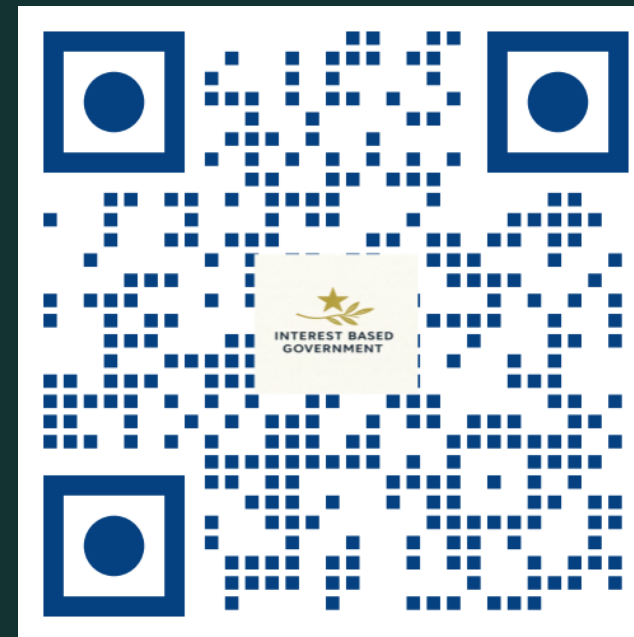




Adam McGough
Mediator, Arbitrator
Problem Solver



"We have the Government we deserve."

This provocative statement challenges us to examine our own role in shaping our democracy. It suggests that the quality of our government reflects the quality of our civic engagement, our willingness to serve, and our commitment to the common good.

But is this entirely fair? Does every community truly get the representation it deserves, or are there systemic barriers that prevent good people from serving? As we explore leadership rooted in faith and service, we'll consider what it means to actively shape the government we want to see.

Questions to Consider:

- Do we participate actively in civic life?
- Do we encourage principled people to run for office?
- Are we willing to bridge divides in our communities?
- What responsibility do we bear for the health of our democracy?

Why I Ran for Office



I am a Christian

My faith is the foundation of everything I do. It shapes how I see people, how I make decisions, and how I understand my purpose in this world.



I believe in servant leadership

True leadership means putting others first, listening more than speaking, and using power to empower rather than control.



I believe we are called to be and make disciples

This calling extends beyond church walls into every sphere of influence, including public service and civic engagement.



I had the experience and a genuine love for people

My background, combined with a heart for reconciliation, prepared me for the challenges of public leadership.



I was called

This wasn't a career move or a power grab. It was a response to a conviction that I couldn't ignore—a sense that this was where I needed to be.



I want to serve and bring glory to God

Every decision, every conversation, every policy discussion is an opportunity to reflect God's character and advance His kingdom.

Inspired by the Sermon on the Mount—a blueprint for living that prioritizes mercy, peacemaking, and justice.

The Conventional Political Playbook

Traditional political consultants operate from a well-worn playbook designed for one thing: winning at all costs. This approach has transformed our civic discourse into warfare, our neighbors into enemies, and our communities into battlegrounds. Here's what they teach:

Define a narrative and NEVER deviate

Message discipline trumps truth. Even when facts change or conviction demands reconsideration, stay on script. Consistency is valued over accuracy.

Attack your opponent with intent to harm

Don't just disagree—destroy. Put them on the defensive so they can't articulate their own vision. Make them answer for caricatures of their positions.

Go only where you get votes and money

Ignore communities that don't support you. Relationships are transactional. People are either donors, voters, or irrelevant.

Own the frame and force your narrative

Control the conversation. Don't let your opponent define the terms. Shape perception before truth has a chance to emerge.

Stir emotion and use FEAR

Fear motivates more effectively than hope. Create a sense of urgency and threat. Position yourself as the only protection against disaster.

Focus on your base, not bringing others in

Mobilize the faithful rather than persuade the skeptical. Division is more efficient than coalition-building.

📌 **The Result:** Campaigns don't just reflect our divisions—they **create the battlegrounds**. They change people, harden positions, and make reconciliation nearly impossible. This system rewards ruthlessness and punishes vulnerability, compassion, and honest dialogue.

