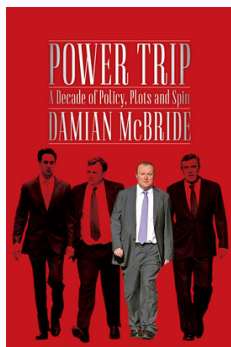


Campaigning lesson from Damian McBride

written by Clive Bates | 3 October 2013



Downing Street bad boy Damian McBride's book, [Power Trip: a decade of Policy, Plots and Spin](#) is well written and a good read, though it does leave you pretty queasy about the goings on at No 10 and Her Majesty's Treasury. But he does offer at least one useful lesson for campaigners.... McBride describes how he was put to work on a special review of the tax treatment of charities, with him having specific duties in relation to VAT.

It was an education in how best to perform political lobbying. We'd receive thirty- or forty-page submissions from major charity associations or accountancy firms detailing incredibly complex or impossibly expensive proposed changes to tax law, which had no chance of going through. And we'd receive hundreds or thousands of identikit postcards, petitions or emails, which - while impressive in terms of sheer numbers - didn't have any emotional punch. Much more effective were the sheer numbers of elderly people persuaded by religious charities to write by shaking hand to campaign for VAT relief on repairs to their local churches. Never the same letter twice; most of them tear-jerking. They might have wondered if it was a waste of a stamp, given they were just compiled and processed by some kid like me, but when I got chance to push through a special VAT refund scheme for church repairs in 2001, those letters were what was in my mind.

He is describing the impact of *authenticity* - the power of real people personally motivated to take the trouble to write with heartfelt concerns expressed in their own words. I agree completely with this. And I agree that no-one's effort to communicate in this way is a waste.

So, if you *really* mean it, write to MPs or MEPs via writetothem.com in your words and say how you feel and what you think should be done.