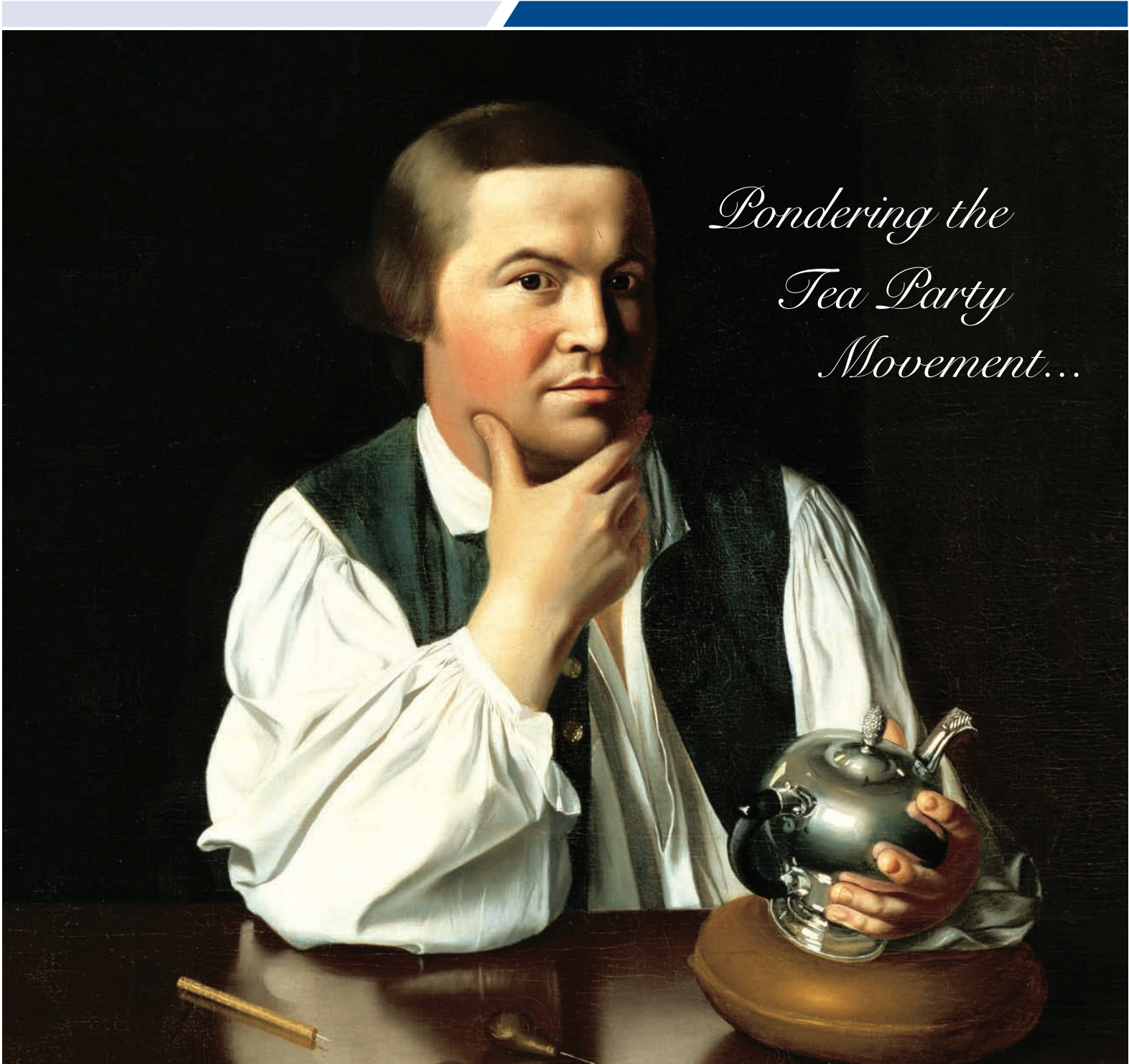


FREEDOM MOVEMENT MANIFESTO

There are a myriad of political groups and movements all over the country, but what will it take for a Freedom Movement to have a lasting impact on America's future?

*Pondering the
Tea Party
Movement...*



FREEDOM MOVEMENT MANIFESTO

Could We Be Campaigning Our Way to Defeat?

By Michael R. Winther

Note to readers: While the following article is addressed specifically to the Tea Party movement, the principles discussed here are relevant to every organization and movement in support of a cause.



One of the most frequently-asked political questions of our day is, “What will come of the Tea Party movement?” Both the left and the right seem to recognize the potential of this movement, but will this “potential” ultimately result in any substantial impact on America or American politics? The Tea Party movement currently has momentum, but long-term success will require caution and strategy.

Here are four factors that could limit the success and impact of the movement.

