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Executive Profile

## Steve Maviglio -- ‘He’s all about picking a fight’

But even some foes admire political consultant Steve Maviglio

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DENNIS MCCOY | SACRAMENTO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Steve Maviglio, political consultant, founder of Forza Communications

Political consultant Steve Maviglio doesn’t look intimidating. A thin man in his mid-50s, Maviglio hovers over a laptop in his sparse office. The only sound in the room is his finger incessantly clicking a mouse, until a reporter calls. That’s when the political consultant begins shooting facts and opinions in semiautomatic fire.

He sounds like he’s reading from a script. His cadence is robotic, with no extraneous detail. When the reporter gets off the phone, his notes will read like the story has been written for him — complete with a splashy quote.

A long-time political consultant, Maviglio has been likened to a Karl Rove of the left and is arguably the most recognizable liberal spin doctor in Sacramento.

“There’s a nugget of truth in everything I say, and hopefully lots of nuggets,” Maviglio said. “The best spin is truth.”

Maviglio has headed up his own consulting firm, **Forza Communications**, since 2008. And he has worked in the press office of the last three Assembly speakers, including an eight-month stint last year with Speaker John Perez, a Los Angeles Democrat.

Along the way, he has accumulated fans and foes alike.

Capitol Weekly, which covers state government, has placed Maviglio among the most influential people in Sacramento for the past six years.

“He’ll spin your clothes off,” said John Howard, the newspaper’s editor.

“Maviglio has got a level of respect and influence that leads people to assume that’s not Steve spinning,” said Chris Reed, an editorial-page writer for the **San Diego Union-Tribune**. “It flabbergasts me.”

Maviglio began his political career at 14 on then-President Richard Nixon’s reelection campaign. After turning into a Democrat in college, he served three terms as a state assemblyman in his home state of New Hampshire in the early 1990s. He moved to Washington, D.C., in 1994 to work for President Bill Clinton.

After holding a few jobs in the administration, Maviglio began working for Rep. Vic Fazio, a California Democrat. In 2000, he took a job as press secretary for Gov. Gray Davis.

When voters recalled Davis in 2003, Maviglio went to work for the California Democratic Party, which led to posts as press secretary for the next two Democratic Assembly speakers.

He left in 2008 to become Mayor Kevin Johnson’s campaign manager, then went back to the speaker’s office to work temporarily for Perez in March 2013. He left in December when the position was filled.

Housed one block from the Capitol, Maviglio’s firm specializes in public affairs, media relations and political campaigns and works with clients whose positions

largely align with Maviglio's liberal outlook. Some are obvious Democratic players, such as the **Natural Resources Defense Council**, while others, such as Verizon, are not.

Maviglio has a reputation for being ruthless. He regularly berates reporters and antagonizes opponents.

"A lot of public-affairs consultants don't want to pick a fight. He's all about picking a fight," said Kristy Wiese, a lobbyist with **Capitol Advocacy** LLC.

But Maviglio recognizes that political consulting is a business and that today's enemy might be tomorrow's client.

Case in point: As Davis' press secretary, Maviglio crossed political swords with Karen Hanretty, former spokeswoman for the **California Republican Party**. But earlier this month, Maviglio laughed with Hanretty over the phone, discussing a possible collaboration to kill legislation that would require health warnings on soda.

Along the same line, Adam Mendelsohn, a consultant with Mercury Public Affairs, said he's invited Maviglio out for beers the same day that Maviglio has slammed one of his clients.

Maviglio's tactics unnerve some people but draw admiration from others. Jon Fleishman, publisher of the conservative blog FlashReport.org, commends Maviglio's passion — though he criticizes his politics.

Not all of Maviglio's critics are as forgiving. The Union-Tribune's Reed criticizes Maviglio for regularly lamenting that median state pensions are \$25,000 a year. That's irrelevant, said Reed, when the state's pension crisis is due to tens of thousands of people who receive far greater payments.

"The statement is factually accurate but it's intentionally misleading ... It's just not right," Reed said.

Many critics are just jealous, said Howard of Capitol Weekly. "I think philosophically, people see in Maviglio the things they see in themselves, and

Maviglio seems to do it a lot better.”

As for Maviglio himself: His goal is to “take over the noise that’s surrounding an issue or race.”

And he doesn’t mind irritating people in the process — or being criticized by his opponents.

Unless they get the facts wrong, he said. He cites the spin-master’s code: “There is an honor among thieves.”

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## The Essentials

**Steve Maviglio, political consultant, founder of Forza Communications**

**Age:** 55

**Education:** B.S. in public relations, Boston University; master’s in public administration, University of New Hampshire

**Family:** Single

**Passions:** Bicycling, driving his 1972 Vespa and serving on the board for the Sacramento Natural Foods Cooperative

**Biggest professional worry:** “Being too passionate about a candidate or cause that I have blind spots”

**What do people misunderstand about your job:** “That ‘spinning’ is misrepresenting the truth. In reality, the best spin is the truth.”

**Allen Young**

Staff Writer

*Sacramento Business Journal*



