



## MY BEST SHOT

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### A CURE FOR THE CANDIDATE BLUES

A candidate for public office called me the other day to check-up on my post-election mental health after my squeaker loss for San Diego City Council in the March primary. Unusually, he wasn't looking for a campaign contribution, but for a kindred spirit. He was a bit blue.

Although there are at least 800 elected offices in the region, the number of people who have lived through the candidate experience here isn't that large and so we belong to a small network of people with a unique perspective. I suggested that perhaps we might start a self-help group for candidates, sort of a survivor syndrome therapy group—he wasn't going for that.

He is an underdog in his race—his opponent has the requisite line-up of power mavens, lobbyists and assorted of political party special interest groups to assure election. As a result, his campaign contributions lag far behind—not a good sign in a world where voters count on a slew of expensive campaign mail just to find out who is running for offices they like not to think about.

And, he is deeply hurt that his years of work on behalf of human rights, environmental issues and education amounted to a hill of beans to the political groups he advocated for over the years who are supporting a likely winner with a big campaign war chest.

I told him that in my year-long campaign experience, I discovered that politics brings out the worst in many people, but the very best in some. It is true that a surprising number of people with

shared backgrounds, battles or backyards disappear, and that far too many sit the fence to see which way the wind blows—creating an even deeper bonding with those who stay the course.

We agreed that the most demeaning campaign experience is not the daily money grovel, but the endless dog-and-pony shows for interest groups who relentlessly demand cooperation on their issue du jour. I had looked forward to these interviews and forums because I expected a give and take of ideas on the difficult problems facing the city. Silly me.

Many of the city's established interest groups pull candidates into their lair every two years for the sport, setting candidates up like gladiators, looking for blood, dangling precious endorsements and campaign dollars as bait. It is a relentless process where candidates are pinned to a tree instead of talking about how together they might save a forest.

But, I reminded him that an amazing number of committed citizens put their money and time where their mouths are in support of candidates and issues that matter to their communities. These folks are remarkable for keeping their word and steady on their feet through the shifting tides of a campaign.

The only cure I know for the candidate blues, I told my friend, is to return to the best part of the business, walking door-to-door and talking to the thousands of voters who can size up an empty power suit in a nanosecond, even one bought at Norstrom's. That kind of campaigning can't be done in high heels.