

Reflections on DOOR KNOCKING

and Canvassing Dos & Don'ts



Marianne Harris Darnell has a question for canvassers.

“Would you approach a man who makes \$100,000 the same way you approach a man who makes \$15,000?”

The president of the Muskegon County Democrats Black Women’s Political Caucus is not pleased to hear “no” as the answer.

“Why? You want to treat some people like they’re stupid and others like they know something? How do you know it’s not the other way around? Hi, how are you? Then you give them facts about that candidate and why you think they should vote for them. As a matter of fact, you should vote period. Are you registered to vote?”

THE KEY IS TO BE REAL

After many door knocking campaigns, the long-time activist, who also sits on the Muskegon Heights School Board, says anyone can do the job, and make a difference. The key, she says, is to be real, come prepared, and show enthusiasm for the candidates and their positions.

“You can make people sit down and think, who might have been leaning another way,” she insists. “I’ve talked to people, ‘No I’m going to stay home.’ But once you show them the picture, once you tell them what’s at stake, you make them think.

“I make sure they understand that if Trump wins, nothing is going to be able to stop the corruption,

because he’s going to have all those crooks in power.”

As to the candidates, Marianne doesn’t cut them any slack. She says bluntly that if candidates can not be bothered to come and present themselves, she can’t be bothered fighting for them.

COME AND ASK FOR IT

“This is my problem with Democrats or Republicans. You want that black vote, you want that Latino vote, and you want the rural community vote. But you’re too damned good to go in those neighborhoods and ask for it.

“They call up and ask, ‘Will you endorse me?’ We get a letter: ‘Thank you for your previous endorsement.’ We don’t even know you. We’ve never given you an endorsement.”

So the Caucus sent all the candidates a letter instructing them to present themselves before a panel. The panel brings back their findings to the body, and the body makes the endorsement decisions. They need to know that candidate will show up for them.

One candidate seeking endorsement invited her to meet her in Grand Rapids.

“I told her, I don’t understand. How is it that you think you’re privy to the black vote, but you don’t even come in the black neighborhood? If you don’t think enough of us to come to us, we don’t think enough of you to vote for you. She never responded, and we’re not thinking about her.”

Canvassing Dos & Don'ts



Includes tips from [NGP VAN](#), the leading technology provider to Democratic and Progressive campaigns and organizations



The role of a political canvasser is to approach and talk about candidates and issues to a large number of potential voters at their home.

The canvasser is expected to present factual information to make the case, maintain a professional demeanor, and exhibit a warm, approachable attitude that reflects well on the candidate and the party.

Whether you're new to political canvassing or you've been around a block or two, the following general tips gleaned from NGP VAN can be invaluable advice, or at least helpful refreshers.

RULE 1: KNOW AND FOLLOW THE LAW

Know The Law—Rule #1, stresses NGP, is to learn and follow canvassing laws. Political canvassing laws protect volunteers and enable political candidates to have a grassroots mobilization campaign without violating any rights. CallHub's outstanding blog, [Essential Political Canvassing Laws For Your Election Campaign](#), is an invaluable education.

We are particularly reminded to obey all "no trespassing" and "no soliciting" signs.

Campaign literature—If no one comes to the door, materials may be left there, but it is against the law to put it in mailboxes.

Identification—It's a good idea to display your volunteer identification, either clipped on a jacket etc., or hung around your neck on a lanyard. It adds legitimacy, and reinforces who you are and what you want to talk about.

Official ID badges provided by the campaign or party are ideal, but otherwise, do include your name and party and/or campaign.

FOCUS ON THE VOTERS YOU NEED

Hone Your Outreach—Focus on the voters you need to win, particularly undecided voters who are likely to vote, and Democratic voters who sometimes vote.

Prepare Scripts—We can all make our points better when we are prepared. Prepare for common questions and talking points by creating canvassing scripts. These scripts should aim to help guide the conversation and provide reminders of facts and statistics.

Be sure to go over your points before you head out, so you are ready with answers and rebuttals. Of course, improvise as needed to hold meaningful conversations with voters.

Be Professional—Always maintain a professional demeanor, and exhibit a warm, approachable attitude that reflects well on your candidate and your party.

Be sure to thank people who take the time to talk with you.

Stay Safe—Don't go door knocking in stormy conditions. No one wants to stand outside or in a doorway in the rain. Where possible, canvass early in the day, or early evening. Knock on doors in pairs when possible, and stay outside. Leave uncomfortable situations.

Be Realistic—A canvasser can expect to stand and walk for extended hours, while maintaining a good level of energy and a positive attitude. Interpersonal and communication skills are a huge asset in the role of a canvasser. Canvassing might be a difficult job for a very introverted person.

Not only can outings be long, the canvassing season is long. It usually begins several months before an election, with activities ramping up about two months before.

During the first few months, canvassing campaigns generally focus on information gathering and encouraging voter registration.

Long hours on your feet is not easy for anyone, and election workers tend to be older, which may

mean less stamina. So don't feel bad if shorter outings are what you can reasonably handle, and perhaps phone canvassing is your solution.

[NGP VAN](#) delves into a wide range of additional topics about political canvassing, including how canvassing works, and the effectiveness of canvassing in building connections, persuading undecided voters, and encouraging voting.

Studies have proven that direct outreach is the most impactful way of election canvassing. Door-to-door canvassing can raise voter turnout by 6%, which, given how close many elections are, can be the determining factor in a candidate's victory.

And the fact that a Democrat showed up can shape voters' perceptions, especially if no Republican canvassers came.

Engagement is more important than ever this year. If you haven't canvassed before but think you might give it a try, get in touch with us and we'll put you on the track. Reach us by email at muskegondems@gmail.com, or stop by our office at 490 W. Western Avenue in Downtown Muskegon any Friday between 1-4 pm.

See our related articles, [How to Talk with Someone with Different Political Views](#), and [REACH](#)