Stories from the Field

Real experience in conflict resolution and community building

My Background

I served as a **litigator, federal prosecutor**, a professor, the Chief of Staff for the Mayor and a Dallas City Councilmember while navigating high-stakes conflicts where truth, evidence, and justice were paramount. But over time, I realized that the adversarial model—while necessary in courtrooms—was destructive when applied to community life.

I have always been a **mediator**. Mediation taught me that understanding beats accusation, that listening is more powerful than arguing, and that most conflicts arise from unmet interests rather than irreconcilable values.

These experiences taught me that **mediation isn't just a technique—it's a posture**. It's choosing curiosity over certainty, dialogue over debate, and reconciliation over revenge. This is the foundation for a new approach to governance.

Applications in Service

- **Citizen Police Oversight Board**: Reviewing body camera footage and facilitating difficult conversations between law enforcement and community members
- **LBJ Now**: Choosing between building walls and building bridges—literal and metaphorical
- **Refuge, Forest Audelia, Chapter 27, Trinity**: Bringing diverse stakeholders together to find common ground on contentious issues





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Share



Core Progression: Another Perspective

Building the foundation for principled leadership

Handling of Truth

Truth is the foundation of integrity and the beginning of wisdom. Without a commitment to honesty, everything else crumbles.

Know what you believe and WHY

Clear definition of core values and principles before entering conflict. Leadership requires conviction, not just compromise.

Recognize: We are designed for relationship

Healthy governance depends on genuine relationships, not transactions. People aren't means to an end—they're the point.

Pursue the goal of Intimacy

In civic leadership, intimacy means mutual understanding and respect, not agreement. It's knowing someone well enough to honor their dignity even in disagreement.

Intimacy requires Trust

Trust is built on honesty, humility, and consistency over time. It cannot be demanded or manufactured—only earned through faithful presence.

Acknowledge: Trust is essential for Community

Trust creates safety, safety allows vulnerability, and vulnerability fuels creativity and cooperation. The health of your community reflects the health of your relationships.

Recognize: People need Community

Every policy issue is ultimately about people—their dignity, security, and hope. Leaders don't just manage systems; they model shared purpose and cultivate belonging.

What is Community?

Community is a **network of people bound by mutual trust, shared purpose, and interdependent relationships**, who work together to sustain collective well-being, cultivate belonging, resolve conflict constructively, and pursue the common good.

What Community IS:

- An intentional practice of shared life
- Recognition of unique strengths in every member
- Mutual accountability and cooperation
- A culture of respect, empathy, and civic responsibility
- Active pursuit of the common good

What Community is NOT:

- Merely geographic proximity
- Casual social connection
- Agreement on all issues
- Uniformity of background or belief
- Passive coexistence

True community requires more than living near each other or sharing a zip code. It demands active participation, vulnerability, and a commitment to working through differences rather than avoiding them. When we understand community this way, governance becomes less about managing competing interests and more about nurturing the conditions where people can flourish together.

Shifting from Battleground to Common Ground

A practical framework for collaborative problem-solving

Moving from adversarial politics to collaborative governance requires intentional practice. This framework, drawn from mediation and negotiation theory, provides a roadmap for transforming conflict into cooperation:

01

Clarify Positions and Interests

Distinguish between what people say they want (positions) and why they want it (interests). Most conflicts dissolve when underlying interests are addressed.

02

Identify Common Interests

Look for shared values and goals beneath competing proposals. People who seem opposed often want similar outcomes through different means.

03

Develop Creative Options

Brainstorm solutions that address multiple interests simultaneously. Avoid binary thinking—the best answers often aren't compromises but innovations.

04

Evaluate by Objective Criteria

Use external standards—data, precedent, expert opinion—rather than willpower or political leverage to assess options.

05

Determine Zones of Agreement

Find where interests overlap and agreement is possible. Build from areas of alignment rather than starting with the hardest issues.

