

# BLACK BOOK

A former advance man for Bill Clinton goes behind the scenes in Iowa to learn how BlackBerry, YouTube, and guerrilla video are changing the secret world of campaign stagecraft.  
By Joshua King

**HANDLE WITH CARE**  
Hillary Clinton is ushered backstage at an AFL-CIO event in Des Moines.

## RULES OF THE ROAD

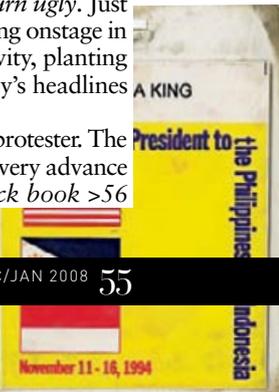
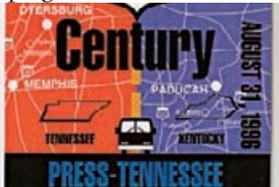
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s Hillary Clinton's Challenger 600 jet streaks west across Iowa toward the city of Council Bluffs, Justin Schall, her staffer on the scene, trades his gray T-shirt, Red Sox hat, and jeans for a dark suit, the battle dress uniform of a presidential advance man. The 34-year-old Schall—a veteran of John Kerry's 2004 campaign—is about to lead the Democratic front-runner to meet the next 1,000 voters on her two-year trek toward the White House. As a nomadic warrior for one of the Oval Office hopefuls, Schall has been shaping this

Iowa stop day and night—working the politics, designing the event, walking through security details with the Secret Service—since landing here from San Francisco four days ago. In advance parlance, it's Game Day. *Advance Rule No. 1: On Game Day, details left to chance will turn ugly.* Just ask Bob Dole, who in 1996 craned over a railing onstage in Chico, California, and upheld the law of gravity, planting his face in a well of cameramen. The next day's headlines interred his campaign in grave metaphor.

The shoddily built stage. The cantankerous protester. The dead microphone. These snafus strike fear in every advance man. Schall keeps fear at bay with *black book* >56

Kevin Sanders/AP Photo





## POWERS THAT WERE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Alexander Gardner's photograph of Abraham Lincoln and George McClellan at Antietam, 1862; the author, right, with President Clinton, 1995; Ronald Reagan and adviser Michael Deaver, 1980.

one more lap around his site—today, the Iowa School for the Deaf—and dashes to the airport to greet his candidate, her political aspirations resting fleetingly in his hands. From buildup to aftermath, the event is a textbook in the basic rules of campaign stagecraft. *Advance Rule No. 2: Once you pick your site, you own it, so choose with care.* With Clinton staffers predicting a high turnout, a 22,000-square-foot gymnasium got the nod. Instinctively, Schall shrunk the space by half. *Advance Rule No. 3: The camera should never show empty seats.* Now, with one basketball court curtained off, more than 1,000 guests squeeze into a space set up for 700. As the heat spikes, the giddy crowd fan themselves with the Clinton campaign's glossy handouts while they wait for the show to start. Every one of them, Schall knows, is a potential contributor, volunteer, voter. "Nobody gets by us without them signing in and giving us their information," a staffer instructs his sentries at the door.

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andidates who are in it to win it, and financed as such, never leave home without an advance team on the ground, ready to produce a camera-ready show in varied genres: a boisterous rally, a sober policy speech, or a shift with a nurse in a Henderson, Nevada, hospital, as Clinton did just prior to Council Bluffs. (Call it Take Hillary to Work Day.)

Political advance—art, science, or irritant, depending on whom you ask—is where strategy meets stagecraft, with methods passing from one generation to the next at invitation-only schools staged by each campaign. To the outsider, the pirouette of politician, people, and press is an exercise in logistics. To the insider, it's more like making movies. The work is invisible if done well, a spontaneous welcome to an honored visitor. Done poorly, it's a disaster in waiting, from a motorcade holding the L.A. freeways hostage to a backdrop ruinously worded in a MISSION ACCOMPLISHED kind of way.

**Political advance—art, science, or irritant, depending on whom you ask—is where strategy meets stagecraft.**

While Iowa's caucus is now at hand, the month of August, with its state fair and straw poll, offered the perfect safari to track both Clinton and her potential GOP opponent Mitt Romney in their natural political habitat. My goal: to gauge the old advance rules and evaluate new ones creeping into the manual. It's been 20 years since I first worked advance for Michael Dukakis on the campaign that gave us Bush and Quayle and Tank. (*Advance Rule No. 4: A candidate dons headgear at his peril.*) Having learned the lessons of that fiasco, I enlisted in Bill Clinton's 1992 advance corps and went on to serve five years in the White House managing stagecraft. One relic of my tenure was a nine-page memo—"Notes for Advance Teams," new ways to make a president look more presidential—that earned me Brian Williams's semi-snide shout-out as the "father of the modern backdrop."

