

Dear Candidates: Learn How to Talk to Us

We're well into another election season, and candidates for office have got to be asking their brightest staff "How do we get these guys' support?"

These guys of course means us. Oregon's Africans and African Americans, our Asians and islanders; our Arabs and Persians; all our Russian- and Spanish-speakers. Particularly it means New Americans' earnest contributions in volunteers and cash — the stuff of local legend. Ask Governor Barbara Roberts or Multnomah County Commission Chair Beverly Stein or Portland Mayor Tom Potter.

If urban myth's not persuasive, these facts should be: Oregon Asians and Latinos, alone, add up to \$12.6 billion in purchasing power. We are 113,715 voters.

So campaign staffers: in a layout lending itself to folding into tidy quarters for hip pockets, here's a column of four fast rules for engaging our American dreamers. Pero hati hati (but beware) they're not talking points. Be advised that non-Western communities are acutely tuned to sincerity. Right words without real feelings will get you smiles and nods. The same smiles and nods as cruel colonialists, ferocious occupiers, and uncaring government guys, got back home.

And there you go:

Quick Rule 1. If you don't mean it in your very bones, don't say it.

Quick Rule 2. Joy is better than sorrow.

Not long ago, at a big annual celebration, aides apparently forgot to tell our state's senior senator that recalling how entire families of Japanese American Portlanders were collected then incarcerated for the duration of the Second World War, is not so cool.

Better, much better than bringing back all these elders' pain is sincerely thanking them. Thanking Japanese America for resuscitating the United States Constitution. For restoring American sanity. For the sake of the next and the next ethnic minority neighborhood our country gets crazy about.

Rule 2 does not mean our families have not suffered. Nor does it propose that policy leaders should not acknowledge how much harm America's wild mood swings do here and or in our homelands. Not at all. Taking responsibility and expressing sorrow is what's expected of good leaders. Do that. Then pause.

Then let us know how much our stubborn loyalty to cultural integrity, how much our ridiculous optimism over American ideals, means to our otherwise cynical nation's momentum. And mean it.



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If however, you have not been around our communities to really feel it — say nothing. Smart silence is better than overt insincerity. Reread Rule 1.

Quick Rule 3. Don't talk up deeds that are your job.

Broad shouldered Americans agreed 50 years to integrate our several ethnic streams into our economic mainstream. We made it the law. The Unites States Supreme Court affirmed again and again that it's our government's job to get it done. Candidates already in office best not brag about what everyone already expects of you.

Only accomplishments taking personal commitment can truly move families marginalized by the entropy of Oregon's awfully racialized institutions. Tell us about deeds done at substantial

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political risk. Talk about work done not already in your position description.

By analogy: Cops don't talk up cuffing a 7-Eleven robber. It's their job. Their public, their superiors, their rank and file, all expect good police work. Contrast that with an officer talking down an angry, possibly armed, teenager — despite the officer's legal authority to use lethal force, despite his pounding heart — that kind of courage, that cool commitment earns our affection. Tell us about caring like that. About caring you've done in our ethnic streams, where the labor clocked is not salaried and the love distributed never makes network news.

Oregon's marginalized communities, whether it's our mentally ill or differently-abled, our non-heterosexual or our non-Anglo enclaves, are in effect no-nonsense breathalyzers for common courage. For simple caring. Blow here.

Quick Rule 4. Have we had noodles?

Sometimes our state's muscular community elders and activists are also in mainstream positions of influence. Of public prominence. Really. It happens.

Take Representative Lew Fredericks. He's busy in Oregon's Legislative Assembly as well as

around our communities' raucous kitchen tables. He's always been in it, right up to his Smokey Robinson eyeballs. Of course there are other black and brown women and men, with government authority. Maybe four. Maybe five, in a state of 3,871,859.

The point is, although Oregon's ethnic minority streams are woefully under-represented in our mainstream's democratic processes, this does not mean we don't have tough and tender leadership in our several side streams. On the

called.

If that's not something you've done — give me a call, name a Southeast Portland noodle shop, say how many hours you have for problem solving. Ten community heavy-lifters will meet you there. And deal you into our critical work. And lend you their good names.

Thereafter, cash-in these elder aunts' and big uncles' respect every next time you need some help. Good credit counts.

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contrary, given our communities' lack of access to Oregon's robust politics, obviously there are diligent leaders at work day and night in our energetic neighborhoods. Keeping it together. Keeping us together. Forgiving America's short span of attention. Stoking our ridiculous optimism.

Accordingly Rule 4 says: Better than a tidy list of equal opportunity activities (go to "Good Deeds are your Job" section) is telling your audience of smiling and nodding black and brown faces exactly whose kitchen table or taqueria, whose temple or mosque or church basement, you've worked in until your worried spouse

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Notes

About the awful entropy of Oregon's racialized institutions:

—Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile (2010).

On the value of Oregon Latino and Asian entrepreneurs, consumers, and voters:

—Latino Oregon's 6,360 businesses had receipts of \$1.4 billion and employed 8,272. Asian Oregonians' 9,046 businesses had receipts of \$2.2 billion and employed 22,714. (US Census Bureau. 2001).

—The 2010 purchasing power of Oregon Latinos totaled \$7.5 billion. An increase of 713.8 percent since 1990. Asian buying power totaled \$5.1 billion. An increase of 465.5 percent since 1990. (Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia. 2012).

—5.8 percent of registered Oregon voters are naturalized citizens or U.S.-born children of immigrants. That's 113,715 voters. (Analysis of 2008 Census Bureau Data, American Immigration Law Foundation).

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