

Could YOU BE THE next prime minister?

Could a bit of spin doctoring groom even the most outrageous candidate to be the next female PM? Self-proclaimed loose cannon Zoe Williams puts herself in expert hands to discover if she has what it takes to be a future occupant of No. 10. Photographs by Cody Burridge

The first person ever to be groomed for Prime Minister was Margaret Thatcher. Well, OK, that's pushing it a bit – Churchill probably had helpful chums who told him when his flies were undone and when his eyebrows made him look drunk.

But Maggie was famously squirrelled away into a house in Chelsea, taught how to speak and dress, taught not to be so wild and squeaky, and turned back out into the world, mad as a snake, but now with a very low voice. Which makes you think that if she could do it, any of us could.

Now, there are a few tiny obstacles in the way of my bid for power. The first is my general appearance,

which I'd characterise as sloppy.

There is a long and noble tradition of politicians who chain-smoke and have food stains on their clothes, but it unfortunately ended when the general public said: 'Alright, we believe you're left wing – you don't have to spell it out in a constellation of egg, sweat and chocolate down your front.' Besides,

I'm not campaigning on a hard-left ticket; I'm campaigning on a 'Let's be more like *The West Wing*' ticket.

Which means I have to look a lot more like C.J. than I do at the moment.

Oh, and while we're on the subject of my policies, they're a tiny obstacle as well. Apart from the universal distribution of moisturiser, which >

BOOM AND BUST
(WHO WOULD YOU HAD TO CHOOSE?)



Zoe's 5 pledges

- ✓ ZOE SAYS NO TO FAT
- ✓ ZOE FOR FAIRER SEX
- ✓ ZOE FIGHTS FOR THE RIGHT TO WASH UP ONLY 50% OF THE TIME!
- ✓ ZOE SAYS MOISTURISE!
- ✓ ZOE PROMISES POLITICS THE WEST WING WAY!

Zoe Williams FOR PM



Sky News' political editor, Adam Boulton, promises to hit Zoe with his furry stick if she laughs



Zoe's collars impress the market traders – just wish they heard her tax proposal

HIGH IDEALS ON HIGH HEELS

I feel sure is an election winner, I have some radical feminism going on. I propose to link taxation to the amount of work you do around the house. So, if like most men you only wash up once in a blue moon, you're going to end up in a 90 per cent tax bracket. How can you measure a thing like that? I guess you could have some kind of gender sensor in your taps, but I don't know how that's done. Which means, at some point, I'd have to get a man to do it – which would be tricky, since my other plan is to establish a National Sex School – like national service, only for sex – and all the men who might know how taps work will be doing that.

Then there's my slogans. 'Hard graft: baby-soft skin' I can get away with since, from a distance, you can't actually tell how rosey my skin is. But 'Boom AND bust (who said you had to choose?)' relies a lot for its efficacy on my, well, tits. They've never been my strong suit. And my campaign against obesity

(I plan to nationalise gyms) leaves me little room for manoeuvre if I'm carrying a little holiday weight myself.

Marginally more problematic is my past. Unlike their male counterparts (Jeffrey Archer, Alan Clark), I don't believe any female MP – not even Shirley Williams – has had a reputation as an old slapper. I, on the other hand, wrote a column called *The Slut's Guide* for three years, which was slutty enough to get me banned from *The Lanesborough* hotel, and it's a matter of public record for anyone who wants to besmirch my reputation.

Besides all that, though, I'm pretty confident that with the right training, anything is possible.

Step 1 Get an image makeover

Sarah Whittaker, of *Insideout*, is my image-maker. She has a very firm agenda. If you throw on an Armani suit with no regard for your regular wardrobe, she says, then you'll look like

an impostor who's just stolen someone else's clothes. Instead, you have to adapt your natural style to suit the occasion. Sarah

sees my natural style as 'rock chick': hip, cool and relaxed, but with some drama. She also thinks my role models are Tamzin Outhwaite and Meg Mathews (which makes me worry that I've been accidentally showing my nipples while we were going round the shops together).

My personality is apparently 'confrontational but not overpowering', which irks, since I've spent 30 years trying to bully everyone I meet. Sarah also says that I represent all ages of woman – I am a three-way split between maiden energy (likes adventure), the seer (seductress) and the matriarch (regal, bossy). This means that all men will vote for me. Or they would if I didn't intend to tax them all to hell.

Sarah recommends I wear a skirt suit, since trousers give off the wrong message (they say: 'Damn! This would be so much easier if I were a man' when, >

HOW THE OPPOSITION RATES ZOE'S POLICIES

We sent Zoe's election pledges to the three main political parties. These were their comments:

TORIES

'Zoe has adopted a high-risk strategy of appealing predominantly to 50 per cent of the electorate. However, her good looks might save her bacon (the lean variety) with the other 50 per cent who will have to wash up if she comes to power.'

Caroline Spelman, Shadow Minister for Women

LABOUR

'Zoe needs to show a commitment to social justice to win votes in a Labour selection meeting. Currently, her pledges are eccentric and uncosted – maybe she should try the Lib Dems.'