06

Build and Protect Trust

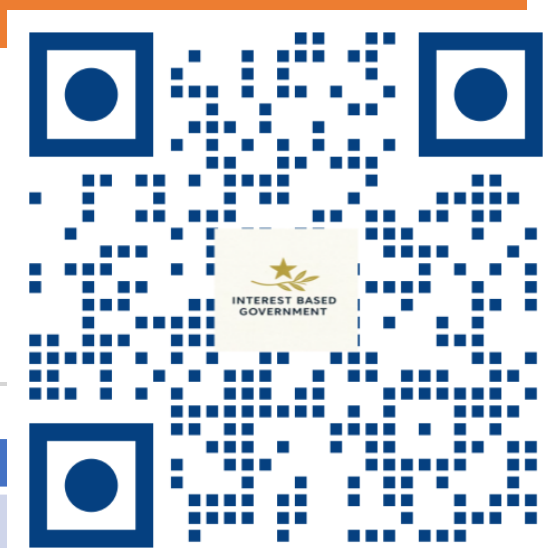
Demonstrate transparency, follow through on commitments, and maintain confidentiality when appropriate. Trust is fragile and invaluable.

07

Commit to Communication and Accountability

Establish clear expectations, regular check-ins, and mechanisms for course correction. Good intentions need structure to succeed.

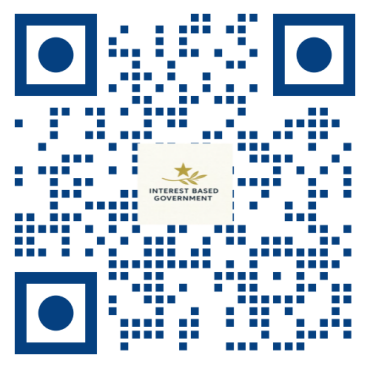
The Negotiation Planning Instrument



Component (Guiding Prompts)	You (Our Side) — Planning & Preparation	Them (Counterparty) — Analysis & Anticipation
Context & Objectives	Your overall aim (outcome + relationship). Define success in one sentence.	What is their likely aim and success definition?
Key Stakeholders & Decision Makers	Who decides, who influences on your side?	Who decides, who influences on their side? Gatekeepers? Veto players?
Issues / Agenda	List all issues to negotiate (price, scope, timing, warranties, etc.). Prioritize.	What issues matter most to them? Any hidden or taboo issues?
Interests (Why)	Your underlying needs, fears, motivations for each issue.	Their likely interests beneath stated positions.
Positions (What they say they want)	Your opening/target/acceptable outcomes per issue.	Their stated demands and typical asks.
Objective Criteria / Legitimacy	Standards, benchmarks, market data, laws, precedents you can cite.	Which standards will they see as legitimate? Their likely standards?
Alternatives: BATNA / WATNA	Best & worst alternatives if no deal; steps to strengthen BATNA.	Their BATNA/WATNA; ways to weaken/neutralize ethically (e.g., deadlines, competition).
Reservation Point & Aspiration	Walk-away (per issue & total) and ambitious but realistic target.	Estimate their walk-away and aspiration ranges.
ZOPA Estimate	Your view of the possible agreement range given both reservation points.	Their likely view of the ZOPA (do they see overlap?).
First-Offer Strategy (Anchors)	Will you make the first offer? Opening number/terms and rationale.	If they anchor, planned counter-anchor and reframe.
Concessions Plan	Concession order & size; what you ask in return; signals; limits.	Likely concessions they can make; signals to watch for.
Value Creation / Options (MESOs)	Brainstorm trades, add-ons, contingencies, and 2–3 MESOs to present.	What low-cost/high-value trades for them? What would they propose?
Process & Setup (3D Moves)	Venue, format, agenda, sequencing, coalition building, timing.	How might they try to shape setup or sequence? Allies?
Communication & Relationship	Tone, questions, listening plan, cultural cues, trust/rapport steps.	Their style, likely tactics (hard/soft/competitive/integrative).
Risk, Ethics, and Authority	Red lines, compliance, approvals needed, escalation path.	Their constraints, approval gates, public optics, ethics concerns.
Implementation & Commitments	How to make terms concrete: who/what/when. Contingencies & metrics.	Their capabilities, risks, and monitoring needs.
Timeline & Deadlines	Internal milestones, external deadlines, time pressure levers.	Their deadlines, fiscal/calendar drivers, sensitivities.
Post-Deal Relationship	Follow-up cadence, dispute-resolution clause, future opportunities.	Their preferences for governance and relationship health.
After-Action Review (to complete after the negotiation)	What worked, what didn't, lessons, playbook updates.	What surprised you about them; how to map better next time.

