



Tom Lindenfeld President, LSG Strategies

Tom Lindenfeld is the president and founder of LSG Strategies, a Democratic grass-roots organizing and political telemarketing firm based in Washington, D.C. Lindenfeld got his start on the 1972 George McGovern presidential campaign. He went on to work on Rep. Mo Udall's, D-Ariz., campaign before he took a break from politics to work as a social worker. He returned to politics in 1988, managing Rep. Frank Pallone's, D-N.J., successful first race. The Princeton graduate lives in Washington, D.C., with his godson, son, wife, dog and a 500-gallon fish tank.

1. How did you get into this business?

"I used to work with convicts and drug addicts, so on one hand I'd work with people that were caught up in the system—but since the same pathologies apply, I figured I could use my skills in either way."

2. How are new technologies like VoIP changing your business?

"I presume that's the way of the future. There's lots of new technologies, [such as] using the phone as a virtual predictive dialer so volunteers aren't getting busy signals or waiting for phones to ring. [We're also] using phones to do virtual town meetings."

3. How do you explain what you do to someone who doesn't work in politics?

"I'm an organizer. And what I do is the part of the political business which requires the direct voter contact and mobilization of large numbers of people, which ... goes hand and glove with the message and media, which tend to be more understood by non-political junkies."

4. What is the hardest race you've ever worked on?

"Either John Street [for mayor of Philadelphia] in 1999 or Lee Brown's [mayor of Houston] re-election in 2001. Those were both enormously different races. The Lee Brown one, I was involved in running the runoff with Craig Varoga, and we had both less money and a more complicated vote scenario. So we had to be able to get a significant amount of votes from whites, African Americans and Latinos. Where our opponent only had to work two [of these voter categories], we had to work three. Also, we had the Bush family and [Rudy] Giuliani campaigning against us. Houston is the largest geographic city, bigger than L.A. Precincts are 3,000 to 3,500 people each. If someone says they have their precinct covered, it's not possible. In Philly, we had a racially polarized race and it required increasing the turnout more than any other occasion." [Editor's note: Both Street and Brown won their races.]

5. How do you reach out to those who rely solely on cell phones and don't have a landline?

"Clerks and boards of elections accumulate and create contact lists of cell phone numbers. There's other text messaging options, e-mail contact and data that can be collected."

6. What lessons did you learn managing Frank Pallone's first congressional campaign that still hold true today?

"When you live under what is a political tsunami, you are trying to find Bush-Pallone voters, that takes a degree of organizing and direct voter contact that requires precise door-to-door, person-to-person building and analysis. ... Putting together a very expansive Election Day operation turned out to be a big part of how we won that."

7. What do you think about laws that would ban robocalls?

"Bad idea. My view is that it's really important for candidates to have as many options to contact and disseminate information as possible. To eliminate the most inexpensive [options], you're going to resign us to a system [where] the only ones that vote are more educated and wealthy and I don't find that appropriate."

8. How do you get someone to not hang up on you?

"The less political the messenger and the message, the better equipped you are to reach the people you're aiming your communication at."

9. If you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?

"Whether I was involved in electoral politics or not, I think of myself as an organizer. I'd be doing that nonetheless."

10. What is the biggest mistake someone can make using phones for voter contact?

"The [mistakes] that are the most significant tend to occur when [campaigns] outsource and don't monitor or hold accountable the people they are contracting with."