members co-signing an amended version as debate proceeds.

4. Creative recess. When an entire convention is in session, in theory only one person gets to speak at a time. This limits communication bandwidth considerably. One way to allow more debate on contentious issues would be to put a recess between presentation and voting. This would give people more time for crafting amendments, soliciting co-signers, and presenting written versions to the secretary.

This process could be facilitated by setting up stations for each motion where people could continue debate and craft amendments. This is the idea behind Open Space Technology (www.openspaceworld.org), a hybrid of democratic and market based decision making which has been embraced by "democracy activists" around the world. I have seen this format in practice by local leftists. Ironically, the far left is embracing a meeting format that is more market-based than that which we Libertarians use at our conventions. Perhaps we should fix this.

Since I wrote this article, a better parallel voting method has been brought to my attention: Range Voting. With Range Voting, the voters grade each option on an agreed upon scale. A scale of 1-5 works well in a committee setting. Finer gradations

require electronic tallies. The grades are averaged and the option with the highest grade wins. (In parliamentary settings, minimum grades may be required for special votes. Otherwise, the winning option simply has to beat the Nay option.) This voting system is often used in judging situations such as: sporting events like diving and gymnastics, GPAs for valedictorian and marching band competitions.

There is some powerful theory that shows this to be a superior system. See www.rangevoting.org for the theory. I have seen it successfully used in action under a different name (consensus voting). A 1-5 scale was used for determining consensus for the LP's Strategic Planning Team. This worked so well that I used it for ranking essays at www.ReformTheLP.org. It was only later that I was told that this was called Range Voting and that it was backed up with strong theory.

A Better National Committee?

My second governance reform is speculative. It might be inferior to what the LP has today.

Currently, the LP elects part of its central committee (the LNC) as at large representatives of the national convention and part of the committee as regional representatives, representing clusters of state parties. This provides a committee with nationally known internal celebrities as well as activists who are known to their respective states. All well and good.

A problem I saw when I was on the LNC was that it was too big. 17 members results in each member averaging 3.5 minutes/hour of speaking time. Figure in time used for voting and parliamentary wrangling and the real figure drops to less than 3 minutes.

More people on the committee results in more skills on the board and more factions represented, but it also results in clumsiness of operation.

One possibility would be to split the board into two boards.

Operations board. This board would see to the finances, database management, FEC compliance, materials distribution, and handle intra-party governance. This board is a good place for regional representatives, who represent the state parties.

Political board. This board would oversee the actual politics done by the national committee. Literature, outreach programs, press releases, etc. would be governed by this board. This is a good place for LP celebrities, such as former prominent candidates, and authors of libertarian books.

The executive committee members could sit on both boards to provide connectivity, as well as rule on which issues go to which committee.

There would be tricky details to work out, such as which issues go where. It may be necessary to form a committee of the whole to work out budget issues. Perhaps even the executive committee should divide. I'd put the Chair on the political board and the Vice Chair on the operations board. (Party Chair is the position that the party would show to the world, and the political board could act as

a shadow cabinet.) It might be optimal to have both boards meet at the same time in separate rooms and then form together near the end of a weekend meeting.

Note that the political board I have in mind is not the same things as the old publications review committee that the LNC used to appoint. I would give such a board more positive powers beyond making sure all the literature conformed to the platform. Instead of the platform being comprehensive, with all literature referencing the platform, the elected political committee would be an “organic platform,” authorized to make statements as issues arose. The convention’s platform would be more on the order of general principles and resolutions.

Once again, do note that this idea is not entirely thought out. There are critical details to consider, and it might not be workable.

And More

OK, I have said enough here. I have written more at libertyforall.net, articles which are archived on www.quiz2d.com/essays. Apply these lessons, or not, as you will. I have personally lost patience with internal LP politics, so I am now focusing my efforts on launching a new party, the subject of Part 5. Those of you wishing to reform an existing party may find a few interesting pointers there as well.