

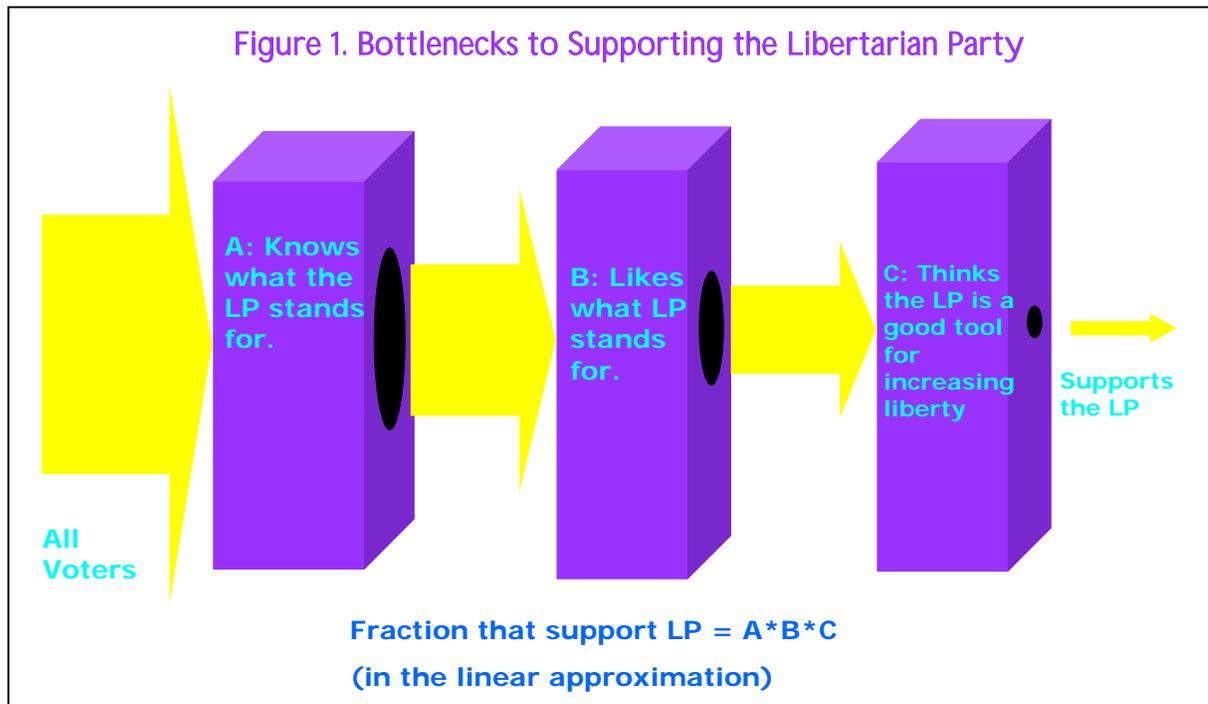
Mass Producing Libertarians

By Dr. Carl S. Milsted, Jr.

Would you like to see how a 20% overall improvement in running the LP can result in a 100% improvement in the number of activists and donors? How about getting a factor of 8 in votes with a factor of 2 in performance? How about a quadrupling of votes with zero extra effort? Does this sound like magic bulletism? It isn't. In fact, it is just the opposite.

Magic bullet theory is about looking at one aspect of operations in order to “get over the hump” or “solve our problems.” This essay is about looking at all the stages necessary to produce supporters and activists/donors.

The process of moving a voter from non-Libertarian to Libertarian has multiple stages. Failure at any stage causes the voter to fail to support the LP. Yet many Libertarian strategists look at only one of those stages. Consider the bottleneck diagram in Figure 1.



We see that of all voters, only a fraction know what the Libertarian Party is and what it stands for. Are they Liberals? LaRouchies? Librarians? Do Libertarians stand for low taxes? School choice? Legal drugs? Many people simply *do not know*. A significant portion of our effort to recruit supporters should be to simply build awareness of what we are about. It does no good for 30% of the population to believe in legalizing marijuana if they do not know that the Libertarian Party is “The Party of Pot.” This is labeled Bottleneck A, Awareness of the LP, in the diagram.

