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pa2010.com's Top 10 Political Consultants

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They're the people pulling the political strings behind campaigns. The people who get politicians elected. The people journalists love to quote, even if they're not exactly unbiased. They're the people behind the scenes.

They are the Keystone State's political consultants.

Few figures are as important to the inside-baseball game of politics we love to talk about here at *pa2010.com*. With that in mind, we present our first ever Top 10 Political Consultants.

In many ways, ranking political consultants like this can be a futile exercise. Win-loss trends often have little to do with their own skill and more to do with overarching political trends. Perhaps more importantly, there are so many kinds of consultants—strategy, media, field, public relations, finance, direct mail and so much more. Comparing one to the other is like comparing apples and oranges.

Nevertheless, *pa2010.com* humbly offers up our best shot at ranking the state's best political operatives. Don't agree with our order? Think we've left someone out? Advance the conversation by posting a comment below. A caveat: The party listings don't necessarily reflect the actual party to which these folks belong, but rather denote the politicians for whom they most often work.

And stay tuned tomorrow for something even more fun... the best-dressed political consultants.

10. Michael Bronstein/Matt Weaver (D)

These two young guns are undoubtedly the rising stars in Pennsylvania politics when it comes to direct mail and political strategy. They're still relatively new to the game, having founded their firm only a few years ago. But they're quickly making a name for themselves in micro-targeting, especially in urban areas. They won *Politics Magazine's* Best Bare-Knuckled Street Fight Victory in its 2009 Reed Awards for their work on state Representative Tony Payton's (D-Philadelphia) campaign. Both cut their teeth in decidedly different ways, with Bronstein working for former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour Party and Weaver establishing himself as force in local county party organization. Look for these two become higher-profile as time goes on and they branch out into the general political strategy.

9. Elliot Curson (R)

There's no question that Curson, one of Philadelphia's most well-known ad men, would be higher on the list if he were still going full-speed as a political advertising consultant. He's laying lower these days in his small Center City office. But the man who helped Ronald Reagan become president and later worked for Arlen Specter remains one of the best in the business.

8. Ed Mitchell (D)

One of the Pennsylvania's most effective political spokesman, Mitchell has guided some of the state's most embattled Democrats through reelection. He works for both Congressman Paul Kanjorski (D-11) and Congressman John Murtha (D-12), both of whom have found themselves the favored targets of Republicans over the years. Kanjorski, in particular, was widely expected to lose last year. And while coverage of Kanjorski is rarely glowing these days, Mitchell can chew out a reporter on the phone as well as anyone. Yours truly would know.

7. Charlie Gerow (R)

Like Curson, Gerow would surely be higher on the list if it weren't for his heavier focus on communications strategy outside the political world. Most recently from his helm atop Quantum Communications in Harrisburg, Gerow has been a mainstay in Republican politics for years. He was an aide to Reagan and even ran for Congress himself (he lost in the 2000 GOP primary to Congressman Todd Platts). He's recently done some work for judicial candidates and, in a rare foray into Democratic politics, he helped Linda Thompson in her surprise upset of Harrisburg Mayor Stephen Reed this year.

6. Dan Fee (D)

He's been called one of the most politically-connected operatives in Pennsylvania, and as a longtime aide to Gov. Ed Rendell's campaigns, the Philadelphia-based Fee is a sought-after commodity for Philly pols seeking to win elected office. He was Rendell's campaign spokesman in 2002 and picked up a bigger portfolio in the governor's 2006 reelection bid. He's worked for former Philadelphia Mayor John Street and most recently helped Seth Williams win the city's Democratic primary for District Attorney in a race where Williams was significantly outspent.

5. Mark Campbell (R)

Like Ed Mitchell, Mark Campbell knows how to push an incumbent Congressman through a tough election cycle. Having long been Congressman Jim Gerlach's (R-6) top political adviser, he's help Gerlach stay in office in an increasingly Democratic district that most analysts thought he would lose years ago.

4. Ken Snyder (D)

Like others on this list, Snyder earned his stripes under Rendell, who he's worked for on-and-off ever since the governor was mayor of Philadelphia. More recently, he was a major spokesman for former state Senator Vince Fumo, and last year he helped elect Fumo's successor. He's working for gubernatorial hopeful Tom Knox's campaign, and Rendell missed him so much that the administration brought him on as a communications consultant to explain how the state is spending its federal stimulus money.

3. John Brabender (R)

Attorney General Tom Corbett's media man, it will be up to him to help the Republicans recapture the governorship next year. He's got the experience—the Pittsburgh consultant has worked for Rick Santorum, David Vitter, Jim Gerlach, Tom Coburn and Rudy Giuliani during his run for president. Undoubtedly one of the best political ad men in the state, he oversaw an aggressive TV campaign last year that helped Corbett be the only Republican to win statewide in Pennsylvania.

2. Chris Mottola (R)

Considered by many of his colleagues to be the best Republican media man in the state, Mottola has worked for former President George W. Bush, Senator Lincoln Chafee and, of course, Arlen Specter. His greatest test could be yet to come—he's sticking with Specter after the senator recently switched parties, and will try to push Specter through what could be his toughest election battle ever.

1. And the No. 1 political consultant in Pennsylvania is... Neil Oxman (D)

Among even his Republican colleagues, few hesitate to call Oxman the best in the business. He made his name electing Rendell mayor of Philadelphia when no one thought it could be done. He later helped push Rendell into the Governor's Mansion, and led Mayor Michael Nutter's media efforts in 2007 when no one thought the wonkish former city councilman could become mayor. He was working for Senate candidate Joe Torsella before he dropped out of the race. And now Oxman wants to help Democrats hold the Governor's Mansion by working for Allegheny County Executive

Dan Onorato. With help from Doc Sweitzer and and J.J. Balaban, his Philadelphia-based firm The Campaign Group has become a national powerhouse in political advertising.

Told he was winning *pa2010.com's* highest honor, he humbly insisted that his colleagues and competitors know as much if not more about running campaigns as he does.

"The truth is," Oxman wrote in an e-mail, "after all the hype, all of us have good days and bad days and in the end our candidates win or lose not because of what we do but because voters decide that the candidates are good or bad from their viewpoint on a whole range of issues."

UPDATE: See my [blog post](#) ^[1] about a possible omission from this list.

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