

Overcoming Excuses: Transforming a "No" into a Registered Voter

When a person doesn't wish to register to vote, it's often because they don't understand how voting can affect their lives. It's your job to find out why they don't want to register, and to then help them see why it is important that they register and vote.

Here's how in four simple steps:

1. Find out why she is saying "no."

Remember an excuse may hide a more basic reason. For example, she may say, "I really don't have time," when, in fact, she really means, "I don't want to take the time to register because I don't believe voting matters."

2. Agree with her.

Make yourself her friend, not an opponent. Let her know that you heard what she said and that you share her concern.

3. Use her reason to convince her.

Explain how her concern is really a reason she should register.

4. Ask if you can help her fill out the registration form.

Let her know that you're a trained volunteer and can answer any voter registration questions that she may have. Sometimes people are embarrassed about not understanding the voting process. Try and make her feel at ease.

The 4-Step Transformation Strategy in Action:

Volunteer: "Hi, I'm concerned about affordable housing and am out here today registering people to vote. Would you like to register?"

Non-Voter: "Thanks anyway, but I don't want to register."

1. Find out why.

Volunteer: "Why not?"

Non-Voter: "Those politicians are all alike anyway. They don't do anything for us once they get elected."

2. Agree with him.

Volunteer: "Yeah, I know what you mean. Sometimes it seems like none of the politicians are working for you and me; they're just working for people who have a lot of money."

3. Use his reason to convince him.

Volunteer: "That's why I'm out here registering voters. I'm fed up with politicians getting away with that just because people like us aren't voting. You know, two years ago some elections were decided by just a few hundred votes."

4. Ask if you can help him fill out the voter registration form.

Volunteer: "It takes just a couple of minutes to fill out the form. Can I give you a hand?"

More common excuses people give for not wanting to register—and sample responses you can give, using the 4-Step Strategy:

Excuse: "I don't have time."

Your response: "I know you're busy. That's why we're out here, to save you the time of going down to the registrar's office. This way you won't have to give up your right to vote, and it will take less than a minute. Can I help you fill out this form?"

Excuse: "My candidates always lose anyway."

Your response: "I know what you mean. I've been really frustrated the same way. And then I found out that half our people didn't vote last time. That's thousands more people than it would take to win. So people like you and me who are fed up have gotten together. And we're going to register 5,000 people right here in town. Can I help you fill out this form?"

Excuse: "I think I'm already registered."

Lots of people who think they are already registered have actually been taken off the registration rolls – usually because they moved. If someone tells you they have already registered, try this "Great, but you haven't moved or changed your name since then, have you?"

Excuse: "I've been convicted of a crime."

Most people think that they can't vote if they've been convicted of a crime, but in California, convicted felons can vote after completing parole. Ask your City/County Elections Office about your state's laws in this regard.

You try it!

Write down an excuse you've heard people use for not registering to vote. Now work out a response to the objection using the 4-Step Strategy.

1. Identify concern.

Listen carefully. Is it a real reason or just an excuse? If it's an excuse, what question will you use to uncover the real reason for not wanting to register? What is their basic excuse? They don't want to register because of _____.

2. Agree with them.

What will you say to let them know you heard them and that you understand that they have a valid concern?

3. Give them a reason.

Given their valid concern, what's a great reason for them to register now?

4. Ask if you can help them fill out the voter registration form.

Final Step: Turn Registered Voters into Volunteers

If you've made sure that a person really is registered, is your job done? No! People who are already registered are your best prospects to become volunteers. So what do you say once you know someone is already registered? "Great, but don't go away. Listen, it's people like you and me – people who understand how important it is for everyone to vote -- who are the heart of our campaign. You know we have an election coming up, and it could have a big impact on the future of housing, human services, jobs, and all kinds of issues. Do you think you could work with us for a few hours?" (Get their name, address, phone number, and email.)