Behind Hillary Clinton's stage in Council Bluffs is a center riser aligned with the news camera's "tight shot" framing the candidate's head for every screen in TV land. On daily calls between advance teams and headquarters, few details are prayed over more devoutly than this shot's composition.

A backdrop wallpapered with easily swallowed, poll-tested phrases is one option. Another is filling the space with hand-picked invitees, as Schall has done—labor intensive

but low risk, as long as you follow *Advance Rule No. 5: Human backdrops should smile and not snooze.* For the event's "wide shot," a large American flag hangs vertically, like the one behind the Speaker of the House, sandwiched between twin Clinton banners written in backdrop-ese: "Ready for Change! Ready to Lead!" *black book* >58

Clockwise from top: Alexander Gardner/Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division; White House Photo Archive; Beltmann/Corbis.



# BLACK BOOK (stage direction)



## MAD CROWD DISEASE

TOP: Barack Obama backstage at an Iraq policy speech in Iowa; Mitt Romney feeds the beast at the Iowa State Fair.

**“Advance is like crack cocaine,” says an occasional Obama road warrior. “It always seems to pull you back in.”**

undergrad recruits, who get in the game to soak up unique advance skills, even if it means menial labor, measly pay (about \$100 a day), and gritty accommodations (I can vividly recall doubling up in fleabags or even sacking out in the backseats of rental cars). As one Clinton White House veteran who worked for Kerry in 2004 and occasionally hits the road for Barack Obama told me, “Advance is like crack cocaine. It always seems to pull you back in.”

In Council Bluffs, Schall, the team lead but a site guy at heart, exploits the visual angles. *Advance Rule No. 8: Some camera angles turn politics into public art.* They heighten emotion, increase stature, add perspective. Images of a candidate in midstride show resolve. A shot looking over a candidate’s shoulder suggests command. Working a different angle, Schall’s stage has a unique underfoot feature, a 96-square-foot rug emblazoned with the “Hillary for President” logo. But to see it, you need a ladder and a sense of *Advance Subrule No. 8A: A shot from above conveys majesty.* And soon, photographers scale the rungs of a lonely 15-foot ladder to get a new look at a standard setup.

Whisked by motorcade from the airport, Hillary waits backstage as the intro music kicks in. *Advance Rule No. 9: Music can define a candidate, for better or worse. No hip-hop, please, in Iowa.* Evaluating a Giuliani trip to Georgia in August, *The New York Times’s* Marc Santora needled Rudy’s campaign for playing a soft selection from Yo-Yo Ma prior to a speech billed to show what Santora called the ex-mayor’s “Mr. Tough-on-Terror” credentials. The Clinton campaign, by contrast, has the music problem licked: Tracks play in prescribed order on a CD supplied from headquarters. Hillary enters to Céline Dion’s “You and I”—ugh, I know, but this is outreach, and in a moment of cyberdemocracy, it won out among 200,000 Internet voters—and exits to KT Tunstall’s “Suddenly I See,” whose zippy beat and telltale lyrics (“And everything around her is a silver pool of light”) electrify Hillary’s fan base and send the crowd home bouncy. Clinton’s communications chief, Howard Wolfson, a rock geek who each Christmas sends friends his critique of the year’s best music, e-mailed me, “When I first heard the song, I pictured a young woman or girl, like my daughter, listening to that song and imagining the possibility of our first female president.”



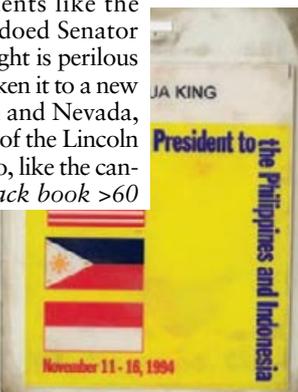
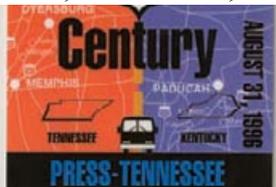
*Advance Rule No. 6: Expansive wide shots cover more front-page newspaper columns.* It’s Event Design 101, and it’s clear that Clinton’s campaign—benefiting from holdover tactics and personnel from her husband’s era—is already operating at general-election tempo.

