

## Sketches, Stories, Elections & Leadership

Wow! What an interesting time over the last couple of months since the USA's general election campaigns have been in full swing. From the pundits to Saturday Night Live sketches, from the candidates to the pollsters, from the debates to the rallies, from supporters to distracters, from (professional) politicians to (every day) people - all kinds of thoughts and ideas are being expressed, all sorts of messages are being relayed.

The election outcome is still unsure, although most people have their own definitive ideas about what it will/should be. Regardless of your politics, the rhetoric is compelling and the results most probably will emerge because of changing demographics, new voters, enhanced interest, dedication and commitment of volunteers, and the current state of the global economy and stability. The ability to create, craft, share, and position appropriate narrative to address these varying and changing elements continues to influence the electorate.

One of the most powerful types of communication throughout this campaign has been the consistent use of narrative, i.e. stories - through the use of satire in the SNL sketches, the personal stories of the candidates, the stories and blogs of the 'real people' from around the country who share the beliefs of one party or another - all have resonated at some level with people around the world. The stories have provided the 'connection' that allow people of all backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and nationalities to have an opinion, a bias, a favorite, and still have common hopes and dreams for our collective future.

For leaders, it should be a clear signal that stories are powerful vehicles used to communicate all kinds of messages. They don't have to be long or involved, either. They just have to be universal, in terms of a concept or value with which folks identify, and often the 'details' are what those hearing the story already 'know'.

The interesting, yet difficult and challenging aspect of the stories used in political campaigns is that they are often told in ways that mislead or misinform. Couple that with the timing and positioning of the story and decisions may be made based on an incorrect assumption. This is not unlike the environment in any industry where there are deadlines to be met, crises to be avoided, obstacles to be surmounted. The sharing of a story and the resulting actions is as much a strategic decision as it is a tactical delivery issue.

Stories, especially those shared publicly during a political campaign, can be double-edged swords. They are powerful tools to convey messages, but if care is not taken, they can convey the wrong message and end up hurting the storyteller in terms of acceptability, consistency and integrity.

'Joe-the-Plumber' is certainly a story that demonstrates the warning, 'Storyteller Beware'. Upon its initial telling it resonated well and apparently validated the points Senator McCain was making. After the initial telling, several of the 'facts' (thank goodness for CNN's Fact Checker):- ) were shown to be incorrect, which Senator Obama has used to validate his message. Depending on which candidate you favor, you have now either taken up the rally cry of 'Joe-the-Plumber' or have totally discounted it and are quite tired of the repetitive use of the phrase/story. Either way, the story spoke to each of us and has been a powerful tool for both sides.

What stories are you using to validate your message? Are your stories truthful? How strategic are you in positioning and sharing your stories? Are you truly harnessing the power of the stories you share or using them as a communication afterthought?

Your results, like election results, will help to tell the tale (no pun intended).

Aloha