

## **Charlie R. Black, Esquire**



*I've walked away from candidates for huge violations of principle.*

—Charlie Black

**C**harlie Black has dedicated a lifetime of work to politics, campaign management, public affairs, and government relations. Throughout his life, Charlie has used the opportunities earned and given to him to become one of the top political strategists for the Republican Party. He has been involved with almost every major Presidential campaign of the last thirty years. That life of politics has brought Charlie into contact with friends and professionals all of who have profoundly shaped his life. Charlie's key to success in life is simple—never stop learning, and learn from great people:

“I have had many opportunities for great jobs, but just as importantly, [I've had] the chance to work for and with great people from whom I learned a lot. One must never stop learning, to be successful in life.”

Charlie's political involvement began in college. At the University of Florida in the late 1960s, he joined the Young Republicans and the prominent conservative youth organization Young Americans for Freedom. This political engagement at the state and national levels brought Charlie into contact David R. Jones, one of the most important leaders of the conservative wing of the Republican Party from the 1960s through the '90s. It was David who taught Charlie the importance of leadership skills: how to read the character and motivation of people; pick the right people for the right jobs; find the good and avoid saying negative things about people, friend or foe; and understand that today's enemy might be tomorrow's friend, so don't burn bridges. Jones's creed required that a man's word be his bond, and his loyalty to his friends be unwavering. Most importantly, David Jones applied his leadership skills not for personal gain but on behalf of his patriotic, conservative, anti-Communist philosophy. Jones emphasized to Black a very realistic and practical philosophy:

“To be effective, to implement conservative political philosophy, you've got to work through the two-party system. That applies to the Republican Party. If you're going to be a leader in the Republican Party, you're going to have to support non-conservative people and occasionally you're going to have to compromise on an issue. So I bought into that, and I've always stuck to it.”

What Charlie took from Dave's tutelage was one goal, integrity. As Charlie says:

“What I respect most in a person is integrity—it is a threshold requirement for someone to get a lot of respect from me. But also, unselfishness, the ability to follow the Golden Rule, the most important of Christ's teachings: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Which means, to do that—no one can do it perfectly—you have to sacrifice and put someone else's interests ahead of yours.”

Out of college, Randal C. Teague brought Charlie to Washington to work on the national staff of Young Americans for Freedom—Charlie's first full-time job and also his entry into the political profession at the national level. Randy taught Charlie that the business of the conservative movement was just that, a business—so they had to run YAF in an organized way, with

attention to detail and clear priorities. Randy taught Charlie a work ethic and determination to get that day's job done before leaving the office.

Following his work with Randy, Charlie went to work with Jesse Helms. Because of Charlie's involvement with Young Americans for Freedom, he was given the opportunity to work in Jesse's first campaign for the U.S. Senate. He learned political organizational skills in on-the-job training in Helms' 1972 campaign. More importantly, Charlie learned, through what would become a thirty-year association with Helms, never to compromise integrity for any purpose, especially not for a political purpose. The Jesse Helms Charlie knew was a straightforward man: "Tell people where you stand, marshal the arguments for your case, communicate clearly and effectively, and never back down." Helms also insisted this was possible to do while keeping a sense of humor.

Charlie got the biggest break of his professional career a few years later. In 1975, John P. Sears hired Charlie to work in Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign. John was a brilliant and creative political strategist. Charlie now reflects that he learned more about politics from John than from all the other political minds he has known in his life, put together. John taught Charlie that to understand current political trends and the desires of the electorate, one had to understand history and the political culture and traditions of every state. One had to see into the future about where each political leader would take the country. John taught Charlie that it takes this understanding, plus a lot of disciplined thought, to be creative in politics or public policy. He taught Charlie to have the courage to be creative, too. He gave Charlie confidence that he could perform at the highest levels of American politics by showing him how to do it.

John also was a great persuader when promoting political strategies and public policies. Creating a good idea is meaningless, unless its creator can persuade the candidate and colleagues in the campaign to do it—and then persuade the news media that it is a plausible idea. John was the best salesman in politics. Through John's introduction to the national political scene, and through hard work and lessons learned, Charlie created his own chance to know and assist great national leaders over the past thirty-four years. This relationship led to numerous opportunities because of both the doors John opened for Charlie and the growth Charlie experienced under John's tutelage:

"When John Sears hired me in 1975 to work for Ronald Reagan's first campaign, that set in motion the entire career path that I have [followed]

ever since. That period gave me the self-confidence that I could perform and be successful on a national level in politics and public affairs.”

Charlie’s association with John Sears soon led to several more prominent roles. Bill Brock hired Charlie as political director of the Republican National Committee when Brock was Chairman. Bill taught Charlie that intellectual and policy content are essential elements of a winning political party. Brock also taught Charlie that one could be a tough competitor in campaigns without engaging in personal attacks. Brock knew where to draw the line to maintain civility.

