

## Appendix C

### Manager Profile—Katie Merrill

#### Managing in the California Big Leagues

**K**atie Merrill's career in California politics began in 1991. "I always knew I wanted to work in politics," she told us. "I got involved in a local LGBT Democratic Club, which led to volunteering on campaigns, which led to a paid position on a campaign."<sup>1</sup> Merrill has described her personal politics as very liberal on social issues and somewhat liberal on economic issues. She figures she has worked on more than twenty-five campaigns and been the manager or general consultant on fifteen of them. Not only candidates but stakeholders in ballot initiatives—very big business in California politics—have turned to Merrill for her political management skills. Her wins include the successful 2010 campaign against Proposition 23—that is, the campaign to uphold California's greenhouse emissions standards.<sup>2</sup>

Like all seasoned campaign professionals, Merrill also has seen her share of high-profile disappointments, including Democrat Phil Angelides' unsuccessful 2006 challenge to California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Schwarzenegger had looked vulnerable at the beginning of the election year. But while Angelides was coming from behind to win the Democratic nomination, the governor's campaign team was raising and spending money to boost his approval rating in the polls. In the general election, the Angelides campaign never really broke through, and the governor was reelected in a landslide with 55.9 percent of the vote.

Not only did Angelides lose but after the loss a leading Democratic consultant who had worked for his primary opponent wrote an op-ed that partly blamed Angelides' defeat on his known impulse to dominate his managers and run his own campaigns.

#### **"Don't Run Your Own Campaign"<sup>3</sup>**

Like the lawyer who represents himself, the candidate who manages his own campaign has a fool for a client. Especially at the level of governor, truly smart candidates hire talented, experienced advisers and pay heed to their counsel.

But not the supposedly brilliant Angelides. One of the worst-kept secrets about the two-term treasurer . . . is that he always runs his own campaigns, down to every tactical decision and the last tedious detail. In the last couple of weeks before the election, major daily newspapers were filled with head-shaking stories from current and former Angelides campaign workers about the ludicrous extent of his micromanagement.<sup>4</sup>

Gary South, former adviser to Phil Angelides



AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, Pool.

Ahead in the polls in 2006, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger agreed to only a single Saturday night October debate with Democrat Phil Angelides (right). Many Californians were more interested in watching college football or the baseball playoffs, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.<sup>5</sup>

Showing the wise restraint of an experienced pro, Merrill declined to discuss the pros and cons of her former boss's management style. But she did talk generally about the difficulty of managing staff in a campaign when all the polling says your candidate is almost certain to lose, which was the case for Angelides. As she pointed out, managers also face certain challenges when everyone thinks you're going to win—namely that there is no sense of urgency inside the campaign: “And so what you have is a bunch of horses chomping at the bit, and they're bored.”

### **Grassroots Organizer Learns about California Media**

When asked about the irony of running media campaigns in California after having started as a grassroots organizer, Merrill admitted that the psychological boost from

successful grassroots organizing and fieldwork is still greater than the boost from successful advertising gamesmanship:

When you're running a race . . . and you meet the contact goals and you meet your ID goals and you meet your turnout goals and win, it's about the coolest thing in the world. It's a hell of a lot more interesting than, you know, "I put 1,000 points on L.A. TV and got two ads in the NBA finals and won."

### **More from Katie Merrill's Interview**

Q. What are you looking for in the personalities of the young people you hire in campaigns?

A. One of the questions I always ask is, do you play any sports? Because I think it's critical to have the ability to work as a team member. And which doesn't mean that I don't hire people who haven't played team sports. But if they have, they know about two things. One, they know about working on a team. Two, they've got a competitive spirit. And I think both of those things, those personality attributes, are critical to being successful at campaign work.

Q. So you want them to cooperate inside the campaign and be competitive on the outside?

A. Yes, exactly . . . I'm not interested in egos. And you see it all the time. Like a presidential campaign—every time a book's written about a presidential campaign, you hear about people undercutting each other and spending so much time trying to become the director of this or the head of that that they lose focus and often lose the race. I think that [ego] is toxic on any kind of campaign whether you're doing a local ballot initiative or whether you're in the big, big race.

Q. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen since you started out in politics?

A. Well, obviously technology and the Internet have changed politics inexorably. And interestingly enough, in California what they have done is they've made the old new again. When I got into California politics, state-wide politics in 1992, people said to me, "Field is dead. It's all about TV." Well, guess what? Field has made a comeback, and it's making a comeback because of the Internet. It's just easier to organize, much easier to call, much easier to recruit volunteers, actually get them to do stuff.

You know, ultimately, until voting becomes an online activity, you have to figure out how to translate online into the offline. And we really weren't able to do it until 2008. The Obama campaign did it. They had brick-and-mortar offices. How did they get people there? They used the Internet. How did they go places where they didn't have brick-and-mortar offices? How did they get people to do stuff? The Internet. When they wanted

people to make calls, and Hillary did this too, into primary states but you were out of state, how did they have you make calls? The Internet. I sat at my computer and got on the phone, and they just patched me through to voters. So that's what the Internet has done to allow the field, which is so labor intensive and costly, to become more cost effective.

Q. What about the relationship between the campaign manager and the candidate? Do you manage the candidate?

A. You hope that you have a relationship with the candidate. You know, it's not about managing the candidate, but it's about sort of having a kind of partnership. You respect the candidate. You each understand what your roles are. And you respect those boundaries. You're in constant communication. You understand what decisions you're going to make, what decisions the candidate will make, and you operate based on those agreements. . . . Some candidates are aware they have [quirks] and are willing to work in partnership, work around them, and some of them aren't. But I think if you go into it thinking you're going to manage the candidate, you're going to encounter a world of heartache.

Q. What advice would you have for a young person who might want to get into politics and someday become a campaign manager?

A. Go volunteer on a campaign right now! If you're interested in politics, this is how democracy functions, right? So, if you want to see how it really works, go volunteer on a campaign and see the bones of it and the ins and outs of it. That's how you find out whether you really want a job in politics. As soon as you volunteer on a campaign, and if you're excited and you do a good job, then you get hired later on in the campaign, or in the next one. It really does start your career.

## Notes

1. Katie Merrill, personal communication, September 15, 2011, for this quote and all other Katie Merrill quotes in this appendix.

2. For more background on Proposition 23, see [http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/California\\_Proposition\\_23\\_the\\_Suspension\\_of\\_AB\\_32\\_\(2010\)](http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/California_Proposition_23_the_Suspension_of_AB_32_(2010)).

3. Garry South is a Democratic strategist who ran Gray Davis' successful gubernatorial campaigns in 1998 and 2002 and was senior adviser to the Steve Westly campaign for governor in the 2006 Democratic primary.

4. Garry South, "Why Phil Angelides Lost," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 8, 2006, [www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/Why-Phil-Angelides-lost-2467030.php](http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/Why-Phil-Angelides-lost-2467030.php).

5. Carla Marinucci and Tom Chorneau, "Schwarzenegger, Angelides Also Spar on College Costs in Only Meeting of Campaign," October 8, 2006, *San Francisco Chronicle*, [www.sfgate.com/politics/article/CAMPAIGN-2006-Gubernatorial-Race-Candidates-2468443.php](http://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/CAMPAIGN-2006-Gubernatorial-Race-Candidates-2468443.php).