

19 **CONSULTANT CANDIDS: The ABDs Of Success**

Chuck Pruitt is partner and co-managing director of the A.B. Data Group, a full-service direct mail fundraising agency that works with Dem political camps and progressive advocacy and non-profit orgs. Recent clients include newly elected Sens. **Bob Casey** (D-PA) and **Amy Klobuchar** (D-MN), as well as Sen. **Carl Levin** (D-MI) and **Obama** for America. The firm's non-profit clients include the Save Darfur Coalition, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the American Jewish Cmte and over a dozen more. And today, Pruitt is our "Consultant Candid."

What was your first job?

Selling shoes at Sears Roebuck -- "Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back."

What is your proudest moment professionally?

Helping Harvey Gantt attract over 150,000 donors to his two Senate campaigns against Jesse Helms in North Carolina. We may not have won, but we sure scared the hell out of them. **What one event in a candidate's past would pose the biggest problem in a campaign?**

See recent events in New York.

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

President, Harvard University. I could do a lot with a \$35 billion endowment.

Negative campaigning -- good or bad?

My fellow Wisconsinite, Ken Goldstein said recently that, "Negativity is an underappreciated asset of democratic politics." Not sure that Ken has watched Sean Hannity recently but drawing what could be seen as negative contrasts can be effective in dramatizing the stakes in any election. As always, there are risks and rewards. Success in small dollar fundraising from ideological donors often depends on drawing sharp contrasts with your opponent to motivate donors to contribute \$25 or \$50. You do it right, the campaign raises money. You do it wrong and misstate the facts, your fundraising letter becomes a political liability.

Where is your happy place?

In front of a big screen HDTV today and tomorrow -- 32 NCAA tournament games in 36 hours. Lose and you're out.

What is your favorite restaurant to meet clients?

Breakfast at the Luna Grill on Connecticut Avenue.

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

Obama for President '2008. I'm living it -- working with the best people in Democratic politics in the most important presidential candidacy of my lifetime.

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

Only as many as you can have and still return their phone calls or answer their emails within 30 minutes.

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

Richard Viguerie -- he pioneered direct mail fundraising and still understands the critical role it can play in challenging the status quo and involving ordinary people in political life.

What is the first section of the newspaper you read?

Sports Section, *USA Today*

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

Hardball with Chris Matthews. He gets the rhythm of a presidential campaign -- the poetry as well as the prose.

We're ending this feature with a question posed by the last interviewee. This is from Majority Strategies' Sam Van Voorhis: Do you think Barack Obama's self-aggrandizing, long-winded, content-free speeches are contributing to CO2 emissions and accelerating global warming?

I'm a bit of a student of American history. There was a time in our country when serious speeches and intelligent thought were an important, even an essential, part of our political culture. It's unfortunate that Sam and others would try (unsuccessfully, I think) to belittle and devalue what is a truly extraordinary rebirth of the power of words and their capacity to inspire a new generation.

Pose a question for the next interviewee.

What's the biggest disaster you've ever confronted in a political campaign? How did you deal with it?