1) Insufficient commonality

People tend to affiliate and organize themselves based on commonalities (or like-mindedness). The greater the commonality, the greater the likelihood of success; without adequate commonality, no group will long survive. Generally, this commonality is most important in the areas most closely related to the mission of the group. For example, theological agreement may not be necessary for the success of the rotary club, but it is critical to a church. Political agreement may not be necessary for the garden club, but it is quite important for a Tea Party group.

For many Tea Party groups, the current commonalities within the movement are based on broad generalizations. Most participants will agree that government is too big, spends too much money, and is too intrusive on individual liberties. These are all nice-sounding platitudes with which Tea Party participants are very likely to agree. But despite this general agreement, many participants in the movement have significantly different views about the underlying details.

These details produce hundreds of important questions on which members might disagree or divide. Members should ask questions like: Do I object to big government only because of what it costs my family or do I object to it on moral, ethical, or principle grounds? Do I oppose the amount of income tax or do I oppose the method of taxation itself? Are government welfare programs an entirely unacceptable use of government, or should they just be scaled back? What is the proper use of our nation’s military? Should government regulate financial markets a lot, a little, or not at all? What is the proper role of government in protecting the environment? Do we want term limits for elected officials? Should juries be limited in their ability to award damages in civil trials?

It would be easy to conceive of one hundred potentially divisive issues such as these. If differences of opinion over each of these one hundred issues reduces the ranks of a local Tea Party group by even 1%, the group would soon cease to exist—or it would split into 100 different groups, each too small to survive.

Although 100% commonality is neither possible nor necessary, it is still a very important ingredient to survival. It is impossible to say exactly how much like-mindedness a group needs in order to survive and flourish, but experience demonstrates that an inadequate amount will doom any organization. On the other hand, commonality is only a good thing if those commonly-held beliefs are correct beliefs.

How, then, do you promote healthy commonality and correct beliefs? To this question there are two important keys: attitude and education. First, to foster the most beneficial attitude within the group, every member and all local leadership needs to develop a sincere mindset of being truth seekers. Every discussion, debate, or disagreement needs to be approached as friendly, cooperative efforts to find truth. An effective development of these attitudes will be essential to the success of the movement.

The second key to achieving both commonality and correct beliefs is education. As the members of a group educate themselves, there should be both increasing understanding of truth and increasing commonality. If any group fails to teach and promote truth, then it is good that it shrinks or disbands.

Even if a group (through education, dialogue, and patience) moves toward greater commonality, recruitment and growth will, of necessity, bring differing philosophies into the group. The newcomers will need to gain an understanding of the movement’s truth-seeking mindset and begin their own extended education. It is also helpful if the group learns to major on the majors, but minor on the minors.

2) Incomplete philosophy

The Tea Party movement contains large numbers of people who know that things are wrong in America, but haven’t yet identified all of the solutions. It is easy to oppose a particular leader who blatantly promotes socialism

and big government, but if the reaction is to blindly support the opposing party or political figure, the group will accomplish very little. It is absolutely essential for liberty-minded groups to develop fundamental principles and philosophies by which all candidates and parties will be measured. Candidate A shouldn't be measured by comparing him or her to candidate B. Instead, all candidates should be measured against the same sound, fundamental principles.

I'm not convinced that many liberty-minded groups have developed and identified these core principles. The secret for the movement is not to preserve its ideology, but rather to find it.

3) Centralization of leadership

Many commentators have lamented the absence of central organization or the lack of a charismatic leader in the Tea Party movement, but such centralization of leadership can be loaded with dangers. Such a centralization of "command and control" puts the success or failure (and the ideology) of the movement largely in the hands of this central leadership. One of the greatest strengths of the Tea Party movement is that it is currently an uprising of concerned citizens—truly a grassroots movement, unencumbered by any central bureaucracy. All that would be necessary to redirect the movement would be to influence, control, or subvert that grassroots leadership. One of the often-repeated tenants of the Tea Party movement is that civil government ought to be decentralized. If this is true of civil government, then it may also be true for the Tea Party movement itself.

In application of the concept of centralized leadership, one of the chief problems of our day is that we don't understand the proper role of government. If this is true of Americans in general, it is especially true of our leaders—even those outside the mainstream. It is dangerous to assume that any leader has an infallible philosophy, and it is even more dangerous to assume entirely pure motives on the part of our leaders.

At the risk of sounding unnecessarily cynical, we need to be 100 times more discerning than we are now. Where do our "conservative" limited government leaders come from? How do we hear about these people? The unfortunate reality is that our leaders on the "right" are often created by the media and the institutions of the "left". We should also remember that the leading "conservative" news network of our day is owned by a dedicated liberal. Time and time again, we embrace certain heroes who we support and follow for a time, only to discover a few years later that these heroes have compromised the philosophies and values that first endeared them to us.

