



How Obama and Romney Each Built a “Brand of You”

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President Obama and Governor Romney aren't just politicians--they're also Jedi masters of personal branding. Here are the 3 top takeaways from the election that leaders can apply when shaping their own professional brand.

Politicians tend to be masters at personal branding, especially once they reach the presidential (or presidential-hopeful) level. In doing research for my book, I found politicians as astute at personal branding as Hollywood celebrities are. Look at the political campaign process as a series of high-stakes, intense “job interviews” by the best of class--which is easy to do during televised debates and seemingly endless public campaign stops--and you'll find personal branding lessons that you can apply in business.

Here are my top 3 personal branding takeaways from the 2012 presidential race:



1. Have a clear value proposition that differentiates you from others.

Personal branding is not just about defining your brand, it's about defining the benefits of your approach and how you are different, even better, than others. In the debates, Mitt Romney built his value proposition around a pro-growth, pro-jobs agenda for middle-class Americans. And he branded President Obama as a failed leader with job-killing policies. In contrast, President Obama positioned himself as the true leader of the middle class and branded Romney as the leader of the one percent.

Takeaway

Make sure that you can brand yourself in a sentence. Your brand sentence is your differentiator that captures the essence of your brand identity. It should describe your value proposition--the value you bring that's different from what others bring. For example, an innovative sales executive in new media described her brand this way, "I reimagine underperforming assets across the converging worlds of Hollywood, Silicon Valley, and Wall Street."

2. Realize that style and personality count as much as substance.

Likability is important for politicians as well as brands. In the branding world, the Q Score is a measure of a brand's or celebrity's likability, and a high Q Score gives them a pricing premium in the marketplace. Likability is important for people too, whether you are interviewing for a job, making a sales call, or interacting in a



meeting. Above all, you need to project energy, openness, and connection, and your body language and facial expressions can help you do all three.

In the first debate, Obama was roundly criticized for his low-energy delivery style and aloof demeanor. He seemed listless and didn't make eye contact much with Romney or the television audience. Obama was clearly not on top of his game. Bottom line, he didn't seem that likeable or even appear presidential, and it hurt him in the polls afterwards until he got on the offensive with an energetic, authoritative speaking and debating style that had always characterized his brand. Likewise, early in the campaign, Romney was dogged by an image of being an elitist, which made him hard for many people to like or even relate to. Yet Romney's authoritative yet engaging style in the first debate completely changed perceptions and made him seem more likable and more presidential. And his more likable personal image propelled him forward in the polls.

Takeaway

Like it or not, style counts as much or even more than substance, particularly a likable style that people can identify with. Realize that you're always onstage, whether it's a small stage in a one-to-one meeting or a large stage presenting to a large group. Actors and performers not only practice through weeks of rehearsals, they do a mental rehearsal along with other preparatory exercises before they go onstage. The goal is to get in the right frame of mind to "become one with the audience." Great actors and presenters engage the hearts and minds of an audience. So speak colloquial English. Don't read your talk. Internalize it. Talk personally, not formally. If you are in front of a large group, select different audience members in the four quadrants of the room and look them in the eye. That



way, everyone will think you are talking directly to them.

3. Carefully edit and “curate” your message.

There is so much noise and data, it’s hard to make sense of it all. Notice how smart politicians don’t numb the audience with a laundry list of points or statistics but frame their arguments with a small group of select points. They also use stories, particular personal stories to make sure the message resonates. (“Last week I meet a voter in Philadelphia...”) Stories are sticky; they are memory magnets. Of course, in telling your story, you have to make sure you phrase it right--or you end up with the viral phenomenon that Romney’s story about “binders of women” created.

Takeaway

Don’t numb your audience with too many statistics: bullet, bullet, bullet; number, number, number, pie chart, pie chart, pie chart. Focus on the important points and statistics, and above all, pepper your talk with relevant stories if you want them to be remembered. When you’re presenting options in a pitch or to support an important point, three is the right number, not five or 10 or 20. One or two is too few, yet four or more will lead to confusion and a lack of decision. There are the “The Three Little Pigs,” “Three Blind Mice,” and “The Three Musketeers,” and the list goes on and on. So make it easy on your audience and stick to three. Three is often a good internal structure to use in a talk to simplify the logic around an argument or point of view. The U.S. Declaration of Independence speaks of “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The number three has a sense of completeness that is powerful and easy for your audience to remember.



You may not be planning to run for office anytime soon, but political candidates and campaigns are filled with lessons in how to create an effective personal style that will help you be more successful no matter what you do.