

***“Absent a competitive leadership campaign, what steps should the Liberal Party take to re-engage its membership and rebuild its national organization?”***

The irony is that leadership campaigns have, for years, been the very source of the disengagement felt by many Party members. Too often, Liberals have felt that their membership was only a tool to help one leadership campaign or another. The Chretien-Martin wars; the Martin/Manley/Copps battle; the 2006 leadership campaign with, ultimately, eight candidates all vying for numbers. People were asked to join the party primarily to vote for one leadership candidate or another—and only rarely out of principle or for engagement in the issues of the day.

Now is the Liberal Party's chance to truly re-engage and rebuild, precisely because leadership is NOT an issue. Our time to recognize Liberals, not as numbers, but as people concerned about the country, with ideas and talent to contribute. We can focus, once again, on what it means to be Liberal in Canada: Economic policies that understand competitiveness and how to create and share prosperity, combined with a fundamental, compassionate belief in human rights, justice and equality of opportunity.

People say that Canadians, particularly youth, are apathetic. Well that's certainly not true of the many, many Canadians I have met over the last few years. Canadians all across the country CARE. Young people care. A lot. They care about equality of opportunity. They care about helping others. They care about their neighbour, with two little kids, who has just lost his job. They care about their sister's cancer operation taking months. They—we—want to be proud of our strengths at home, and to regain our pride in promoting peace and prosperity abroad.

*So how to re-engage liberal members and liberal-minded Canadians?*

First, make it clear—by actions, not words—that their opinions and engagement are important and necessary.

We must move to a one-member one-vote system. The technology is there, and we can use that same technology, not just for voting, but for “consultation” on specific issues. We should re-vamp our archaic policy development process. We can eliminate extra layers of provincial/territorial party bureaucracy, which are not only costly, but make members feel even more removed. It's time to embrace the internet, using tools such as facebook, YouTube, online “town halls” and internet networking—these provide great opportunities to engage in real, two-way discussions. We can also provide tools and channels for greater community involvement, so that Canadians can act on liberal values and ideals in their communities, not just talk about them. And in the process, build goodwill for the Liberal brand.

We need to re-engage liberals by asking, listening, and by helping them know that even small actions can, collectively, make a difference for all Canadians—in our ridings, in our provinces, and throughout the whole country.

Finally---we must stress that we are a party of the possible; that we will not idly accept personal and misleading attacks, but nor will we engage in them; that rather than using fear to motivate, we will focus on offering constructive alternatives. Instead, we will encourage membership, engagement and, yes, fundraising--out of a belief in the politics of the possible.