

WHAT WE LEARN FROM A PRESIDENT BIDEN

Full disclosure: I advised the winning Biden presidential campaign and worked indirectly with Senator Biden on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee back in the 1980s. And regardless of who you voted for, the Biden campaign offers lessons for us all as we face the worst global pandemic in a century, the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression, and the most jarring civil division and upheaval since 1968.

For America, there is very good news in the largest voter turnout in a century, and in the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency joint conclusion: “There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised.” In this, nearly 80 million voters either supported Joe Biden or agreed with the last line in Bob Woodward’s book *Rage*: “When his performance as president is taken in its entirety, I can only reach one conclusion: Trump is the wrong man for the job.”

Now, looking ahead, past the “thank-God-it’s-over” 2020 presidential campaign—what can we *all* learn as we move forward?

First, for America, for Americans, winning is very often about the underdog **COMEBACK**. Lost in the mind-numbing 2020 campaign commentary is the story of the greatest comeback in modern U.S. political history. Back in February, Joe Biden was dead—4th in Iowa—5th in New Hampshire. Broke and on the brink. And then . . .

In South Carolina, the Biden campaign team became even more focused, disciplined, and insurgent. Broke, but not broken, candidate Biden began to re-channel an underdog spirit that is at the heart and soul of Americans and America’s birth. With the instrumental help of Representative Jim Clyburn, candidate Biden summoned his own survival instincts and strategically forgot about what he had just lost and re-focused on what he could now win.

Underdogs are optimists. They don't brood. They look forward. And they know at their core that not losing can be winning.

Second, 2020 Joe Biden is different than the Senator Joe Biden I knew in the 1980s. In fact, 2020 Joe Biden has done something all great leaders do: He's **LEARNED**. Senator Joe Biden talked a lot. 2020 Joe Biden understands less is more. For example, in several post-election 15-minute speeches, the President-elect said more with less and adapted better than his opponent to the cruel challenges of Covid-19 campaigning. In an age of disruption, 2020 Joe Biden has learned the power of focus and discipline.

Third, the winning Biden campaign reminds us about the simple and enduring power of **PLAYING OFFENSE**. High-stake campaigns are innately cautious. And while the Biden campaign had its days of cautiousness, they played more offense than recent Democratic presidential efforts and bet it all on candidate Biden's original conviction: "We are in a battle for the soul of this nation."

From his Delaware basement, candidate Biden doubled-down on the principle that truth is the best form of propaganda—and espoused policies from the missing center of American politics. Often, candidate Biden returned to his campaign's through line to rise above the muck of politics—transcending and focusing on moral solutions, uniting principles, and future policies.

And now, the hard part begins.

Back in 1997, at the height of the financial crisis, I was advising South Korea's President-elect and future Nobel Peace Prize winner Kim Dae Jung. I conducted a study to identify the leaders who were most successful over their first 100 days—who best jump-started their own leadership and legacy.

The list narrowed to three: President Franklin Roosevelt, U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and President Ronald Reagan. All three enjoyed relatively high levels of popularity early on and cemented their places in history from very strong beginnings. And all three defined themselves, played offense, and controlled the dialogue.

The three leaders were very different in many ways, and they faced very different problems, but they had one tactic in common. They all set their sights on an “enemy” to sharpen their own definition of themselves, to define the causes for which they stood, and to define what ultimate success will look like.

For Roosevelt—over the first Hundred Days—the enemy was a group of “uncaring, mindless bureaucrats.” For Thatcher, it was “socialist over-spenders.” And for Reagan—from the get-go—it was “big government.” The enemies varied, but they were all enemies. And thus, these three very different leaders energized their own definitions of themselves and of success by defining who or what they were against.

President Biden faces formidable enemies. Today, Covid-19 is killing 1000 Americans daily; 40% of Americans have less than \$400 in their bank accounts; the nation’s infrastructure is not just falling apart, but is begging for workers and job-fueling solutions; and the U.S. has suffered 85 “billion-dollar” weather and climate disaster events since 2015, costing an astonishing \$583 Billion

Across his first 100 days, and beyond, it is time for an underdog President—2020 Joe Biden—to put to work his learning, define his “enemies,” and move to the constant state of playing offense.

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