

Political Leaders Must Be Activists

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Sunday, December 19, 2010

<https://politicsrespun.org/2010/12/political-leaders-must-be-activists/>

I've been quite disappointed in how President Obama's relationship with the populace has shifted from being a facilitator of socio-political change with a high social media profile to a typical president who neglects opportunities to fully engage citizen activists with a progressive agenda. His failure to motivate the millions of people whose email addresses he collected, to in turn motivate Congress to let the Bush tax cuts for the rich to expire is a classic example.

A few weeks ago in an interview in the *Hindustan Times*, Al Gore had a few words about leadership [italics is mine]:

How can individuals contribute to fight the climate change?

Some sensible choices like using more energy efficient light bulbs, more insulation and adopting less carbon consuming technologies can help. But, the bigger change will come at the policy level by the politicians. *Leaders will have to become political activists and go at the grass root levels to speed up the process of fighting global warming.*

via [Need to speed up process of fighting global warming: Al Gore - Hindustan Times.](#)

It's the part of about leaders being activists that appears ground-breaking, but it's really not. Movements start by people stepping up to lead, but too often politicians don't see their role as being movement leaders. Voter turnout dropping below 50% in BC in 2009 demonstrates that people's expectations of political leaders has evolved.

But will the next generation of political leaders in BC learn truly embrace this new climate?

[Gillian Shaw reviewed some core rules](#) for how leadership contenders [but really, any prospective political leader/activist] ought to use social media in motivating their constituency:

1. Be honest
2. Social networking is about dialogue
3. "Not listening to people on Twitter would be like not answering our phone"
4. Lose the generic website, Facebook and YouTube sites
5. Go mobile or go home

People seeking leadership or even just policy influence need to understand that social media is not merely another one-way, broadcast advertising platform but a place particularly designed around human engagement. It's either do social media correctly or skip it entirely, which has its own attached peril because people using social media will correctly conclude that a leader's absence signals their neglect of

that human platform.

So now that the BC NDP and BC Liberal leadership races are on, prospective leaders have the opportunity to put member engagement on the table as something needing a new paradigm compared to old 20th century ways of acknowledging members as people who simply join a political movement only to sub-contract their political activity to the "professionals." More and more people today are not abrogating that responsibility.

Particularly if the BC NDP, for instance, is to become the electoral wing of a progressive social movement in BC, the party and caucus need to embrace the myriad of ways of facilitating that kind of engagement and inclusion, particularly by focusing on [points 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 from my benchmark](#) for evaluating political evolution:

1. We must build a social movement within the party
4. We must empower members and non-members
5. We must improve our relationship with the environment
6. We must improve our relationship with labour and other progressive groups
7. We must build a constructive relationship with progressive businesses

In February and April of next year we'll see how 21st century BC politics can become.