



A Battle for the White House: Head vs Heart

Posted on October 10 2016

[Blog](#)

[International Affairs](#)

[Keynote Speakers](#)

[Leadership](#)

[Politics & Current Affairs](#)

With the series of presidential debates now finished, last night we saw the third discussion in which former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and businessman Donald Trump came head to head to battle for the most powerful position in the USA. The candidates responded to questions over a range of topics of public

interest, giving a brief glimpse into how they would deal with issues of public concern if they were to be given the keys to The White House.

[Social media](#) has been on fire with tweets, comments, debates and memes about the two candidates. With this in mind, it is no surprise that all figures counted viewership of the series of debates was predicted to eclipse the previously most watched American Presidential debate, between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. The candidates have never been so starkly opposed, and the polls couldn't be tighter. With the electoral vote of the century looming on the 8th of November we spoke to three experts in the field to see what they thought about the techniques used to debate - [body language](#) and oratory skills.

We caught up with [Nadine Dereza](#), the Media Director for PS Programmes, as well as an expert in presentation skills-coaching and delivering the perfect speech, [Nigel Barlow](#), who runs his own international consultancy and imparts business strategy, advising people how to innovate creatively. The third we spoke to was Martin Brooks, an Impacttologist, who can explain how successful communicators achieve their results.

As Barack Obama is set to move out, we look back at his legacy. All three experts agreed that he has cemented the formula for a successful campaign, but we wanted to know what is it about Obama that makes him a great speaker. Martin Brooks comments that "in the US Presidential election campaign of 2008, Obama's Presidency was greatly assisted by his use of specific [communication](#) techniques that created the impact he had on the electorate."



What is Obama's legacy?

Nigel Barlow agrees: "Obama is a natural orator. He uses time-honoured skills. In his acceptance speech, he used 21 tri-colons, groups of three such as 'peace, love and understanding', which created an impact of rhythm." Martin furthers this point, citing 24 uses of the contrast technique and 93 uses of the "thumb of power" gesture.

Martin continues by stating that "these impact techniques are well tried and tested. During the US Presidential election this year, we will see many of the same techniques being used by both candidates."

To give some specific examples of this, Martin pinpoints the speaking in threes technique.

The Impacttologist states that "In his first inauguration speech Obama used the speaking in threes technique seventeen times; he even opened with one; "I stand here before you today, (1) humbled by the task before us, (2) grateful for the trust you have bestowed in me, (3) mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors."

Donald Trump also opened his recent convention speech with this “three”; “friends, delegates, fellow Americans.....” and similarly, Hillary Clinton also used the “three” technique to accept her nomination; “It is with (1) humility, (2) determination and a (3) boundless confidence in America’s promise that I accept your nomination...”

Martin goes on to point out that President Obama used the emotive technique of contrasts. He isn’t the only President to do so. Martin says “when President Clinton wanted to “sell” his nominee to the American public at the Democratic convention during President Obama’s 2012 re-election campaign, he also used the contrast technique; “I want to nominate a man who’s cool on the outside, but who burns for America on the inside”.



Former President Clinton used the contrast technique

Donald Trump used the same technique when he said; “We will be a country of generosity and warmth, but we will also be a country of law and order”. Here the two sets of describing words starkly contrasting.

Hillary Clinton also used the contrast technique a number of times. Here is one example; "We will not build a wall, instead we will build an [economy](#) where anybody who wants a good job can get one".

Contrary to Martin's view, Nigel Barlow picks out examples to illustrate that "Trump and Clinton have not mirrored Obama in any respect", Obama focuses on collective pronouns and speaks with natural focused fluidity, whereas Nigel points out that Trump focuses on himself - "he uses I or me twice as often as Hillary" and he is "famous for digressing from the point in hand", which has the effect of making him appear like a "loose cannon". Equally, Hillary lacks the natural oratory skills of Obama, Nigel says she "relies too heavily on an autocue and can come across wooden and stilted".

Nadine agrees with Nigel but takes his point further by analysing the body language of the two candidates. She says "Hillary's speeches are carefully planned and scripted, which, depending on your point of view makes her look either authoritative or disingenuous. Donald's speeches may be looser and more off-the-cuff, but he has exactly the same problem of appearing to be one thing to one person, and something else to someone else: where supporters see honesty, opponents see a loose cannon."



Do you prefer Clinton's autocue style or Trump's off the script style?

“Clinton has a relaxed on-stage presence behind the podium, usually gesturing with a single hand. She is in the detail, and gives the impression that she knows the situation as well as any of the journalists who put questions to her.”

“Whereas Trump’s body language is superficially much more dynamic than Hillary’s, and as a result his personal image and brand stick powerfully in the mind. However, the more excitable he gets, the less articulate he becomes, with his hands acting as a distraction, moving excessively around, pulling focus away from the content.”

Nigel points out that “people are more responsive to an emotion pitch”, and he is right. Nadine supports him in this by saying “the contest looks set to be a classic head vs. heart decision: will the American people choose the established, credible career [politician](#)? Or will they vote for the [businessman](#) who speaks his mind and gets what he wants?”

It is clear from our experts that although the candidates differ starkly on their manifestos, they do draw on some similar techniques in their public speaking;

whether this be recycling tried and tested techniques from the successful campaign of Obama, or using body language to express their own opinions and motivations, it becomes no clearer who will win the votes of the public and take on the most powerful position in the U.S.

As Americans wait with baited breath for November 8th, so do the rest of the world.