When Charlie’s work brought him to help with the Reagan Administration in 1980, he took the rare chance to learn from Ronald and Nancy Reagan personally. Ronald taught him how critical it was for political leaders to devote themselves to improving their nation and the world, and not just sustaining it. Nancy taught him that some rare individuals, by offering selfless devotion to a leader, make it possible for that leader to achieve great dreams for the country. Together these insights captured for Charlie the political brilliance that characterized the Reagan years in the White House. In particular, Charlie admired Reagan’s ability to pick the right people for the right job and then to delegate. But such delegation only worked because Reagan had a clear idea of his priorities. And with clear priorities, together with trust for the people working under him, Reagan could provide effective and strong leadership. Charlie recalls:

“Reagan wanted to defeat Communism, cut taxes, and reduce the size of government. But in order to get the military buildup he needed to defeat Communism, he had to compromise with Tip O’Neil. Because he was able to work with the Democrats in other areas, thanks to Regan, the world was better, the wall came down.”

Charlie continued to play an active role in Republican Party politics. His contact with George H. W. Bush (41<sup>st</sup> President) as an outside advisor taught Charlie that a political leader should always rise above self-interest and do the honorable thing. Bush (41) did what he thought was right, regardless of the political consequences.

Of course, Charlie had supported and worked for Jack Kemp leading up to the race against Bush in 1988. It was Kemp, one of Charlie’s best friends in politics, who taught Charlie that conservatism could not and



should not succeed if it did not address the needs of every American. The original compassionate conservative, Jack thought about the poor and disadvantaged of society every day. He reached out to them privately and in his creative conservative public policies.

Another wonderful opportunity in Charlie's life has been to know a star of the "greatest generation," Bob Dole. A living testimony to the need for service and sacrifice for one's country, Dole also showed Charlie the importance of working across party lines through civil relationships. When Charlie first worked for him in 1976, he was surprised to learn that Dole was a close friend of George McGovern! Dole was one of the great legislative leaders of the last century because he got things done and didn't care who got the credit.

Yet another privilege of Charlie's life has been a personal friendship with John McCain for over thirty years. McCain taught Charlie a long time ago not to complain about any bad break. Charlie admired McCain's courage to be completely fearless in doing what he thinks is right, and his high standard of loyalty in friendship. Most of all, Charlie learned from McCain a personal demonstration of Churchill's admonition, "Never, ever, ever give up!"

The sum total of these professional and political contacts is a deep sense of gratitude for the United States, shown through Charlie's desire to serve:

"I believe the United States is the greatest country on Earth. And the key to that, as de Tocqueville identified when the Republic was new, is citizen participation and service to community, state, and country. I have been able to spend a majority of my adult life in politics and make a living do-

ing it. And I have spent many, many hours in politics and helping others in volunteer work. There is an obligation for American citizens to do that to keep the country great.”

Charlie’s early years growing up in the Black family shaped his work ethic and his values. His parents, Ray and Lorraine, taught and showed him the importance of honesty, hard work, humility, good citizenship, and belief in Christ. Charlie remains close to several Baptist pastors, but Jay Wolf deserves mention for his particularly important role in Charlie’s life because he taught him about witnessing his faith and reaching out to non-believers. He also taught Charlie the need to study the Bible in order to be a good witness. Doug Coe, another great lay Christian leader, also influenced Charlie. Doug taught Charlie, and countless others, how to work with non-Christians to achieve world peace and cooperation by putting into action the principles of Jesus Christ—practicing patience, extending mercy, giving generously—without necessarily preaching.

In Charlie’s early thirties, he saw the need to create a stable business in government relations and public affairs, rather than just bouncing from campaign to campaign for the rest of his life. Bill Timmons, Sr., showed Charlie how to do this—how to translate political experience into professional services for large businesses. And Timmons welcomed his new competitor into his field by mentoring Charlie for many years. Charlie has always tried to return this favor by mentoring young people in business. That’s an obligation that Charlie has taken seriously throughout his life:

“Part of our obligation, for those of us who have been around in politics and government for a long time, is to teach and train young people and the people that we work with, sometimes even older people. I usually summarize it for young people in politics, that there are two essential rules: that your word is good and that you are loyal to your friends. There are other things that they need to be taught, but if they get those two rights, then that’s a pretty good path to character development.

For those of us who are involved in campaigns and government and those of us involved in the spin-offs of campaigns from government, like public affairs, we must pick people of good character to support for elective office or for the executive branch or even for our government-related businesses. Sometimes, somebody is very effective in politics, or in a government job, or in a private-sector job, whose character is marginal. We

must still hold out for integrity. We need not and should not reward bad character in or around politics.”

His ability to work with the other side of the aisle has been part of Charlie’s success, especially with Peter Kelly, Jim Healey, and Scott Patrick, Charlie’s main Democratic partners. They had the courage to join forces with this young conservative Republican, and showed Charlie how to create an effective bipartisan professional firm. These men are not just examples of how Charlie can work across party lines; they have been among his best personal friends for over twenty-five years.

Another profound influence on Charlie’s life is his wife, Judy Black. Together they have learned that God’s greatest gift is the unconditional love of a good marriage. Judy taught Charlie that politics and business are fine, but that one’s faith, spouse, and family must always be given priority. She convinced Charlie that amid his life as a successful operative in Washington, he could still take the time to help those in need. Judy’s example causes Charlie to never let a day go by that he doesn’t try to help, or mentor, another person.

Many other good friends have contributed lessons as well. Taken collectively, all the people mentioned in this profile are the reason Charlie feels that he has led a charmed and blessed life. He thinks that he may not have yet lived up to the example provided by some of the great leaders he has known, but their good character remains in his memory, and he emulates their virtues as his aspiration. For Charlie Black, imitation of the good character he witnessed in his training forms the basis of his own principled political practice.