And Senator Clinton gets around. Excluding personal and Senate travel, Hillary has attended 326 events in 32 states since January 20, 2007. That was the day, two years before the next inaugural, when she launched her exploratory bid in a Web video from her living room sofa in Washington, ironically, without moving an inch. (Here I should disclose that, although I’m a decade removed from the advance business, I am still funding it, in a way, having made contributions this year to Clinton, John Edwards, and Chris Dodd.)

*Advance Rule No. 7: You get paid in memories—and even the bad ones are valuable.* Jon Davidson, Clinton’s advance director, has the names of roughly 75 advance people on his whiteboard at HQ in Arlington, Virginia. Each is labeled with his or her function on a team: Lead, Site, Press, Crowd, Motorcade, and RON (not a name but an acronym, for “Remain Overnight”—the person responsible for hotel accommodations), and Davidson moves them like chess pieces from coast to coast. They range in age from dinosaurs, who roamed during the Carter/Mondale era, to

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he optics of politics, traceable to Alexander Gardner’s wet-plate collodions of Abraham Lincoln with George McClellan at Antietam, has always been critical to a candidate’s message machine—but in the YouTube era ever more so. Campaign staffers obsess over it. Seasoned journalists draw metaphor from it. Bloggers rant about it. And all campaigns work to avoid moments like the “macaca” catastrophe that torpedoed Senator George Allen last year. Getting it right is perilous work, and Mitt Romney’s practioners have taken it to a new level. On a warm Friday morning in Ogden and Nevada, two small Iowa towns separated by 32 miles of the Lincoln Highway, I meet Romney’s advance men, who, like the candidate, are uniformly courteous, *black book* >60



From top: Scout Tufankjian/Polaris; JOSHUA KING.

# BLACK BOOK (stage direction)

well groomed, and businesslike. They weren't always so polite, and were led, until June, by Jay Garrity, whom *The Boston Globe* identified as an alleged police impersonator. *Advance Rule No. 10: Brushes with the law get you a one-way ticket home.* If true, Garrity would fit the old mold of the advance-man-as-Secret-Service-agent, a guy who deputizes himself and rules with a heavy hand. Jerry Bruno, a Kennedy-era legend, recalled such a style—his own—in *The Advance Man*, his 1971 memoir that is still given quasi-biblical reverence. He recalled disentangling Bobby Kennedy from a “tall and very shapely” aide in 1967. An exasperated Bruno grunted, “Either you get away from the senator or I’ll drag you by the hair into that car.”

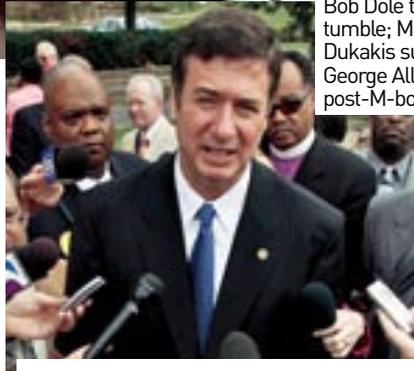
Unlike other campaigns, where Secret Service protection is already in place, the Romneyites whisper of “safety protocols” to protect the candidate and his family, but they are an otherwise peaceable outfit in Garrity’s absence. Armed with duct tape, a jackknife, and a fistful of cable ties at a community center event in Ogden (pop. 2,000), Charlie Pearce, 24, is the very model of a modern advance man. Dubbed “Boy Band” by staffers (probably because of the pompadour he calls his “Wo,” or White Afro), he is initially standoffish. *Advance Rule No. 11: Don’t talk to the press unless you’re telling them, politely, where to stand.* With his muzzle removed, Pearce, a steelworker’s son and a wilderness guide, comes off as a MacGyver type who needlepointed his own Republican-elephant belt, lives with his grandmother, and thrives on campaign camaraderie—“the brotherhood of advance guys,” he calls it. He honed his survival skills on Maine’s Class III white water: Recalling how he saved a camper from diabetic seizure, he says, “You get out in the woods and there is no police, no gas stations, no cell phones. *You just gotta make things happen on the fly.*” Call it *Advance Rule No. 12.* It translates perfectly on the campaign trail, where plans implode with regularity (see *Rule No. 1*) and camouflaging the fallout is an acquired skill.

