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## FOR WOMEN EXECUTIVES: BUSINESS IS A LOT LIKE POLITICS

How do you communicate leadership? You can be smart, hard-working, competent, strategic and blessed with superior vision for your company's, your state's or your country's future, but if you cannot communicate all that effectively, chances are you'll fail to capture the leadership position. That's true in politics, and true in business.

In fact, a recent study conducted by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation demonstrates how this holds true. The Foundation, a progressive organization whose mission is to promote women in politics and the arts, analyzed voter perceptions of ten women who ran for governor in 2002. The results indicated that personal qualities and performance often outweigh substantive issues with voters.

The study, entitled "In Cracking the Code: Political Intelligence for Women Running for Governor," also found that women candidates are often judged more harshly than men seeking the same job. According to the study, "the candidate's personal style—clothes, hair and communications skills—is more closely scrutinized than a man's."

Barbara Lee, founder of the Foundation, sums up what many women are thinking: "Of course, we would like to think that experience and qualifications always triumph, but that isn't necessarily the case." However, the evidence, according to Lee, demonstrates how "the initial impression that a female candidate makes stays with voters longer and is less likely to change than voters' impressions of male candidates."

And women in politics are not the only ones who can benefit from this vital research. Women who are business leaders—or want to be—can learn. "The feedback we've received has told us that it is applicable to women in all fields who want to be successful," says Lee.

So what's a candidate or business leader to do? Lee shares a few of her tips.

### **Prepare, prepare, prepare.**

“A candidate who is prepared, practiced and relaxed will come across as confident and capable,” says Lee. Not only that, but you’ll feel prepared, confident and relaxed—which is equally as important.

Hire the professionals you need to strengthen your image and message.


Whether it’s a wardrobe consultant, make-up artist, media trainer or public speaking coach, the goal is to create a strong first impression. Leaders must know how to command a room or a debate stage from the beginning. They need to get ready for critical presentations or debates by practicing on videotape. When they review their performance, they have to pay particular attention to posture, facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. And of course, their messages must be conveyed powerfully and succinctly.

### **Add a little humor.**

Lee found that candidates, like all leaders, need to show decisiveness—but also not be afraid of a little self-deprecating humor. It helps diffuse tension and makes the candidate or anyone appear more human. “One of my favorite examples of this comes from Governor Jennifer Granholm of Michigan,” says Lee. “As a candidate, she was asked about the time she appeared on the television program, *The Dating Game*. She responded, ‘Well you don’t want a boring governor do you?’ Her retort ended that line of questioning once and for all!”

See which of these additional findings can apply to the work that you do.

- A candidate who is less “tailored”, both in the way she carries herself and in her manner of dress, is perceived by both male and female voters to be less of a leader and less professional.
- Misspeaking plagued several of the candidates. However, successfully recovering from public mishaps also demonstrates a particular confidence.
- A confident attitude conveys many positive qualities: intelligence, competence and authority.
- The importance of a well-planned, but controlled schedule cannot be over-stated.
- Successful candidates paced themselves and were fresh for their most important public events.
- Successful candidates also left the job of managing the campaign up to the campaign manager, rather than involving themselves in the micro-management of staff.
- Voters used debates to learn a candidate’s stand on the issues, but more importantly, voters wanted to gauge a candidate’s quickness, toughness and decisiveness.



- Voters lose confidence in candidates who display insecurity during critical moments of engagement. For this reason, preparation for debates, forums and press events is particularly important.

- When a female candidate is prepared and practiced, voters notice. When she isn't, it's hard for them to forget.

If you would like to download a copy of “Cracking the Code: Political Intelligence for Women Running for Governor” visit [www.barbaraleefamilyfoundation.org](http://www.barbaraleefamilyfoundation.org).