



Business Lessons from the Presidential Campaign By Kathleen Begley

As a rule of thumb, I avoid proselytizing. One reason is that the word is so darn hard to spell. Another is that I respect other people's ability to make up their own minds about personal issues such as sex, religion, and politics. They don't need me to make major life decisions.

Or do they?

Especially about politics.

As you read the Internet and watched the news media during the past few days, I'm sure you've noticed a wealth of opinion about this Tuesday's Presidential election. After a bazillion years of crisscrossing the country to get votes, Democratic candidate Barack Obama and Republican hopeful John McCain will finally learn their political fates.

As a self-employed communications training consultant, I have observed the goings-on of the past two years through the prism of my expertise. Often, I have been utterly stunned by tactics that would backfire big time if done by individual entrepreneurs, corporate executives, or Everyperson employees. So, breaking my own rule against preaching, I offer some observations:

- **Call people only during business hours.** For the past several weeks, every time my phone has rung at my home, I have dreaded hearing the Democratic or Republican message on the other end. Hey guys, I'm trying to wind down after a hard day. Haven't today's politicos seen the Seinfeld episode in which Jerry turns the table on a telemarketing representative and demands the man's phone number? "Let's see how you feel when I call you at home tonight," Seinfeld says sarcastically. If I badgered my exhausted clients during their leisure hours, I dare say I would be out of business in days, possibly hours or minutes.
- **Check your facts.** In my view, Joe the Plumber is the ultimate distortion of reality. After both Obama and McCain repeatedly mentioned him in the final debate, the guy became a pseudo-celebrity. Last week, he even appeared at several GOP rallies. As you may recall, Joe is the Midwest resident who had asked Obama during a brief handshake to explain how the Democratic tax plan would impact his ability to buy his own business. But guess what? Joe is not a licensed plumber. He owes back taxes. He lacks the money to buy his own company. Imagine your pushing an outside computer or construction vendor who had no qualifications to troubleshoot your software or to build a new cafeteria. My guess: you'd be fired.
- **Bite your tongue.** As much as I believe in authenticity, some sentiments have no place in public. During Obama's announcement of Sen. Joe Biden as his vice presidential pick, the senator from Delaware enthusiastically bounded onto the stage. During his remarks, he publicly acknowledged his wife Jill, a faculty member at a statewide community college. To his credit, Biden mentioned that his spouse has a doctorate. But then he said something so disconnected with the occasion that it made me, and many other women and men, cringe in embarrassment. Biden's description of his wife: "drop-dead gorgeous."
- **Dress appropriately.** If you're a CEO heading a multi-billion-dollar industry, I see nothing wrong with a buying your suits at Neiman Marcus or Saks. As a matter of fact, if Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin had positioned herself as something other than a down-to-earth hockey mom and moose hunter, I think pundits would have ignored her \$150,000 campaign wardrobe. The lesson for you and me: make your clothes match your goals.



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- **Use gentle humor.** I think the best line of the entire Presidential election came Friday from California Gov. Arnold Swarzenegger. A former body builder, he appeared at a rally supporting fellow Republican McCann. Swarzenegger's main criticism of the lanky Obama: skinny legs and undeveloped biceps. How refreshing to get away from efforts to blemish political reputations by making connections with long-faded questionable characters such as left-wing activist Bill Ayers and right-wing spy G. Gordon Liddy.
- **Check job candidates.** Over the weekend, on an MSNBC program hosted by Norah O'Donnell, a guest noted that "even McDonalds" interviews potential hires several times before giving them jobs. Palin became the choice for vice president after meeting McCain only once. If you're ever interviewing job candidates, please know that today's Human Resources standard includes weeks of mandatory tasks such as contacting past employers, talking to references, checking Internet entries, verifying education, and searching public records.
- **Customize your remarks.** Before the era of 24-hour news and Internet videos, candidates gave the same speeches over and over in different locales without any downside. In those days, voters had little way of knowing they were listening to the same speech given in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami. Times have changed. While I'm well aware of the need to repeat messages eight to 10 times before audiences get them I'm certain that thousands of repetitions is way over the top. Like many of you, I can hardly wait for Tuesday's vote to be over just to end the suspense. But I'm also eager to stop hearing about "Change We Need" and "Country First." In my opinion, the time finally has come to put up or shut up.

Dr. Kathleen A. Begley has taught business communications skills to employees of most Fortune 500 companies. The author of seven books, she regularly receives evaluations that her workshops are "full of energy and life" and "a breath of fresh air." You can reach her through her website at www.writecompanyplus.com or at her email address KBegley@writecompanyplus.com.