he images from Pearce’s smaller events are workmanlike but effective: At the Iowa State Fair, he positions an aproned Romney, spatula in hand, behind an open spit of swine, holding a scrum of photographers at bay long enough to create an upbeat shot of the candidate as cook for the next day’s paper. Unlike Clinton, Romney splits his stagecraft duties between advance teams and a Boston-based events staff, sometimes lending his outings a party planner’s patina. In Ogden and Nevada, the campaign’s 68th and 69th “Ask Mitt Anything” events (the Romney campaign delights in quantifying the arcane) manufactured assembly-line visuals befitting an M.B.A.-run operation, their lightly produced simplicity belying their power. A Romney aide proffers the front page of the local paper—devoted to the prior day’s “Ask Mitt Anything” ice cream



## DAMAGE CONTROL

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Bob Dole takes a tumble; Michael Dukakis suits up; George Allen post-M-bomb.



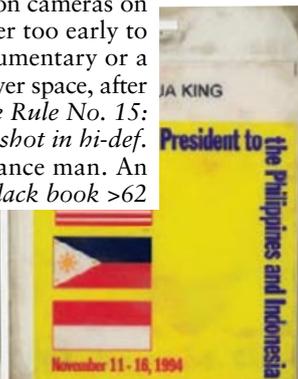
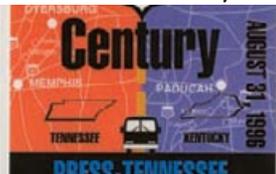
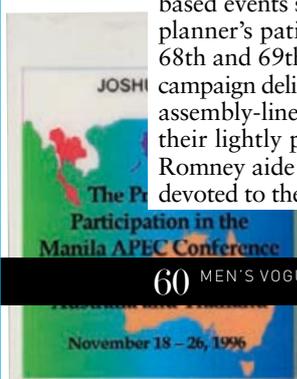
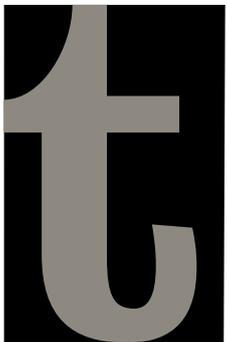
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social—and though there’s a story, the backdrop consumes the newsprint. *Advance Rule No. 13: A front-page picture is worth a thousand words, maybe more.*

One odd detail at Pearce’s event is the lavalier microphone clipped to the pocket of Romney’s starched white shirt. *Advance Rule No. 14: Beware the perils of the live mic!* It recalls Ronald Reagan’s 1984 sound-check blooper, accidentally recorded before his weekly Saturday radio address: “My fellow Americans... I’ve signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.” The stakes are lower for Romney: I learn later that the microphone belongs to his tactical video unit, which turns B-roll from the campaign trail into movie-worthy content for Mitt TV, his Internet television channel. And here is where Romney’s campaign is rewriting the stagecrafter’s rule book with technology.

Mitt TV, under the direction of Michael Kolowich, trains lightweight Sony HVR-Z1U high-definition cameras on Romney’s Reaganesque gestures. It’s never too early to archive footage for an inauguration documentary or a presidential library (it’s only pixels and server space, after all), so Kolowich has introduced *Advance Rule No. 15: Flashes of presidential bearing should be shot in hi-def.* Kolowich, 55, is not your ordinary advance man. An Emmy-winning producer and a

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Clockwise from top: Michael S. Green/AP Photo; Michael F. Samoleden/AP Photo; Alexa Welch Ecluder/ Richmond Times-Dispatch/AP Photo.

## Advance Rule #19: Position an aide at the back of the room to cue applause with a few quick claps; the crowd will always follow.

former Romney partner at Bain & Company, he gained fame and fortune as a founder of Ziff-Davis Interactive. Now a pioneer of Web video, he leads Romney—and the political profession—in bypassing old media, allowing candidates to broadcast themselves, with final cut, directly to voters. “I approached the campaign and I said, ‘Internet television is going to change the world here,’” he tells me. “And they said, ‘We agree—now go do it.’” If they succeed, they will further erode old media’s waning influence on elections.

Mitt TV’s influence comes into focus a day later, at the Republican straw poll in Ames, as the candidate’s strategy shifts from “Ask Mitt Anything” to “Mitt Buys Everything.” At Romney’s encampment, his army of hundreds is outfitted in blue Team Romney T-shirts, mechanized with 61 golf carts, and provisioned with an endless supply of barbecue, matériel that hints at the Allied buildup on the English coast.

All told, Romney will spend at least \$2 million in Ames alone, \$443 for each of the 4,516 straw poll votes he’ll receive.

