

Former Texas Democratic Party director shares secrets to campaign success

By Macy Smith

The former director of the Texas Democratic Party visited the University of Texas at Austin on Sept. 24 to discuss the strategy behind winning political campaigns.

"Ultimately, voters think about who earns their trust and what makes a difference in their life," said Manny Garcia, co-founder of Seeker Strategies. "I'm making a decision on who I entrust with my family, my job and my life. Who will earn that?"

The UT alum delivered his "Messaging 101: Building a Winning Message" speech as part of the Renewing Democracy Speaker Series. At Seeker Strategies, a Black and Brown-owned political communications firm, Garcia advises Colin Alred's campaign for senator and was the driving force behind the 2021 Texas walkout on voting rights. With the presidential election approaching on Nov. 5, Garcia's speech aimed to offer insights into how each party crafts its messaging to influence voters.

"To win – maintain eyeballs, you have to be interesting," Garcia stated. "Texans like characters, and I think one of the sins of politics is being boring."

Garcia emphasized the importance of understanding the audience and informing candidates on how to frame their messaging to reach voters emotionally. More than just a list of proposals and policies, voters seek authentic connection and sincerity from candidates. He underscored values-based messaging, highlighting the significance of building rapport with voters through their values beyond merely relying on logical arguments.

According to an [Oxford study](#), the affective intelligence theory states that emotions precede conscious reasoning in voters' decision-making. To illustrate this, a study from the [University of Chicago](#) revealed that 72% of political ads were developed to center on emotion rather than logic. Oxford explains that by evoking an array of emotional reactions, candidates can mobilize voters to take action.

"To win over undecided voters and ensure people show up and vote, candidates want to tap emotional responses," said UT professor Bethany Albertson following the speech. "There's a strategy behind getting people to feel, and those feelings can prompt further engagement."

As the election approaches and swing voters make their final decisions, Garcia stressed the value of anticipation. He argued that effective campaigns involve careful planning and preemptive damage control in order to maintain the public's trust through potential pitfalls. He explained that by shaping the narrative before a challenge emerges, candidates can successfully communicate their plans without the extra noise.

"Political messaging plays a big role in the current election," said government student Kevin Roberts, who attended the speech as a class requirement. "You're trying to get people to vote for you, so you have to create a compelling vision for the country to get support."

Garcia reinforced the significance of understanding that different voters have unique factors that motivate them. Therefore, he claimed that it's insufficient to stay within the boundaries of major points of interest when attempting to reach split voters.

In his final remarks, Garcia explained that the ability to portray oneself as the candidate for change is an advantage, given that many Americans express dissatisfaction with the current state of the country. Due to the reality of our polarized political landscape, he acknowledged that many Americans have already made a firm voting decision before the start of the campaign. Looking forward, he expressed hope that voters will continue to engage in honest dialogue with policymakers and support campaigns that put the people first.

"In a campaign, the focus is clear," Manny Garcia said. "Who's my next marginal voter, and what do they need to hear in order to get to victory? Once comes victory, then comes the change I can bring for that person."