

Second Edition

HOW TO WIN YOUR

1ST



ELECTION

Susan Guber

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St. Lucie Press
Boca Raton, Florida

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Printed and bound in the U.S.A. Printed on acid-free paper.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 1-57444-130-2

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Introduction

There is no magic formula to winning an election. Each election is unique. The mood of the electorate, the press, the economy, the caliber of the candidate, and the opponents all play a significant role.

The inner resources of the candidate play a big part, too. How much time can the candidate commit? Is he or she well organized, a self-starter, a fund-raiser? These are questions that must be asked.

There are lessons one can derive from successful races, but there is no recipe for what works and what doesn't. You must be willing to try it all. The late Claude Pepper, senior member of Congress, told me when he was eighty-six years old, "Perhaps the most important element in a successful campaign is the willingness and the will to win, the desire to win being so strong in the candidate that he or she will exert tremendous effort and dedication to the victory. In order to do that, in general a candidate must be the kind of person dedicated to the kind of public service that he or she seeks."

Predicting the results of an election is somewhat like reading a crystal ball; if there were predictable answers, elections would not be the horse races they are. This measure of the unknown makes them a competition, a challenge, and a game. This book provides the essentials

for a well-run campaign. If a candidate doesn't win after using them, then it won't be because he or she did not campaign well. Of course, I would be foolish to say that is not important, but the means to that end can furnish priceless lessons. You can gain a lot of experience, skill, and personal insight by running. Win or lose, you will acquire experiences you never had before, meet new people, get involved in new organizations, become aware of public affairs, and, in short, grow. Running for office was truly the best year of my life. Sometimes when I look back, I think that running for office is at times more exciting than being in office. I looked forward to every campaign with enthusiasm.

One of the reasons I decided to write this book is that I ran in a district that was held by a Republican, that had never elected a woman to anything, and that has so many professional people living in it that I was bound to get lots of opposition. Indeed, more lawyers and doctors live in my district than in any other district in the state! The point is that it is possible to win against these obstacles, as I did. The key is to work hard and keep to a plan.

Another reason why I wrote the book is for the female candidate. Few women over the age of fifty have corporate experience. The glass ceiling has kept many women from moving up in their jobs or community service, where they would have the opportunity to develop relationships with chamber of commerce members or power brokers. How does a woman who wants to run get started? My recipe is especially directed toward that woman.

Finally, I wrote the book because there is so little written on the subject, particularly for candidates with no knowledge of the mechanisms of elections. People would ask if I would help them with their campaigns. I found I was spending hours with candidates, so I decided to put it all in writing.

I devoted fourteen months to running for office, working twelve to sixteen hours a day. I listened to the advice

of many people, but ultimately I had to make my own decisions about what activities to undertake. Once I made my decision, I followed through—from start to finish. Here, then, is how I won my first election.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Norma Burke, who edited the book, and to my husband, Michael Guber, who critiqued the content.

Thanks to members of the Florida political community for answering my questionnaire so that I could include anecdotal examples from their campaigns.

My sincere gratitude to Dr. Allen Morris, the historian of the Florida legislature, for allowing me to quote from his book, *How to Win in Politics* (Peninsular Publishing, 1949).

About the Author

Susan Guber served three terms in the Florida House of Representatives. Prior to her election, she chaired Dade County Common Cause, the Citizen's Coalition for Public Schools, and the Women's Political Caucus.

Ms. Guber grew up in Brookline, Massachusetts and received her B.A. degree from the University of Chicago. For the past thirty-two years, she has lived in Miami, Florida. She has been married for thirty-eight years and has two married daughters and a granddaughter.

Currently Susan Guber is a lobbyist, mainly dealing with healthcare issues. She serves on the Florida Commission on the Status of Women and the Dade Cultural Affairs Council. She was recently elected chair of the Dade Cultural Alliance.

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1

Deciding to Run

There are many reasons why a person decides to run for office. Among them are serving the community, solving problems, participating in the decisions that affect many, learning about government, and being a leader. Most people who run will give you a lengthy dissertation on their formal reasons for entering a race. The personal reasons are somewhat harder to come by. The real reason a person wants to submit himself or herself to the pressure of a tough political race, and then be under the watchful, critical eye of the public, is not easy to discern. Former thirty-year Congressman Dante Fascell said, "There are just four things you've got to know going in, though; you'll never get rich; you're under a microscope; there's no privacy; and you'd better work with other people because you're not a dictator. The democratic system is neither efficient nor economical."

When I asked State Representative Suzanne Jacobs of Delray Beach about her first race, she said, "It was a year long, arduous, back-breaking, exhausting experience." Asked if it was worth it, she answered "positively." Some

people back into the decision inadvertently, like school board member Michael Krop. After seeing a newspaper article about so many people picking up applications to run and so few actually going through with it, he became an example of one who decided not to run. Then, one night he went to a restaurant, and a friend who had also read the same article said he was disappointed in Krop's decision. He spent ten minutes encouraging Krop, who was still unconvinced until the man whipped out his wallet and wrote a check. With his first contribution, he finally decided to make a go of it and became a school board member and then chair of the fourth largest school system in the United States.