One thing Romney doesn’t buy directly—but exploits brilliantly—is the straw poll arena production and its glorious backdrop, a 30-foot-wide photograph of the Iowa State House in autumnal splendor.

When radio host Laura Ingraham ushers the other seven candidates offstage following a ceremonial cattle call, Romney remains alone under a shower of cannon-fired confetti. The resulting image is a first-among-equals shot that, in this case, only money can buy. Kolowich’s Mitt TV cameras roll on the moment, the speech that follows, and the day’s other triumphs. Twenty-four hours later, after feverish editing and scoring on a laptop during a flight west, Kolowich will have transformed his footage into a Ken Burns-style wide-screen documentary that gets approved by the campaign and uploaded instantly to the Web. *Advance Rule No. 16: Postproduction is the new rapid response.* On his YouTube channel alone (he’s on MySpace and Facebook too), Romney videos have been viewed over 800,000 times this year—the highest channel viewership of any Republican candidate except, curiously, that of Congressman Ron Paul.

Shortly after I returned from Iowa, Michael Deaver, Ronald Reagan’s image maker, died at 69. An occasional mentor to me during my White House days who was both

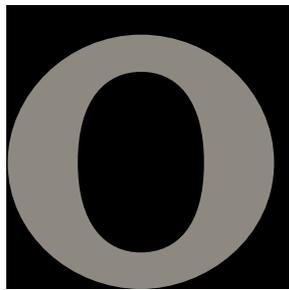
hailed and pilloried as a message magician, he brushed off attacks or accolades with a homespun demurral. “I’ve always said the only thing I did is light him well,” he said of Reagan. “My job was filling up the space around the head.”

That job now falls to Democrats like Justin Schall and Republicans like Charlie Pearce, heirs to Deaver’s legacy. No longer do they need to rely on *Advance Rule No. 17: A Nightly News package earns a post-event cigar.* Video and still photos will be on the Internet, through hundreds of feeds and blogs, in a matter of minutes. *Advance Rule No. 18: Use every available channel to define your candidate visually.* But beware: As each campaign becomes its own *Truman Show*, the news cycle, propelled by kids with video cameras and mobile broadband cards, is shrinking to nothing.

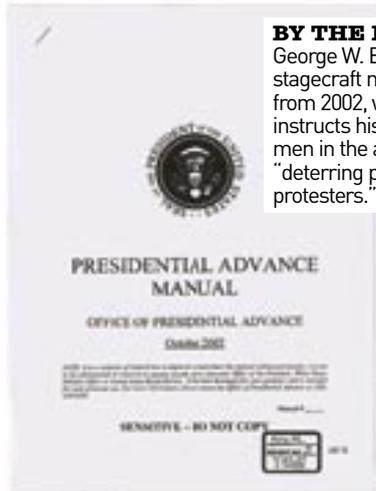
Does this spell the end of advance men? Hardly. The process starts with them, now as it did in 1960. And some campaigns are in dire need: Fred Thompson, for example—who ought to know something about stagecraft—has been bombing at improv. On October 1, he said to an Iowa restaurant gathering, “Could I have a round of applause?” and, “I had to drag that out of you.” (It was embarrassing on the front page of *The New York Times*, and it looked even worse on YouTube.) Rudy Giuliani, too, paused in the middle of a speech to the N.R.A. to take a cell phone call from his wife, Judith. A Fox News poll taken days later of 900 registered voters showed that 81 percent believed a candidate should screen his or her spouse when in the middle of a speech.

Script versus spontaneity: It’s hard to advocate exclusively for the former in a campaign hungry for a healthy dose of the genuine. But it’s worth offering two final rules—taken from my years of experience—that are meant to mitigate the awkward. One is in the bag of tricks I used at the White House when the man at the podium didn’t bring his A-game. *Advance Rule No. 19: Position an aide at the back of the room to cue applause with a few quick claps; the crowd will always follow.* The other comes from the Book of Common Courtesy. *Advance Rule No. 20: Turn off cell phones and pagers when speaking in public.* □

Read about the covert stagecraft of Barack Obama, John Edwards, and Rudy Giuliani at [mensvogue.com](http://mensvogue.com)



**TICKET TO RIDE**  
A few of the author’s credentials and mementos from his glory days.



**BY THE BOOK**  
George W. Bush’s stagecraft manual from 2002, which instructs his advance men in the art of “detering potential protesters.”

JEFFREY SCHAD

