

# CALGARY HERALD



These simple tips can make Harper life of the party



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While Canadians take a collective breath following the cliffhanger Parliament of spring, political observers are following the remaking of Conservative Leader Stephen Harper with great interest. Harper is spending the summer on the barbecue and pancake circuit, allowing Canadians across the country to get to know the real Stephen.

Image-makers agree Stephen needs a little help in the public presentation and charisma department. Insiders say Harper stubbornly resists any type of media or image coaching. I have met him on several occasions and found him to be distant and cold in one-on-one exchanges.

At the recent Conservative convention in Montreal, I found his public speaking before a large audience dramatically improved. However, in hospitality suites, where one-on-one skills are a prerequisite to positive interaction, he seemed cold and aloof. I know that is not the true Stephen. I know he is a person with great ideas who genuinely cares about Canada and Canadians.

Unfortunately, polls reveal perception often overshadows reality in the process of image building. Leaders have always been coached and handled to compensate for PR weaknesses.

George W. Bush's speechwriters learned to delete those big words and references to other countries. Brian Mulroney deepened his voice. Bill Clinton softened his Arkansas accent so northerners could understand him. You will notice Hillary Clinton does not have an accent at all — she sounds like a Canadian. Franklin Roosevelt was never photographed in a wheelchair. Pierre Trudeau, well, Trudeau pretty much dressed and acted as he pleased. There may be a lesson here, but don't tell Stephen.

We could wax eloquent about freshening Harper's hair, rehearsing facial expressions such as smiling and refining basic body language, such as his walk or how he holds his head, and basic tips for communicating on camera.

And, it goes without saying you must dress for the occasion. If it is tux and tails, fine. If it is golf shorts and Hilo Hatty shirt, great. If it is western shirts and blue jeans, excellent. Just get the cowboy hat right. A red hat is Red Deer, a green hat is Regina, a white hat is Calgary, and a black hat is R-CALF from Montana.

Stephen, this is important. Be relevant! Wearing the dated Flames jersey instead of the rebranded flaming "C" while stumping in Calgary during last June's election was not a good thing. It signalled you were out of touch with one of the most exciting experiences in modern sport history. And, it was happening right here in your hometown.

So, for the summer celebrations, we have put together some party tips to help Stephen — and anyone else networking their way through the summer — to win friends and influence people.

1. Have fun, and look like you are having fun. Show some teeth.
2. Move toward the centre of the gathering. That will signal that you want to be engaged by the people who are there.
3. As you are introduced to individuals, make them feel they are the only person in the room during the few seconds you speak to them.
4. Make the first move in an introduction by extending your right hand and saying your name.
5. Lean slightly toward the individual and look directly into his or her eyes.
6. Do not encroach on personal space. Not too close, but not too far away.
7. Slow the pace of your voice. Speak loud enough to overcome the party noises.
8. Repeat the person's name even if it is "Bob Smith." Signal that you feel he or she is important.
9. Rehearse a generic opening question and a follow-up that will elicit a positive response in any situation.
10. Be genuine. If appropriate, ask more personal, probing questions.
11. Listen intently to people's answers. Nod occasionally to show you hear what they are saying. Make them feel you genuinely care.
12. Never be caught looking over the person's shoulder scouting the next introduction.
13. Signal that the conversation is over by extending your hand, repeating the first name and thanking the person for his or her opinions.
14. In a quick-shake situation in a large crowd, never appear to be in a hurry even if you are. Look into people's eyes, grasp their hands firmly and give a greeting. Allow approximately three seconds for each encounter.
15. Repeat number one. Smile, smile, laugh and then smile some more. This is not a punishment. Stephen, repeat after me, "I am having fun, I am having fun..."

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