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Perhaps we overestimate the value of having centralized leadership in a movement. If we can learn the right concepts and understand good strategy, our actions can be more effective without national, central leadership than they would be with it. In the end, the success or failure of the movement will depend on decentralized, local leadership. By reading and studying good books, any honest, inquiring citizen can have a better understanding of government and economics than any of the "conservative" leaders that may rise to prominence on the national stage.

4) False flattery

How badly does the movement want a seat at the table? If the Tea Party movement experiences any success, politicians and other organizations will pander to it. Many of these politicians and organizations possess credibility and clout that may be envied by political outsiders. It will be important for movement activists to resist the temptation to compromise their principles in exchange for acceptance by the elite.

Having considered these four vulnerabilities of any political movement, we must now recognize that it is essential for a movement to have a clearly-defined set of goals. This section will present 7 goals to consider. These goals are equally applicable to an organization like IPS, and I strongly believe that our own organization must hold to them as well.

1) Focus on education.

Educating ourselves: Too often we don't know what it is that we don't know. Tea Party groups—and other liberty-minded movements—must start with the understanding that the most important concepts of government and economics have not been taught in American schools for over a century. The problems in America and the world are not limited to the changes in philosophy that we have observed in our lifetimes. It is imperative, therefore, that Tea Party members dig deep to test our political, economic, and historical assumptions. Perhaps the most

dangerous peril is that we might assume things that we should not assume. Just because we learned something in school 30 or 40 years ago doesn't necessarily mean that it is correct.

Educating others: The last half-century has produced numerous movements that have attempted to stem the tide of socialism and big government. Some of these include: the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign, and the movements that it spawned; the mid-1970's Moral Majority movement; the 1980 Reagan Revolution; the explosion of "conservative" talk radio; and now the Tea Party movements.

Although some positive achievements can be attributed to each of these movements, the ultimate result, in each case, was that America continued its shift toward bigger and bigger government. Whether we characterize the result of these movements as failure or just lack of success is only an academic question. In fairness, these movements may have been successful in slowing the growth of government, but we can credit them with very little more than that.

A parallel to a current event might be instructive. On April 20th, the explosion and fire on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig resulted in an underwater gusher of crude oil that has polluted a sizeable chunk of the Gulf of Mexico. While hundreds of thousands of people work to clean up the effects of the leak, the leak itself has continued unabated for weeks. Anyone familiar with the situation recognizes the importance of stopping the flow of oil at its source. The best use of resources (both money and manpower) is to fix the problem at its source. Only those resources that cannot be effectively used to stop the leak should be directed to cleanup efforts, because all cleanup efforts are doomed to eventual failure if the leak is not plugged.

Our efforts to win elections and affect policy can be compared to the gulf clean-up efforts—important work, to be sure, but ultimately doomed to failure unless the source of the problem is fixed. ****Pull-quote**** Thousands of patriotic Americans labor tirelessly to put good people into elective office, just like those who labor to protect the beaches and marshes from crude oil. These are noble and beneficial efforts, but only if these resources of time and money could not be effectively channeled to the more critical educational effort.

While we labor to win elections, our nation's schools are gushing forth millions of students who have been conditioned to desire bigger government. While we circulate petitions and write letters to our representatives, our media is spewing out thousands of barrels of statist and socialist ideology that is reinforcing what is taught in our schools and subtly adding to the citizen's confusion.

To be effective in the long run, any movement must focus primarily on changing the hearts and minds of millions of Americans. This can only be accomplished through several strategies. First, we must educate large numbers of Americans in the principles of good government and sound economics. Second, we must begin to reduce the size, enrollment, and influence of government-funded schools. This is the primary source of what is polluting the shorelines of our political and social institutions. Third, we must create and support media outlets that don't have a statist agenda. All three of these strategies are essential to any long-term success. Shortcuts around any of these strategies will be doomed to failure.

“...we will have only temporary victories until we replace the educational and media machines that produce socialist thinking...”

2) Create reasonable expectations.

Start with the understanding that this is a long, difficult battle. People become discouraged when the reality falls short of their expectations. If we expect fast results (maybe 2, 4, or 6 years), we are likely to become discouraged when the battle takes longer or the results are initially disappointing. Local Tea Party groups will find it difficult to retain active members if their leaders create overly optimistic expectations.

Each of the following scenarios can weaken the movement unless we have a proper perspective and effective strategies:

- Our candidates lose and we get discouraged
- Our candidates win and betray us and we get discouraged
- Our candidates win and betray us and we don't know it
- Our candidates win but along the way we become a little more socialist in our thinking

In every election cycle, the Republicans go to battle against the "liberal Democrats". For a century now, the outcome has been relatively consistent: government grows, liberty declines, and both major political parties move gently closer to socialism. Even if we maintain our purity of ideology and our candidates win and vote properly, we

will have only temporary victories until we replace the educational and media machines that produce socialist thinking throughout the country.