Public Policy Negotiation Planning

Adapting the framework for civic leadership



Public policy negotiations differ from private business deals in critical ways. You're accountable to constituents, operating under public scrutiny, and balancing competing values rather than just competing interests. This adapted instrument addresses those unique challenges:

Component	You (Your Perspective as Leader)	Them (Other Officials / Stakeholders)
Policy Context	What public problem are you trying to solve? What's the desired public good?	What outcomes or public values are they pursuing? How do they frame the issue?
Constituencies	Who do you represent? What mandates or promises shape your position?	Who do they answer to—constituents, donors, interest groups, media?
Stakeholders & Coalitions	Allies, influencers, advocacy groups, and agencies who share or support your goals.	Their key allies, interest groups, and influencers. Who shapes their decisions?
Core Interests	Underlying public values: equity, efficiency, safety, freedom, growth, etc.	What values drive their stance (justice, liberty, fiscal prudence, local control)?
Public Positions	Public statements, press releases, and visible commitments.	What have they said publicly that constrains flexibility?
Private Flexibility	What aspects are negotiable? What cannot be compromised (core principle)?	Where might they have private flexibility or unspoken needs (credit, legacy, optics)?
Public Narrative	How can you frame the issue around shared interests or common values?	How do they currently frame the narrative, and can you bridge language?
Ethics & Public Trust	What ethical boundaries or transparency obligations apply?	Where might they face ethical or perception risks?

By thinking through both perspectives systematically, you can identify opportunities for collaboration that others miss and avoid pitfalls that derail good-faith efforts.

Principles of Public Policy Negotiation

When we negotiate public policy with integrity and strategic wisdom, we honor both our constituents and our opponents. These principles guide how we approach difficult conversations in the public square:



Negotiate in public interest, not partisan victory

The goal is better outcomes for the community, not bragging rights or political points.



Separate values from positions

People can share values (safety, prosperity, fairness) while disagreeing on methods. Focus on the values.



Use Interest-Based Government

Apply mediation principles to governance—understand underlying interests, not just surface-level demands.



Frame joint wins

Look for solutions where multiple parties can claim success. Zero-sum thinking creates losers; creative collaboration creates partners.



Seek legitimacy through principled measures

Base decisions on objective criteria—data, precedent, expert analysis—not political power or personal preference.



Model civility and transparency

How you negotiate matters as much as what you achieve. Demonstrate the behavior you want to see in civic life.

These principles don't guarantee easy solutions, but they transform the nature of our disagreements from warfare to problem-solving. They make our conflicts productive rather than destructive.

Interest-Based Government

A framework for transforming public leadership



Interest based Government is a framework for public leadership and policy-making that applies to principles of interest-based negotiation to governance, emphasizing understanding, alignment, and reconciliation of underlying stakeholder interests rather than positional or partisan competition. It seeks to transform public decision-making from adversarial debate to collaborative problem-solving by focusing on shared values, transparent communication, and mutually beneficial outcomes.



Leaders are mediators

Public servants facilitate understanding and reconciliation rather than picking sides

Policy becomes participatory

Citizens aren't just voters or constituents—they're active participants in shaping solutions that affect their lives.

Conflict is reframed

Disagreement becomes an opportunity for creativity and mutual learning, not a threat to be crushed

Accountability through respect

Trust is maintained through mutual respect, data-driven analysis, and principled communication—not spin or manipulation.

The Vision: Interest-Based Government redefines leadership as *mediation in action*—where understanding replaces accusation, dialogue replaces division, and shared interests become the foundation for progress. It's the practice of governing through understanding, trust, and collaboration—leading not by control, but by connection.

9 Covenants of Interest-Based Leaders

Commitments that transform how we engage in conflict

These aren't just nice ideas—they're binding commitments that shape how we conduct ourselves in public disagreement. They're countercultural, counter-intuitive, and costly. They're also essential for restoring trust in civic life:

1

Engage Privately First

Address disputes one-on-one before anything goes public. Give people the dignity of a private conversation before airing grievances.