A Labour party spokesperson

LIB DEMS

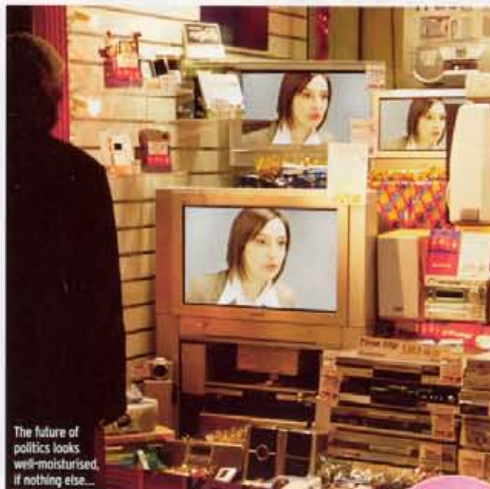
'We urgently need more women in politics, and Zoe looks like a great candidate. Not sure the tax on crisps would be a massive vote winner, though.' **Sarah Teather, Liberal Democrat MP for Brent East**

< actually, I want to say: 'I am woman. I am like a mountain: old and strong. I go on and on'.

The result is astonishing. The sharp collar expresses confidence; it says: 'I can take you on, matey, and I'll see you off with my dangerous collar.' My bag is worn and battered, as if to convey that I've done my time as a lowly politico and am now ready for the run of the country. I look so smart that it's impossible not to take myself seriously. It all makes me feel weird and power hungry and, as I did my 'meet the public' market walkabout in full regalia, I swear people looked scared.

Step 2 Watch your body language

Glenn Kinsey, of *Positiv Productions*, is the most successful trainer of TV presenters in the country. He is way too discreet to tell me whose career he's turned around, but politicians are among them. There are a number of things I learn from him; the first is, limit what you say to things you believe to be true. A seminal study in the 1970s said that presentation was seven per cent words, 38 per cent tone of voice, 55 per cent



The future of politics looks well-motivated, if nothing else...

body language. In other words, if you're talking complete piffle, it's not just the words that give you away. 'If you're being you,' Glenn says, 'you're basically invincible.'

A lot of communication skills courses tell you not to move your hands. Glenn says the opposite – so long as the gesture matches the words. If you stop moving your hands, you'll look like Iain Duncan Smith, who was always slightly too still. Then people will laugh at you, stab you in the back and nick your job.

I commence my speech while Glenn films me. I'm terrible. My eyes are all over the place, which makes me look drunk. I flail my arms as if I'm dancing to Christian rock and I have no control over my audience. We address these problems one by one. But the single most useful thing Glenn says is this: everyone is a great politician when they're arguing with their boyfriend. Think about it – you're full of conviction, you're determined to win, you speak powerfully in a bid to hold the floor. Any time you want to persuade an audience of anything, just imagine it's your ex.

Glenn has some other rules. First, that of three, which is: 'Tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em, tell 'em, then tell 'em what you told 'em.' Second, control your eye movement (you look up to the left when you're remembering something, up to the right when

you're making something up). Third, excel at mood-matching (match your interviewer's vocabulary and pace). And, finally, always stand as if your legs were in cement, which sounds easier than it is.

Step 3 Out your skeletons

Sky News' political editor, Adam Boulton, gives me advice which I am to hear a lot: that if you have any secrets at all – you know, drugs, love-children, etc – bring them out straightaway. But what if you can't remember a lot of your past mistakes? Say you spent your whole adolescence trying to get high off deodorant and lighter gas – that's the kind of thing you really wouldn't recall until your best friend circa 1987 crawled out of the woodwork and told everyone over two pages in the red tops.

Political pundit Matthew Parris agrees that you've got to be upfront, but warns: 'Nobody is as conservative as the Labour party. If you were a former hooker, you'd be best off with the Liberals.' But I don't know if the Liberals are going to want me, to be honest. I'm a bit of a loose cannon, policy-wise. 'There are cases

of independent candidates who don't have any particular policies, but still come across as decent types.' Matthew soothes. This is my chance – I'll forget policies for the time being and concentrate on seeming decent instead.

There is some mileage in being an attractive, marriageable, unmarried candidate up to 35. Mums might think: 'She'll be good for my son.' But what the greater public want is to see someone who's settled. Still, Matthew is ultimately reassuring in terms of my personal life. 'You can have a fairly exotic private life in politics nowadays,' he says. I'm not sure what 'exotic' means, but let's say it covers cocktails but doesn't extend to hula skirts.

Step 4 Will it work?

I'm beginning to hold out hope that it's possible to be a hard-drinking, hard-living former slut (well, I say 'former') and still be in with a chance.

I admit I have some gaping policy holes on the Euro, crime, education, transport, foreign policy and the environment. So what I need to do now is imagine some or other boyfriend giving a view on the Euro, crime, education, transport, foreign policy and the environment – and then imagine that he was completely and utterly wrong.

My only real sticking point is presentation. Glenn is very firm on this matter: only if you believe what you're saying, and you tell the truth, will you come across well. And no politicians do that. Not ever. Not even on *The West Wing*, where the characters are more intelligent than any politician has ever been in the history of democracy. Where the whole business is more idealised than the friendships are in *Friends*. My chances of being so flawless that I never have to roll my eyes to right while I make something up I'd put at slim to nil. ■

THE EXPERTS

- ★ Sarah Whittaker runs personal lifestyle profile company *Insideout* (020 7266 9898; sarah@insideout.co.uk; www.insideoutnet.co.uk).
- ★ Glenn Kinsey runs *Positiv Productions*, specialist in spoken and visual communication (018-950 9050; www.positiv.com).

LOW IN FAT, HIGH IN MORAL FIBRE

HARD GRAFT; BABY-SOFT SKIN