

## **The Real 2004 Campaign Issue: ‘It’s Leadership, Stupid!’”**

By Brent Filson

During the 2002 Presidential campaign, a now famous sign hung in Bill Clinton’s headquarters, "It’s the economy, stupid!"

Back then, the Bush campaign had been focusing primarily on Clinton’s reputed indecisiveness, his foreign affairs inexperience, his dangerous liaisons, and his draft dodging -- when most voters were motivated by the slumping economy.

Focusing on the wrong issues, Bush was beaten decisively. "It’s (fill in the blank), stupid!" now describes any kind of misapplied focus.

In 2004 Campaign, there may be another case of misapplied focus. For I submit the defining issue is "It’s leadership, stupid!"

Sure, the issues that pundits are touting — jobs, the war in Iraqi, national security — are key; but the overriding issue, the issue that will be in the minds and hearts of the swing voters come November is, Who can best lead the country in these turbulent times?

If the campaigning of the past few weeks is any indication, both candidates might be as clueless to the real issue, just as George Bush was in 2002.

I’ve been consulting with thousands of leaders worldwide for the past 19 years, and here are five leadership sins that I have observed most commit. They can provide a template for measuring whether the candidates are getting it.

#1: The Sin Of Giving Orders.

Today, the lowest form of leadership is the order, simply because it is the least effective form of leadership. Yet most candidates don’t understand that -- maybe because most of them have been in government so long.

*Order* comes from a Latin root meaning to arrange threads in a woof. Which is telling because order-giving became entrenched in the early years of the Industrial Revolution; the captains of industry dealt with the uneducated country folk flocking to their factories by having them "ordered" or ranked like threads in fabric, in other words, telling them when to work, how to work, where to work.

Refined and empowered by the Victorian culture, with its patriarchal power structure and strong links to Prussian military organization, the culture of the order-giver reached its zenith in the

United States after World War II.

With the industrialized world recovering from the War, many U.S. businesses were like ocean liners plowing through relatively calm competitive seas, their leaders, like captains and mates, running things by sending orders down a rigid chain of command.

But with the advent of globalization, businesses around the world are undergoing changes as radical as any since the Industrial Revolution. Leaders must be quick, adaptive, and smart — skills less conducive to ocean liner management than white water canoeing.

Today, leadership is not ordering people to go from A to B, it's having people want to go from A to B. That 'want to' is the sharp edge of organizational competitiveness and the *sine qua non* of leadership.

Of course, candidates who cut their leadership teeth in government have never had to wrestle with the leadership challenges commercial sector leaders wrestle with every day. They simply stand up in front of people and "stay on their message." That's not leadership, that's cheerleading.

What candidate is instilling that 'want to' in the voters? You can't order that. It has to come from them.

But a candidate who can't instill 'want to' will simply have the usual suspects voting for him, voters who vote the party line.

Look, leadership is not about getting people to do what they simply want to do, it's about getting people to do what they don't want to do and be totally committed to doing it. This presidential campaign is going to be decided by a razor thin margin. The candidate who can get the opposition's voters to do what they normally wouldn't do, come over to his side (The Reagan Democrats; the Clinton Republicans) will win.

#2: The Sin Of Motivation. When we talk about getting people to do what they don't want to do, we're talking motivation. Leadership that is not motivational is leadership stumbling in the dark.

However, leaders who actively try to motivate others, can't. They misunderstand what motivation really is. This is where the candidates screw up. They don't know the fundamental psychological drivers of motivation.

Motivation is not something we do to others. Leaders can't motivate anybody to do anything. Motivation is something the people do to themselves. The leader communicates, the people

motivate. They motivate themselves. It's their choice, the people's choice, to be motivated or not. The motivator and the motivatee are the same person.

In the campaign, look for candidates who are simply rabble rousing or talking tough instead of setting up that environment for those to make the choice. That environment is making a deep, personal emotional connection with the voters.

#3: The Sin Of Presentations. It's a sad day when leaders (and candidates) are presentation happy. Along with the order, presentations are at the low end of leadership effectiveness.