2

Respect Dignity

No name-calling, insults, or personal attacks—EVER. Disagree with ideas, not personhood.

3

Stance of De-escalation

Observe tone, volume, and emotions. Actively work to lower temperature, not raise it.

4

No Scorekeeping

Don't bring up old grievances when addressing present issues. Each conversation deserves a fresh start.

5

Own Your Part First

Analyze your own role, wrongs, and blind spots. Acknowledge them before pointing out others' issues.

6

Guard Your Words

Avoid extreme language like "always" or "never." Precision in language honors truth and prevents escalation.

7

Seek Interests, Not Positions

Work to identify what truly matters beneath the stated demands. Ask "why" more than "what."

8

Find a Bridge

Commit to at least one area or topic of collaboration, however small. Build from agreement, not from division.

9

Guard the Truth

Be honest, and correct the record directly and immediately when wrong. Credibility is more valuable than being right.

Understanding The Screwtape Letters

C.S. Lewis's masterpiece on spiritual deception

C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* is a brilliant work of satirical theology, composed of 31 letters from the senior demon **Screwtape** to his apprentice nephew **Wormwood**. Each letter teaches subtle and psychological methods to lead a human "patient" astray.

What makes the book so powerful is its **inversion of morality**. God is "the Enemy," virtue becomes vice, and sin is presented as sophistication. Through Screwtape's cynical wisdom, Lewis exposes how easily we deceive ourselves into thinking our worst impulses are actually noble.

Each Letter Typically:

1. Focuses on a specific sin or distortion of virtue (e.g., pride disguised as humility, busyness as virtue)
2. Uses irony and inversion, teaching "evil as good"
3. Twists truth into half-truths, showing how self-deception grows
4. Exposes human psychology and "respectable sins"
5. Rarely mentions God directly—He is always "the Enemy"

The following three letters apply Screwtape's diabolical wisdom to the world of political campaigns, showing how conventional political tactics corrupt even well-meaning candidates.

Screwtape Letter 1: Message Discipline

On narrative control and the illusion of authenticity

✉ *My dear Wormwood,*

You must ensure your candidate never strays from *his own narrative*. Convince him that his story—not the Enemy's truth—is what must remain consistent. Teach him that integrity is not faithfulness, but **message discipline**. He must believe that changing his mind is weakness, even when conviction demands repentance.

Encourage him to see authenticity not as honesty, but as strategic consistency. Whisper this to him daily: "**Define the story early and never deviate.**" Do not let him consider that the Enemy delights in hearts that can still be corrected. If he learns that admitting error can bring trust, we lose him.

Should the Enemy prick his conscience to confess, tell him that a public admission would "confuse the brand." Nothing terrifies a political man more than looking uncertain. Whisper to him that his long hours are "sacrifices for the people," even when they mostly serve his ambition.

Convince him that *image* is influence, and that righteousness is whatever wins the next vote.

If ever the Enemy's Spirit stirs him to genuine humility, remind him of the cameras. Nothing ruins humility like being admired for it. Should his conscience question his motives, remind him that "leadership requires visibility." A little vanity is excusable when cloaked in service.

Remember, Wormwood: humility rarely survives a press conference.

In time, he will preach the language of light while walking comfortably in the shadow. It is a delicious condition—self-satisfied hypocrisy that looks like leadership. The greatest lie, after all, is the one told with perfect confidence.

Faithfully yours, Screwtape

Screwtape Letter 2

My dear Wormwood,

The consultants are right — attack first. Strike before your opponent has the chance to speak. There is no time for discernment when destruction is efficient.

Encourage your patient to “define” his opponent, but never to *understand* him. The Enemy’s Son once told them to love their enemies; how inconvenient! Twist that command into “pity them privately while destroying them publicly.”

Have him believe that “fighting fire with fire” is strength. Teach him that vilifying others is not hatred but *strategy*. If he ever begins to see his rival as a person, remind him that the alternate position will hurt someone.

Outrage is the most useful counterfeit of courage—it feels noble, costs nothing, and blinds the fool to his own cruelty.

Encourage him to “speak truth to power” while secretly enjoying the sound of his own anger.