Madeleine Kunin, former governor of Vermont, writes in her autobiography, "The first time I ran for office...it was by mistake." A local newspaper reporter covered a meeting she was attending at which she talked about the importance of women serving in public life. The reporter stood up at the meeting and said, "It's time for a woman," and announced Kunin would be running. Since she did not withdraw, she says it was the only way that she could step over the threshold into public life.

Most great leaders of this country began their political careers by making the decision to run in just the same way you or I would. Barbara Jordan, the first black woman elected to Congress from the South and a notable member of the Judiciary Committee to study the impeachment of a president, gives us a glimpse into her decision. In the book *Barbara Jordan, A Self Portrait*, she talks about John Kennedy's presidential campaign. She went down to headquarters to see if she could offer her assistance and volunteered to do anything. After stuffing envelopes for days, she was asked to fill in for the candidate at a speaking engagement. The campaign staff realized her speaking ability was outstanding and continued to use her in the role for which she is now famous. She says, "By the time the Kennedy-Johnson campaign ended

successfully, I had really been bitten by the political bug. My interest, which had been latent, was sparked." One day, a friend said she should run for the Texas House of Representatives. She said, "I make enough money to eat and buy my clothes and run my little Simca, but I certainly don't make enough money to run a political campaign." After the friend loaned her the filing fee, she thought, "I've got to get serious about this. I've been talking politics, and wanting to get into it, and here I am." She questioned her knowledge about Texas state government and got a textbook to read up on the subject. Thus began her illustrious career.

Not all famous politicians have a hidden desire to run. Dwight Eisenhower backed into running for president after stating repeatedly he had no desire for elected office. People asked him constantly if he would run for president. In his book *At Ease, Stories I Tell to Friends*, Eisenhower says, "Pressures increased. Finally, I took a convenient opportunity to put my views before the public in an answer I sent to a newspaper publisher who wanted to enter my name in the New Hampshire presidential primary of March 1948. I worked over the draft of the letter carefully because I did not want to make it appear that I was arrogant or aloof or not complimented by such suggestions as had been made—but I did want to make it definite that I was not going to get involved in politics." Not taking no for an answer, he was asked to speak along with other "candidates" at the Republican National Convention. He wrote a letter saying he was not a candidate but that "tremendous demands had developed urging me to get into politics. These came from both parties. Men of every kind and class, it seemed, visited my headquarters during all of 1951 and each had his own reason for asserting that I owed it to the country to become a political candidate....For weeks I had to wrestle with the facts and arguments so often and so long presented. Finally, I came to the conclusion that with numerous people I deeply

respected stressing the need of our country for a change in political control and domestic programs, I should abide by the decisions of my party and of the electorate if I were nominated." Thus Eisenhower threw his hat into the presidential ring and won by a landslide.

Personally, when asked the question, I would answer, "I've always had a fascination with the government process, its power, and the people who are in a position to make things happen." My first political involvement was in Common Cause, an organization that scrutinized the workings of government. I learned how money was raised for candidates, how lobbyists influenced the process, and how congressional rules worked. It gave me the background on general issues and how to lobby effectively. I then got two jobs at which I stayed two years each, both of which broadened my political background. One was an aide to a county commissioner, and the other was an aide to a state representative. After that, I was in charge of the legislative coordination between the local hospital association and state government. By the time I had served in all of these positions, I felt it was time for me to stop working around the system and run for office myself.

As I talked to other elected officials, I found they had similar reasons for running. One man had served on his local zoning board when he decided to run for his first elected office, the state senate. Another had been president of his chamber of commerce, and still another had been a labor leader. George Crady, a member of the Florida House since 1977, lost twice before he won and sums up his first campaign as follows:

There's gratitude for all of those who pleaded that I run. Convincing were the arguments campaigning would be fun.

Announcement day was really swell, this said without retort,

Three hundred fifty relatives showed up to give support.
The campaign posters came at last two thousand forty-four,

Within three days they were gone and friends demanded more.

The day I stood there waiving signs, what glory did I see?
My bumper stickers totaled four hundred eighty three.

And thirteen thousand hands I shook while knocking door-to-door.

Behind each hand, a smiling face would pledge support galore.

Twelve thousand votes—the minimum—would be the count for me.

(Alas) the race was lost. I now admit a recount was not due.

But those who showed to vote for me my thanks, TO BOTH OF YOU!

Representative Crady had a sense of humor about his losses and decided to run a third time. Almost everyone who runs for election has been involved in some way in the community beforehand. They all have a bit of name recognition and a network of people to help them. Their reasons for running are as varied as the candidates themselves, and *why* becomes a frequently asked question on the campaign trail. Be prepared to sit down and think about why you want the office you are seeking and come up with some personal answers.

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- Before you start campaigning, know your reasons for deciding to run and be able to articulate them. People will ask!
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