There is a hierarchy of methods regarding verbal persuasion. In ascending order of effectiveness:

First, there is a presentation, which COMMUNICATES information.

Next, there's the speech, which CONNECTS the speaker with the audience in order to persuade, compel or promote. There is often an emotional component to this connection that is conveyed through stories, anecdotes and the like.

Finally, there's the Leadership Talk, which brings about a COMMUNION, an intimate sharing of thoughts and emotions, between speaker and audience so that the audience will be motivated to be the speaker's cause leaders.

The HIERARCHY OF VERBAL PERSUASION:

PRESENTATION (COMMUNICATE) => SPEECH (CONNECT) => LEADERSHIP TALK (COMMUNE).

The candidates' communication problems stem from their propensity to deliver communications which are more like presentations rather than what I call "leadership talks."

The leadership talk is simply a communication from the heart that makes a deep, emotional connection with the audience so they believe in and take ardent action for the speaker.

The leadership talk is the most powerful motivational tool of all. Events in history bear this out. Throughout history whenever a people needed to accomplish great things, whether in the realm of religion, military endeavors, political movements, human rights, etcetera, one thing had to happen: A leader had to gather them together and speak to them from the heart. That leader didn't give a presentation. He/she really didn't even give a speech as it is known by the candidates today. That leader gave a leadership talk. Of course, it wasn't called a leadership talk at the time; but when you look back on it, that's what it was. And that's what we're not getting

from candidates.

Look at it this way: When a leader speaks, two questions hang in the air. Audiences always ask and answer those questions whether or not the speaker is aware of it. "Can you do your job, and why are you here?" The candidates make a big show of answering the first question. That's the information they communicate about what they will do as the president. But the other question they're not answering: Why are you here? If they don't believe that you are there for the right reasons, you'll lose them. That's what a leadership talk is all about, communicating in a motivational way why you are there. Clearly, with television and political rallies, people are gathering together. But aren't the cheering people the choir being preached to? No candidate has shown the communication ability to branch out from those people, to reach the hearts of most of the voters; and one main reason is that they haven't been connecting by consistently speaking from the heart.

#4: The Sin Of Ignorance Of The Heart. Descartes had it wrong. It's not I think therefore I am. It's I feel therefore I am. People's feelings are their existence.

Too many campaigners think that the message is the message. Whereas the message is not just the message, the message is the messenger. You've got to bring your total self into the leadership equation, if your leadership is not your life, you diminish your leadership and your life. Without an emotional connection with the people you lead, you can't get the results you're capable of. Tyrants show anger, little else.

Motivation and emotion come from the same Latin root meaning to move. When you want to move people to take action, engage their emotions.

In the campaign, look for the candidate who can get out there among the people and make deep emotional connections with them. Forget the canned political ads. The candidate should put h/herself in jeopardy -- not physical jeopardy, of course, but voter-jeopardy, interacting with voters, live, unrehearsed, and unplanned.

#5: The Sin of Selfish Results. Leaders sinning by looking out for themselves exclusively -- in it for what they can get out of it.

They say, "I want ... I want ... I want ..."

Great leaders, i.e. those leaders who get great results, look out for the people. They're in it for what they can help the people get out of it.

They say, "What do you want? How can I help? How can we do this together?"

This seems simple enough; but I'm constantly surprised as to how few leaders get this. Most torpedo their careers not because they lack intelligence and job skills but because they fail to win the hearts of their co-workers and the people they lead. And their self serving leadership is the main reason for such failure.

Have the people believe that working for you (and with you) is their greatest career move, and you'll gain loyalty and devotion money can't buy nor position dictate.

Political candidates are particularly susceptible to this sin. They talk service but "walk" giving away the store for votes.

Look for those candidates whose principles are polls, whose vision comes not from their life's experiences but from focus groups, whose passion is promise-them-anything and whose calling is ego-aggrandizement, and whose pockets are easily lizable -- and you have candidates who are masters at committing the 5th sin.

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