

# POLITICS NEEDS MORE ENGINEERS (AND THAT'S COMING FROM A LAWYER)

In support of PEO's goal of having 11 engineers in the 2011 legislature, we have invited elected officials, past and present, to share their views on how the aspiring politicians among licence holders can become more engaged in the political process.

By *Martha Hall Findlay, LLB*



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## WHY DOES POLITICS NEED MORE ENGINEERS?

Because you bring a perspective, knowledge and experience that can contribute significantly to public policy and government. It is well known that people with engineering training—people who are analytical, results-oriented, focused on making decisions based on science and fact—have made excellent business people. The same opportunity exists for public policy and government. We need more people who are trained to obtain

the facts, to analyze needs and possible solutions as objectively as possible, and then to get things done.

## WHO?

It's not for everyone. Although it can be immensely rewarding, it can also be pretty demanding—it is *not* a 9 to 5 job. Particularly where the legislature is in a different city, requiring travel and time away from home, it is a huge personal commitment. It is therefore much more of a challenge for those who have family or other obligations (young children, older parents, etc.) It is much easier to do if you are financially stable, and if you either do not have other responsibilities, or they are behind you (i.e. kids have grown up), or you otherwise have the necessary independence, flexibility and/or family support.

## WHAT?

It's not rocket science, but it does require a lot of hard work—and others to support you. There are various “campaign college” texts and seminars out there. One I recommend, geared to aspiring female politicians but useful for men too, has been prepared by Equal Voice: [gettingtothegate.com](http://gettingtothegate.com). There are also lots of people to ask for advice—don't hesitate.

## WHEN?

Timing will depend on your availability, family and other commitments. But there are many other factors, such as when is the next election? What party do you want to run for? What constituency do you want to represent? Is there an incumbent? But even if there is no immediate opening where you are interested, there is no time like the present to get involved—to learn, to make connections, network, and prepare for a nomination campaign and full candidacy further down the road.

## WHERE?

Where you run will depend on a number of factors. Although in most cases you don't technically have to live where you run, it usually is the place where you live, work, or otherwise have a connection. You might choose a different jurisdiction, due to incumbency (i.e. no opening), or because someone else is already heavily favoured in a nomination battle. Realistically, “winnability” is also a factor. Of course, the winds of political fortune can shift dramatically, and I always encourage people to run. Regardless of success, it is an extraordinary experience. And it often takes more than one campaign to succeed.

## HOW?

First, do your homework on levels of government, jurisdictions, current politicians and electoral history. Second, get involved with someone who has already done it. If provincial or federal, join the local riding association of the party you've chosen, and volunteer to help out—it's the best way to get to know the people who are already involved. And volunteer for a campaign. In so doing, expose yourself to all aspects—door-knocking, phone-calling, data entry, brochures, lawn signs, assisting the candidate with debates, getting the vote out, etc. And ask questions! It's all great learning for when you take the plunge yourself, which I hope will be both soon, and successfully. Σ

Martha Hall Findlay, LLB, MP Willowdale, encourages anyone interested in getting involved in politics to write to her at [HallFindlay.M@parl.gc.ca](mailto:HallFindlay.M@parl.gc.ca).