
What Leaders Can Learn from Both Clinton and Trump



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When connecting with an audience, Hillary Clinton leads with the head while Donald Trump comes from the heart: Both hold lessons for today leaders.

Watching Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the U.S. presidential debates, it is striking to observe the difference in communication styles between the candidates; indeed they seem to use two diametrically opposing ways of connecting with their audience. The question is which style works best for a would-be world leader? And what can leaders in other walks of life learn from these two very different communicators?

When it comes to analysing the communication style of the two presidential candidates, it is important to remember that both have gone through serious media training that has helped them soften the rougher edges. We also need to take into account that stress and pressure – and running for president of U.S. certainly creates a fair amount of both – have the tendency to lead to more exaggerated negative behaviours unless very deliberately controlled.

We all have our range of individual and personal communication features that influence our preferred style of communication; the way we transmit, deliver, receive and interpret information. There are four main communication preference styles, as outlined in the [Communication Preference Styles Survey \(CPSS\)](#), a diagnostic tool, developed by [Ian C. Woodward, INSEAD Senior Affiliate Professor of Organisational Behaviour](#), to compare individual communication style preferences.

These styles are reflected in the language and words we use, the topics we choose to talk about, the nonverbal signals we give and the voice tone we project, as well as our overall approach to connecting with other people.

These communication styles include:

1. **Rational Communicators** who come across as logical, factual and direct. They have a preference for analytical thinking and concentrate on key information that allows them to get straight to the point. Logic is their forte, and often empathy gets lost in the process.
2. **Structured Communicators** who are organised, meticulous and detail-oriented. Their goal is to understand the world by concentrating on details and factual information. Big picture, abstract thinking is often more difficult for these communicators.
3. **Expressive Communicators** who display a people-oriented and emotive approach to communication. They are interested in humans and relationships and express this by being warm or passionate or emotional. Expression is their forte, while applying logic and structure does not come as naturally.
4. **Visual Communicators** who express their ideas in an animated, lively way, building on ideas, metaphors and images, preferring to concentrate on the “big picture” than the details. Intuition is their forte while facts and deep analysis is much less emphasised.

As is probably evident, Clinton has a strong preference towards Styles 1 and 2, while Trump’s way of communicating leaves little doubt about his preference towards Styles 3 and 4.

The logical straight shooter

When watching Clinton during the second presidential debate, we see her initial reaction to the first question is to respond with a personal question in turn, thus modelling the behaviour of her husband, Bill Clinton, during his town-hall style presidential debate with George H. W. Bush in 1992. Bill Clinton's personal and empathic question immediately created a human connection with the then-questioner and through his whole audience, starkly exposing the difference between his warm approach and Bush's apparent lack of empathy.

However, Hillary is not Bill, and immediate empathic connection is not her forte. Her weapons lie elsewhere. She has a reputation for having a sharp head and a cool heart. After her first, personal remark to the questioner, she immediately starts to deliver a well-prepared, smoothly analytical response. Facts and details pour out of her with ease, and are, characteristically for the Style 1 and 2 "logically comprehensive communicator", structured by order, logic and sequence. Her language is clear, and she connects the facts with the concrete, the "how-to".

The downside of her communication style is that she might remind people of the strict school teacher who knew it all and used to humiliate them in class. This impression is reinforced by her clear, calm, modulated voice, as well as her behaviour during Trump's turn to speak, as she diligently takes notes while he speaks. Her head held high, as if in disdain, and her sometimes pinched mouth further contribute to this perception.

This is a great disadvantage in a race for the White House where many voters cast their ballot based on nothing more rational or factual than "how they feel" about the candidate.

Passion and action

Trump, on the other hand, is the master of strong emotions, delivered with little logical underpinning or structure. His passionate rhetoric, and his imaginative, energetic, highly descriptive and unbridled emotional language create a sense of excitement and dynamism in his listeners, and give him the image of "a man of action", in contrast with Clinton, who is seen as "the woman of words". Trump's expressive facial and body language make him come across as more energised than Clinton's poker face. Trump excels at creating engagement and interpersonal relationships, and elicits strong passions from people to whom facts and figures matter little.

However, the weak side to Trump's communication style is also apparent: He jumps from one topic to another, and rarely if ever answers the original question, even when repeatedly brought back to it by the interviewer. He is undoubtedly able to touch and even rouse people (in a positive or negative way, depending on the point of view you take) but comes across as unprepared, unpredictable and lacking substance and depth.

Lessons in leadership perception

What can we conclude from these observations of the candidates? As far as Clinton is concerned, she is respected for her competence and knowledge, but seen as lacking warmth and empathy. People will vote for her because they are convinced of her qualifications, or because they vote against Trump, or because they are staunchly Democrat. They will not vote for her because they connect with her on a human, emotional level.

As far as Trump is concerned, it seems surprising how he can attract so many passionate and determined followers in spite of his confusing messages lacking logic and substance. What he does masterfully is to sense group emotions and connect with people's frustrations and concerns. He provides hope, not facts which can make people blind to his behaviour as a reckless, modern-day Messiah.

There is a lesson here for leaders of all ranks. Speaking only to people's heads does not create the passionate commitment as touching their hearts does. Leaders are best when they do both. Maybe Hillary Clinton can learn this lesson. Luckily, she doesn't have to look far for help. One of the best coaches to bring all four styles together is available, and what is more, she is married to him.

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