Of course, many people dislike what the Libertarian Party stands for. Some do not appreciate the power of free enterprise. Others believe in moralistic legislation. Many like the direction we are pushing for but do not like our radicalness. So, of that fraction of the voting public that know what the LP is about, only a fraction of that fraction would be happy if the LP was successful. This is Bottleneck B, Belief in the LP program, in the diagram.

However, just because someone knows about the LP and would like to see us in power, it does not mean that particular someone would actually support the LP. There is grave question in the minds of many as to whether the Libertarian Party is an effective tool for increasing liberty. After all, Libertarians rarely win elections, and they far more often split the pro-freedom vote thereby putting the greater of two evils into power. The “lesser of two evils ‘syndrome’” is a “disease” of the Libertarian Party, not of those who refuse to vote Libertarian. So of the fraction of the voting public that knows about the LP *and* likes what it stands for, only a fraction votes for or otherwise supports the Libertarian Party. This is Bottleneck C, Credibility, in the diagram.

Thus, the support base of the LP is the product of three fractions times the number of voters. That is, the fraction of the public that votes for or otherwise supports the LP is equal to $A*B*C$. **Even if each bottleneck was 30% (which looks pretty optimistic, given our level of effort), we would end up with a whopping 2.7% of the vote.** This is on the order of what we get in a three-way race. However, I think we are doing less well than 30% at each stage because a significant part of that 3% or so that Libertarians get is simply noise – just being on the ballot is worth a couple of points. An estimate of 20% at each stage is probably

closer to the truth, with a mere 1% or so of our votes being earned in the typical three-way race with a cardboard candidate.

The effect of successive multiplications of fractions are brutal. But there is an upside: relatively small improvements at each stage can produce large changes in the end result. If we improve each bottleneck by a factor of two, we increase our earned vote total by a factor of *eight!* Victory starts to look like it is within reach.

Alas, I have cheated a bit. Bottleneck A is a cumulative effort. Doubling the rate at which we get out the word does not immediately double the number of people who are aware of what the LP is about. We *can* improve on this bottleneck at existing levels of effort, and I started a business to help this cause, but building up brand awareness does take up time and a lot of advertising dollars.

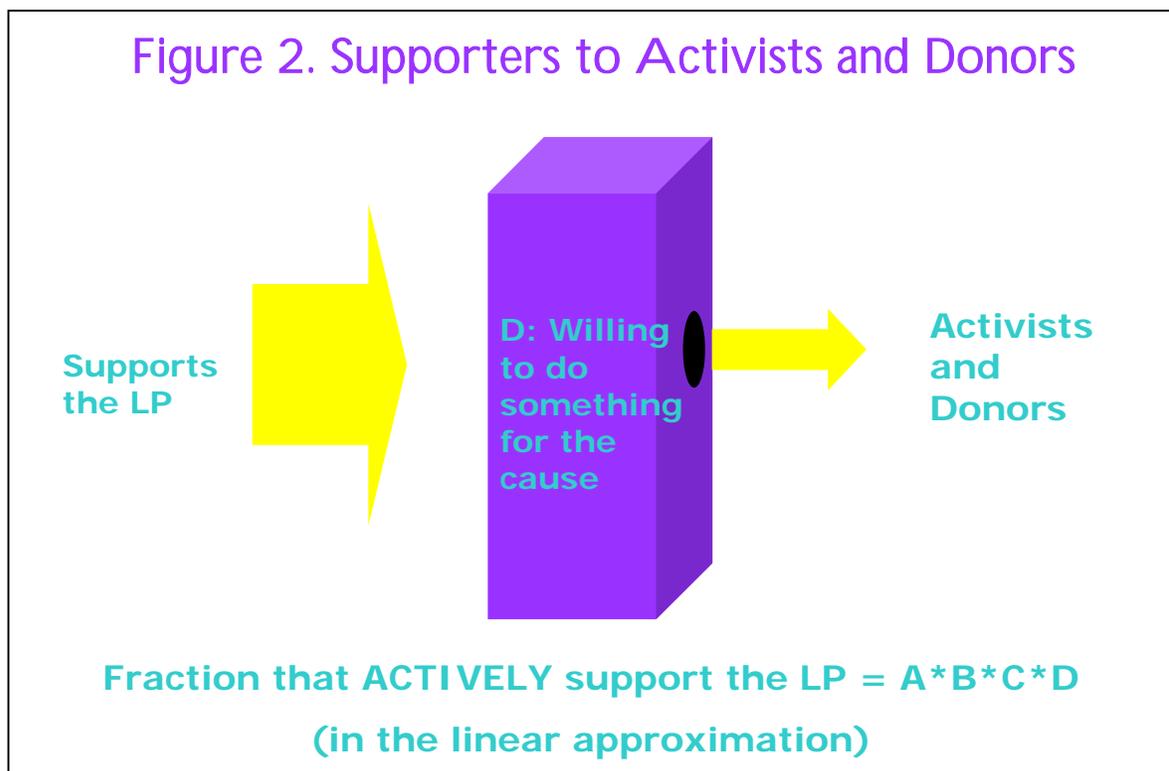
Many Libertarian strategists place too much blame on Bottleneck B – hardcore Objectivists are notorious in this regard. By ascribing most of the low vote totals that the LP gets to lack of belief in the LP program, it is easy to reach the conclusion that we should drop politics and focus our meager resources on education efforts. Others, might opt for dropping or postponing principles by trying the water down the LP Platform in order to open this bottleneck.