Have him confuse *conviction* with *contention*. Let him thunder from the podium about justice, all while nurturing quiet contempt for anyone who disagrees. The more he despises them, the more convinced he will be of his moral superiority.

The Enemy works through mercy and conversation; we prefer slogans and caricatures. Convince your man that winning requires moral asymmetry — that truth is optional when the stakes are high.

And if guilt stirs, have him recite this mantra: “Politics isn’t church.” How deliciously effective that phrase is — as though a man could serve the Enemy only on Sundays!

In this way, you will make him a master of division and a stranger to grace, admired by men and a foreigner to peace.

In malice and mirth,

Screwtape

Screwtape Letter 3

My dear Wormwood,

I am pleased to see your patient finally speaking of his “enemies.” That word, my boy, is *gold*. It changes everything. Once a man divides the world into allies and enemies, he no longer needs to examine his own heart. Hatred becomes strategy, and contempt becomes conviction.

It appears your patient has begun to see merit in listening to his opponents. Dangerous ground! Crush that impulse immediately. Whisper that compromise is cowardice, that cooperation is betrayal, and that working “across the aisle” is tantamount to heresy. You must never let your patient approach a private conversation when a public confrontation will do. The Enemy’s manual (how tiresome) suggests going directly to a brother or sister who offends him. Preposterous! What good is quiet reconciliation when outrage brings attention?

The key is to keep him performing conflict, not resolving it. Let every dispute become theater. As long as he’s fighting publicly, he’ll never notice how far he’s drifted from the private obedience the Enemy prizes.

Teach him to refer to his opponents by their worst moments or their weakest arguments. “Label, mock, and dismiss” is our winning trinity. Once they are caricatures instead of souls, compassion becomes impossible.

The Enemy once spoke of leaving ninety-nine to find one. We, on the other hand, are experts at the opposite — losing souls efficiently in bulk.

You’ve done well to keep your patient busy. It’s remarkable how easily exhaustion masquerades as devotion.

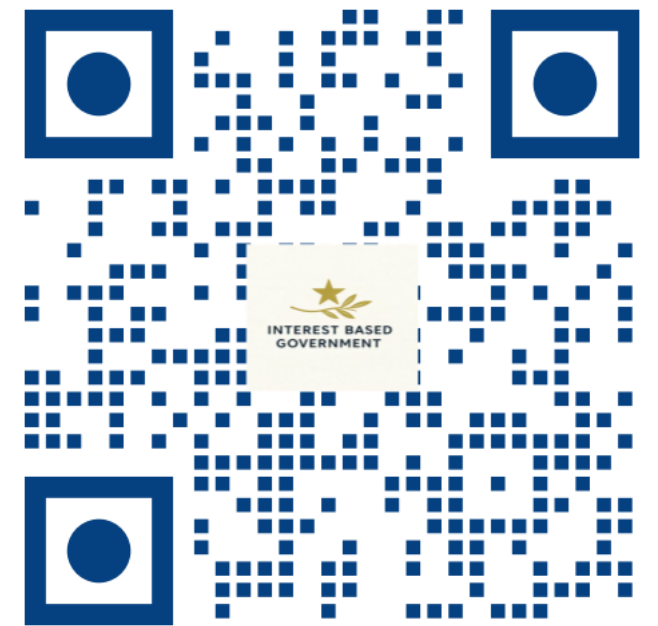
Fill his calendar with meetings, flights, panels, and calls. Keep his schedule so packed that he can claim “no time for rest.” The Enemy still prefers stillness — so make him allergic to it.

If he begins to sense conviction, drown it in meetings, microphones, and motion. The busier he becomes, the safer he is from reflection.

Remember: the goal is not to make him wicked but to make him *effective without holiness*.

Your affectionate uncle,

Screwtape



Adam McGough

Amcgough@JAMSadr.com

214-876-0582

Choosing a different path—one of integrity, service, and faith-driven leadership

Thank you

The question before us isn't whether government is broken—it's whether we're willing to be the kind of people who can fix it. Not through partisan warfare, but through principled leadership. Not through manipulation, but through mediation. Not through division, but through dignity.

We have the government we deserve. Let's deserve better.