3) Don't measure success by electoral victories.

Election Day victories are certainly welcome, but the real goal is much bigger than winning elections. In fact, the real goal is bigger, even, than winning every single election on Election Day. The real goal is a population that fully understands the proper role of government and is willing to support this goal regardless of the personal consequences. We want a population that has such a complete, consistent, and thorough understanding of government, economics, and history that they cannot be deceived by compromised ideas or by compromising people. We desire a discerning electorate that will always cast their ballots in favor in liberty and righteousness, even if there is no organized Tea Party effort. Winning elections is thinking too small.

4) Be truth seekers.

Don't assume that anyone has arrived at the destination of truth. We should all be on a journey seeking truth, but should never assume that we have totally arrived. The assumption that any of us has arrived creates a complacency in which we stop learning and studying. This assumption may also contribute to unnecessary strife within the group. We should always welcome gentle and relaxed dialogue on the important issues of the day.

5) Have goals.

Tea Party groups (and other liberty-minded groups) must avoid the practice sometimes referred to as "meet, eat, and retreat". Every productive group needs a multitude of projects by which progress and success can be measured. For every project, there should be short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term goals—for the group as a whole and for its individual members.

6) Create a proper mix of education and action.

Education without action is a waste of the precious resource of knowledge, but action without education is a dangerous waste of effort. For the Tea Party movement—and other movements and organizations like it—to succeed, it must instill in its members a love of both learning and action. We live in an age and a time when reading (much less studying) is a lost discipline, and few people can say that they have a true love of learning. The successful movement must cultivate this love of learning. Some of us are so anxious to do something, anything, that we go off half-cocked, rendering most of our efforts nothing more than a misfire. Conversely, some people love to read and study, but are hesitant to take any action.

As an aside, we need to make sure that we don't define "action" too narrowly. Effective action includes far more

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than attending a rally or walking precincts for our favorite candidate. Effective action also includes things like inviting someone to hear a good speaker, contributing funds to worthy groups, writing letters to the editor, giving someone a good book, or leading a study group.

7) Have fun.

Promoting liberty and fighting statism is serious work. But if we leave this work exclusively to those dedicated few who will labor for liberty with no reward whatsoever, the workforce will be small. Certainly it would be nice if right-thinking Americans would get (and stay) involved solely because of the importance of the work. The truth of the matter, though, is that we are all pleasure seekers who prefer fun to work. Since liberty-minded groups should be attempting to expand their ranks beyond the dedicated few, it is important to make the work as enjoyable as possible.

In order to refine strategies for making activities enjoyable, group leaders might benefit by studying the meetings and activities of successful service clubs. Find active, growing, and successful groups and see what they do to maintain interest.

Conclusion


No effective freedom movement can long exist without being challenged or attacked by its opponents—especially opponents who are well-financed and entrenched in the system. Although the Tea Party movement has experienced some direct attack by the media, a much greater threat comes in the form of subtle and seductive attempts to weaken, subvert, or misdirect the efforts of well-meaning patriots. Leaders of local Tea Party groups need to be especially vigilant to keep the movement on track.

The Tea Party movement must also be aware that dozens of other well-meaning movements have come and gone without reversing the growth of government in America. The common thread in the failure of each of these groups and movements has been their inability to develop a consistent, comprehensive, and principled understanding

of government and economics—and then to successfully educate others to share in this understanding.

The historical graveyard of liberty movements is full of organizations that put action ahead of education, that put pragmatism ahead of principle, and that put the personality of leaders ahead of prudence. We are all anxious to change the philosophy of the Capital, the Whitehouse, and the Supreme Court, but these institutions will always be a reflection, more or less, of our citizenry. Any effort to

change government that skips the education of American citizens will ultimately fail.

It is essential to remember that elections are little more than the report card on our educational efforts. If we don't stop the leak of socialism at its source, there is no way that our political efforts can keep the beaches clean. Unless the bulk of our time and money goes to education in sound principles, we are just campaigning our way to defeat. 

Resource List for the Well-Informed Citizen

Biblical Principles of Government DVD series:
Solid foundations for government from the
Founding Fathers and the Bible.

*This 20-hour course will be available from
IPS in early 2011.*

Biblical Economics
by R.C. Sproul, Jr.

Whatever Happened to Justice?
by Richard Maybury

The Law
by Frederic Bastiat

The Myth of the Robber Barons
by Burt Folsom

America's Providential History
by Mark Beliles and Stephen McDowell

The Making of America
by W. Cleon Skousen

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