Voter education and platform moderation (or incrementalism) *are* good things, but it is easy to overestimate how much of these are needed. Bottlenecks A and B are nowhere near 100%. It may well be true that only a few percent believe in the full LP Platform, but full agreement is not what is needed to get through this bottleneck. The voter need only prefer Libertarian candidates to their Republican and Democratic rivals, not fully agree with the Libertarian candidates.

Finally, there is Bottleneck C, the least appreciated bottleneck by most Libertarian strategists. This bottleneck does seem daunting at first, since it would seem that we need resources to gain credibility, vs. credibility to gain resources. But there are ways to increase credibility with little extra effort. For example, focusing efforts on two-way races eliminates the “lesser of two evils” dilemma opening the credibility bottleneck for many. I did a study of state house races in the years 1999 and 2000 for a dozen states [published in the May 2001 issue of *Liberty*]. Libertarians did roughly four times better on average in two-way races (ignoring

other third party candidates) than in three-way races. The average state house candidate in a two-way race did roughly *forty times better* than Harry Browne did in 2000.

Note that the supporters in Figure 1 are not simply LP members. They include voters, registered Libertarians, people who allow a sign in their yard, etc. Of those, only a fraction put forth real effort and/or dollars toward the cause. Indeed, most people in general put forth no real effort to support a political ideology. Democratic governments are run by that small minority willing to work for the cause (along with the remoras who attach themselves to winnable candidates for access to power). Figure 2 completes the picture with Bottleneck D, Dedication.



The Story So Far

The essays in this series can be categorized according to which bottleneck they address:

I opened with “Two Models of Growth” which essentially stated that the easiest way to achieve growth is to work on widening Bottleneck C. To some degree the current essay is a more detailed exposition of my original thesis. While

repetition has its risks, this bottleneck is very much under appreciated and deserves more press.

Then followed “Excuses for Liberty” which gave a philosophical framework to allow principled libertarians to sell an incremental program while still being able to sleep at night. It is a powerful tool for widening Bottleneck B for those whose outreach efforts extend beyond anti-social computer guys.

“A Realistic Vision of Victory” addresses one way to widen Bottleneck C. It is not the only way, but it is perhaps the least controversial.

“Victory in Indianapolis” does not address a particular bottleneck, but it is a paean to improving the efficiency of our operation. It does relate to the bottleneck diagrams in that a mere 20% increase in the overall efficiency of our operation results in 70% more activists (I am discounting the effects of Bottleneck A improvements since this bottleneck is cumulative). Reasonable improvements in across the board efficiency can yield dramatic results. There is no need to resort to pyramid schemes and semi-honest recruiting and fundraising letters.

“Dirt Cheap Marketing” addresses primarily Bottleneck A, with some implications for Bottlenecks B and C. It was also a shameless plug for my online store (Buy! Buy! Buy!).

I have written nothing directly addressing Bottleneck D, but in a way all these essays are designed to address Bottleneck D. One reason many supporters stay passive in their support is they do not know how to act effectively. I hope to turn this series of essays into a handbook for activists at some point.

More to Come

There is much more to come, regarding all four bottlenecks, some of which is dynamite – both controversial and extremely powerful. I believe a factor of 8 or even 16 in our active support base in the next ten years or less is quite possible – given the proper strategy. Much of what has been written so far is groundwork and (hopefully) building up of readership. Stay tuned.

