

BUILDING A PARTY MESSAGE

Winning Elections

As a party organizer, your job is to help the party govern successfully and win elections. To win elections, the party must get as many people as possible to support it. That means that a successful party organizer spends most of his or her time trying to find effective ways to convince people to support the party.

Building Support

People support political parties and candidates for many reasons, but most people support a party because they believe that party can help to solve their problems and the country's problems.

There are two basic ways that parties solve people's problems.

The first, and the quickest is through Patronage. Patronage means giving a person or a select group of people something that they need or want -- a job, some rice, a canal or a road for their town. In exchange, that person or group of people is expected to support your party in the future.

The problem with patronage is that there are never enough jobs or rice or money to give to everyone. It is very difficult to win over more than a small number of people this way. And the people who do not get jobs or have a road or canal build in their village often want to know why their neighbors got something and they did not!

The second way to convince people to support your party is by convincing people that your party and its candidates:

1. Care about their problems and share their concerns for the country and their hopes for the future, and
2. Have a plan for improving their lives and fixing the country's problems.

This is called developing a party Message.

What is a Party Message?

In it's most simple form, your Party Message is a statement of why someone should vote for your party and its candidates.

Your message should describe your party's plan for improving the country and give people a sense of what you party will do for them if it is elected or re-elected. Your message should give people a clear sense of both the policies and the values that your party supports.

A message, by definition, talks about the future rather than the past. Talking about what you have done in the past is not the same as talking about what you are doing now and will do in the future.

The test of a good message comes when you are in the market or meeting with a group of people and someone asks you "Why should I support your party."

Your answer to that question is your message.

While there are an unlimited number of possible messages, below are a few samples that may give you ideas about your own message:

1. We are the party that will feed Cambodia, and we have a plan to end hunger in the next five years
2. Our party fights for justice by ending corruption in the government and ending human rights abuses at home.
3. We are the party of jobs and economic growth.
4. Farmers are the key to Cambodia's future. Our party will work to help them.

These are just examples. Try thinking of some of your own ideas.

Supporting the Message with Policies and Ideas

Once you have a message, you must come up with ideas for policies and actions to support you idea. For example, if you say that you are the party of jobs and economic growth, you must be prepared to describe what your party will do to create jobs and economic growth. You also must be prepared to explain how what your party will do is different from what other parties will do.

One of the most frequent mistakes in politics is to develop a message, but not the policies and ideas to support it. If you tell people you will solve a problem, but cannot tell them how, they will probably not believe you.

Listening to the People

So how do you decide what your message will be?

Above, we said that most people vote for a party because the believe that the party can help solve their problems and the country' problems. So the first step in developing a message is to understand what people are concerned about.

Think about your own village, commune, district or province. What issues are people interested in? What are they worried about? What things do they want for themselves and their children? What do they want their future to be like?

These are the types of questions that a good political organizer must always be thinking about. Many organizers make the mistake of thinking they know what the people want without actually asking them. A good political party organizer listens as much as he or she speaks and is always looking for opportunities to learn what people truly think.

Expressing Message Effectively

Once you have decided on the problems you will address in your message, and the ideas you will advocate for solving these problems, you must think about how you will describe your message.

The words and ideas you use to express your message are almost as important as the substance of the message. If your message is not clear and understandable, or if it is long, complicated and boring, people will not be interested. When you are thinking about how to talk about your message, think about the Five Attributes of a Good Message. Is your message:

Brief - The best messages can be described in one or two carefully chosen sentences. If it takes a long time to describe your message, it is probably too long and complicated. Remember, you can have ideas and policies to that you use to support your message, but your message is a brief statement of what the party cares about the most. unless it is brief, people may become bored or lose interest.

Understandable - Consider who are the types of people you want to support your party. Are they educated or uneducated people. Will they understand the words and concepts you are using to make your points? Many political parties make the mistake of developing a complicated message that average people cannot understand.

Unique - Your message is worthless if voters do not associate it specifically with your party. Try to make your message different from what the other parties are saying, or try to come up with supporting ideas and policies that are uniquely yours. If every party says they are against corruption, but your party alone pledges to enact a tough anti-corruption law, then you have made yourself unique.

True - It is very easy to get a reputation as someone who says things that are not always true. This reflects badly on you and makes people lose faith in the party. Always ask yourself, "Is what I am saying really true?"

Hopeful - Your message must give people hope that if you come to (or remain in) power, things will get better. Many messages are about problems that will take years to solve. To be effective, your message must make people believe that even if it takes time, your ideas will eventually help their lives. For a message to be successful, it must make people believe that the solutions you propose will be worth the wait.

Using Your Message

If a message is going to help the party, it must be used often and effectively. Once you have decided on a message, all party members should be educated about the message and should talk about it. Your party should organize events and activities to talk about your message with people who are not party members. And the party's leaders should make sure their words and actions support the

message.

For example, if you decide your message will be "We are dedicated to improving the lives of children in Cambodia":

The party's MP's could introduce a new law in the Assembly to help make sure that all children can receive education.

The party President could give a speech on the importance of children to Cambodia's future.

Other party leaders could visit schools and orphanages.

Party Organizers in every province could organize a meeting between mothers and the local party leaders to discuss the problems facing children and the party's ideas for solving them.

The party could produce a pamphlet on its ideas for helping children.

There are many more potential ideas, and when your own party chooses its message, you should be creative about developing ideas to spread the message.

Stick to the Message

The goal in choosing a message is to get people to identify your message with your party. To do this, every party member should understand and talk about the message as often as possible. If you only talk about your message some days, and other days you talk about different things, people may not understand what your message is. Or, if some party members talk about the message, but others discuss different topics, people may also get confused.

Make sure all party members know your message and talk about it often. Try to connect other topics to your message, for example:

If your message is about children, but the National Assembly is considering a bill on corruption, the party's MPs should talk about the effects of corruption on children

Summary

There are Six important steps to building and using a message:

1. Listen to the people and learn their concerns
2. Develop a Message to address those concerns.
3. Develop policies and ideas that you can put into place if you win the election to address those problems and concerns
4. Use the Five Attributes of a Good Message to find a good way to express your message
5. Find activities to use your Message.
6. Stick to your message. Make sure everyone in the party understands the message and uses it.

Good luck!