

The Hotline

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National Briefing

CONSULTANT CANDIDS: Same Game, Different Rules

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Thomas Oppel co-founded All Points Communications, LLC, a Dem media firm, after nearly 25 years as a media consultant, strategist and political journalist. Oppel began his career as a teacher then moved to journalism, covering two presidential campaigns and dozens of state and local elections for UPI and daily newspapers in New England and the South. In '85, Oppel moved from the audience to the arena, managing and advising Dem campaigns from the precinct level to the presidency. He also served as chief political and comm. advisor in ex-MS Gov. **Ray Mabus'** (D) campaigns and admin. And today, Oppel is our "Consultant Candid."

What was your first job?

Mowing lawns and selling newspapers was my first job as a child. My first job out of college was teaching sixth grade English.

What is your proudest moment professionally?

I've been fortunate to have a number, but the first was in 1986 on the day after Mike Espy was elected as the first African-American congressman from Mississippi since Reconstruction. I was the press secretary on his campaign and at the day-after press conference, I met two dads (one African American and one white) who had each brought their child "to see what was possible," as one of them told me.

What one event in a candidate's past would pose the biggest problem in a campaign?

Dishonesty.

If you could be in any other line of work, what would it be?

Either playing for the Red Sox or playing in a rock band.

Negative campaigning -- good or bad?

Done correctly, it is effective and can provide voters with information they

don't have.

Where is your happy place?

Any place with my wife and three children.

What is your favorite restaurant to meet clients?

I don't regularly meet clients at restaurants, but my favorite restaurant was Times Change in Jackson, Mississippi. Unfortunately it's not there any more.

What campaign (past, present or future) would you most like to be a part of?

Robert Kennedy's campaign in 1968, if I could change the ending.

What is the ideal number of clients to have at one time?

One less than the number you can give the attention they deserve.

What firm/individual who does your kind of work for the other party do you respect the most, and why?

I have always believed that the Democratic Party stands for those who lack power and privilege and seek to succeed based solely on merit in a system that provides a fair and level playing field. Given my beliefs, it's hard to respect those who work against such principles.

What is the first section of the newspaper you read?

As a former newspaper reporter, I start with the front page and go through the whole paper.

If you could only watch one news show, what would it be?

It may be a sacrilege for a media consultant, but I don't think you learn all that much from "news shows." I'd probably pick local news, although I do enjoy Keith Olberman.

We're ending this feature with a question posed by the last interviewee. This is from The Tarrance Group's Brian Tringali: What is your favorite book or film and why?

My favorite film is The Magnificent Seven, with its fundamental plot of a group of professionals assisting unarmed farmers and families against armed bandits is what I believe I do. It's based on The Seven Samurai, which is a wonderful film, but culturally, the cast, writing and music of the Magnificent Seven are more appealing.

Pose a question for the next interviewee.

If you could change one thing about the election process, without abandoning the commitment to a fair and free vote, what change would you make?

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