Canvassing Tips

1. Work in teams with people of various ages. Split up the canvassing list by age, if possible. People being canvassed respond much better to their age peers. The Young Voters Project did a study and found that voters under 29 years of age respond better after being canvassed by someone in the same age group. I have always imagined that this theory works with all age groups.
2. Assume it will rain. Have an umbrella, boots, and a raincoat in your car. Also, an extra pair of socks helps keep your feet dry in all types of weather. It doesn't hurt to bring Band-Aids, foot powder, and bunion pads, either.
3. Bring a few dog treats. Use them only if a seemingly menacing dog comes toward you. The treats are not bribes for other's pets, they're purely for self-protection.
4. Shut off your cell phone (or put it on vibrate). A ringing cell phone is turns people off, whether or not you answer it.
5. Don't jump to conclusions about potential supporters based on the house, the street, or the neighborhood.
6. After ringing the bell or knocking on the door, take a giant step back. A stranger standing too close to the door when it opens can be off-putting to the person opening it.
7. Smile. Smile even if you're getting a tongue lashing.
8. Get your information out quickly. Practice using the "who, where, what, and why" format. "Who" is you and "where" is where you are from or what group you represent (this is very important and puts people at ease when they know why a stranger is at their door). "What" is that you're canvassing for “**fill in the blank**”. "Why" is when you give them your pitch on why they should vote and why they should vote for “**Blank**”.
9. Talk about the issues until you identify a "hot button" issue with that voter. Many times, they'll tell you what concerns them, but often, you'll have to pick up facial cues like a furrowed brow or a nod. Continue to talk about this issue. If you can't identify which issues are important to them, don't be afraid to ask.
10. Try to reach an agreement on an issue with the potential voter. No matter where people may fall on the political spectrum, it is not difficult to find common ground. Once you do, highlight that you're in agreement with them. I like to use phrases like "that's a problem, don't you think?" or "so we both think we'd better off with...." to establish that we're in agreement. Once you've established this common ground, talk about Barack Obama's stance on this issue and how it's applicable.
11. Don't talk about your pet issues. Talk with the potential supporter about their important issues. Also, don't offer up your personal theories on issues. Stick with the message.
12. Always ask potential supporters if they have any questions or anything that they'd like to share with you. Demonstrating that you care about someone's thoughts is more effective at swaying voters than reciting the virtues of your politician. In addition, you're likely to get some background on the area that you're in, so that you can better identify with other people that you canvass. For example, you're likely to find out that a school has cut programs, the river is polluted, or the axle plant closed. So, these regional issues give you another opportunity to fine tune your message to either education, the environment, or the economy, respectively.
13. Tell everyone that you've canvassed that you appreciate their taking time to talk to you and that you enjoyed talking to them.
14. Take scheduled breaks with other canvassers and share your experiences (and change your socks while you're at it). Just as you become better at canvassing after your first several houses, you'll become even better after you find what your colleagues have learned.

On the turf:

* **Knock every door!** Even if you don’t see lights on or cars in the driveway, knock or ring the bell anyway. Someone may be home, so try anyway. And if you can’t hear the doorbell from the door, knock loudly.
* **Clearly mark your results** for each door. Usually your turf sheets will also come with a key to all those two-letter and number codes: NH=Not Home; MV=Moved; 1=Supporter; 5=Supports Opponent, etc. Make a note if it’s helpful for people coming back to the door, such as that they speak a different language, or you’re told they work nights.
* People usually take a lot longer to get to their door than you think. **After you ring the doorbell or knock, wait a good minute**. You can listen to hear if someone is coming to the door, or sometimes you’ll see the blinds move or see the pressure on the curtains change as someone approaches to see if you need to wait a bit longer.
* **Some people don’t use the door to their house that faces the street.** If you don’t see a mailbox on the front door, or it seems unused (check for lots of old newspapers or flyers; a pathway or driveway that leads to a side door) and there is an accessible **side** door that looks well-used, try that door instead. This can especially be true in larger houses that have been split into apartments. Make sure you stay visible from the street, and don’t go around the back of the house alone, even if that is the more-used door.
* Whatever day it is, **most of the people on your list are not going to be home**. Another reason why it’s important to volunteer– it may take 3 or 4 visits before someone from the campaign talks to that voter. But you have to keep trying to reach them.
* **If the person at the door has moved** away, ask for the new resident’s name and see if they have registered to vote yet. The campaign may decide to send them a voter registration form.
* **You cannot leave literature in a mailbox** – it’s illegal. If you have a flyer or pamphlet to leave, close it into the storm door. Sometimes you can curve the literature and wedge it between the door handle and the door jamb, or under an open lever-style handle. If you have space, you can write a “Sorry we missed you” note on the literature.
* Sometimes a voter will ask you questions about your candidate that you don’t know how to answer. Mark their question down and **have the campaign or candidate themselves get back to them**. Thank them for their interest in learning about your candidate. Sometimes, as I did when I was asked a question about a national issue while canvassing for a city council race, you can remind the voter of the scope of the office and the types of issues the person will face.
* **Canvassing is not soliciting**. You can still ring bells or knock on doors with “no soliciting” signs. However, if a person asks you not to come onto their property or to leave it, politely comply.
* **Smile!** When you’ve talked to someone, remember to be kind to them, to thank them for their time, and to wish them a nice day. Most of us rarely get kind treatment from strangers, so be the exception!

7 Myths About Door-to-Door Canvassing:

**1. The closer to the script you stay, the better.**

This is what you will be told by most campaigns. That is because they are afraid you will say things that they don’t want you to say. Nothing is worse for a campaign than rogue messaging. The problem is that people don’t respond to scripts. They respond to people. Figure out the main messages of the campaign and be as natural as possible without deviating from those messages. (For top research in this area, check out “In the Trenches: What Republican Operatives Need to Know About Voter Canvassing.”)

**2. It is illegal to knock on doors marked no soliciting.**

A good friend of mine always asks these questions of volunteers who are wondering about no soliciting signs. First, “Who made the laws about soliciting?” The politicians. Second, “Who wants to get re-elected?” The politicians. Finally, “Does it seem likely that politicians would make laws that hamper their ability to get what they want?”… In short, you are not soliciting. Going to a marked, no-soliciting door with a political campaign is completely legal.

**3. Doors marked no soliciting will be less receptive.**

This is sometimes accurate, but I have found that if the truth be told, the majority will not respond in any way more negatively than usual. Most of the time they don’t even remember they have the sign, and they basically don’t want average salesman coming up and bugging them. Occasionally you will get some people who will challenge you, and that is fine, you can just apologize and move on. To say this is the average however is a definite myth.

**4. It is difficult to canvass territory that has been recently canvassed by another campaign.**

I have literally been working opposite sides of the street with another campaigns worker before, going back over some of the exact same doors five minutes later. People actually like to compare and contrast. Any questions that the other campaign brought up to them are fresh on their minds. Rarely is it any more difficult to canvass after someone else. It can actually be very beneficial.

**5. Doors with dogs should be skipped.**

For reasons I have yet to comprehend, the presence of a dog in a front yard has a very unnerving effect on many first-time canvassers. Dogs are pets. If you can see them, they aren’t typically dangerous, or they wouldn’t be out and free. Use caution and intelligence, but don’t be intimidated by that tail wagging lab simply because he happens to be trying to call you over by barking. Nothing facilitates a conversation with a voter like making friends with their dog.

**6. It is fine to drop literature on a mailbox.**

Every campaign I have been on has made a point to say this, but don’t forget! Mailboxes are off limits. It isn’t just illegal. It is a federal offense. Don’t do anything to the mailbox. (And just for good measure, leave the post alone, too. Avoid even the appearance of evil.) Nothing like giving a campaign a good name like breaking the law.

**7. People don’t like it when you knock on their doors.**

Finally, as hard as it is for people to believe, the average person doesn’t mind having a campaign volunteer tell them what they need to know about a candidate to make an informed decision. It saves them time, and effort. They feel like they are getting decent information because it is straight from the source, and if you do your job right, it doesn’t take that long. There will, of course, be exceptions, but as a general rule, the overwhelming majority of your responses will either be neutral or positive, with the occasional cynic and recluse thrown in.