



Campaign-Inspired Communication: 3 Strategies Lawyers Can Learn from the Presidential Election

Career Development



Author George R.R. Martin is best known for his bestselling series of epic fantasy novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire* — which is perhaps even better known as the inspiration for HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Before he wrote about the cutthroat politics of fictional Westeros, however, Martin authored *Ace in the Hole*, writing that “Politicians were mostly people who'd had too little morals and ethics to stay lawyers.” Some may debate whether this is accurate, but Luan de Burgh of the [de Burgh Group](#) says that in-house counsel can actually learn a few skills from the politicians in this year's United States presidential race. The group specializes in training professionals, especially attorneys, to communicate, present, and develop businesses. De Burgh has three politician-inspired lessons for in-house counsel.

Wear your crown

For this lesson, de Burgh actually drew inspiration from royalty. Even when Queen Elizabeth II isn't physically wearing her crown, she always walks upright, with grace, as if she is balancing a crown on her head. “I have been encouraging lawyers to ‘wear their invisible crown’ ever since,” says de Burgh. “I tell students to imagine they have a piece of string attached to the top of their heads, pulling them toward the ceiling.” This helps them align their spine and stand taller, like the Queen.

De Burgh explains that nearly anyone can benefit from this technique. In fact, before entering into the world of business, de Burgh lectured in voice and speech at London's leading drama schools. “This is one of the techniques that I used to help young actors develop and demonstrate confidence when speaking,” he says. Actors and politicians alike use this technique to appear grounded, competent, and compelling when they present on stage. De Burgh continues, “you can certainly see the leading presidential candidates wearing their crowns in all their appearances and debates.”

How can attorneys translate this technique to their own careers? “Demonstrating confidence like this is extremely effective when one wants to have an impact on others,” explains de Burgh. Audiences are very perceptive and tend to notice when others are present and engaged. Wearing your crown from the moment you walk into a meeting room or presentation, to the moment you sit down, gives the impression that you are confident in the messages you are communicating. Your audience will sense your confidence in your position, and be more likely to listen and agree. This technique can also be used when handling difficult negotiations or problem-solving with a team. Exuding grace and competence will instill a sense that you have control over the situation. This in turn will make others more receptive to your arguments, leading to more productive conversations. Maintaining an aligned spine and good posture will also show that you are present and engaged. This can encourage others to be honest and open with you. This can be especially helpful during client meetings.

Even outside of formal meetings and presentations, wearing your crown can give you a confidence boost wherever you are. “I often use this technique when walking in the opposite direction of a huge crowd,” says de Burgh. “It is a very effective way of getting others to walk around me rather than me walking around them!” This technique can even be used after work hours, according to de Burgh. “I have found this an effective technique for being noticed by the bartender at a crowded bar,” he jokes.

Smile, point, and wave

If you have seen a few debates on TV you have most certainly seen at least one politician “smile, point, and wave.” This technique is used by skilled politicians to engage a crowd, look friendly, and come across as widely supported. They smile, look at a distant audience member, point at them, and wave, as if they have a personal connection with certain members of the crowd. Although this level of showmanship works on the national stage, de Burgh recommends a more toned-down approach for attorneys. “Lawyers can utilize this particular technique more subtly, and as effectively, without the actual pointing when speaking to a large crowd of people,” says de Burgh. Because many in-house counsel find themselves at the intersection of law and business, this skill can be especially helpful during large conferences or industry presentations.

De Burgh recommends that during a speech, especially to a large audience, it is very important to maintain eye contact. However, it’s also very difficult to maintain eye contact. This is where the “smile, point, and wave” technique comes into play. De Burgh explains, “The best thing you can do is to divide the audience up into 6 to 8 blocks. Treat each block as if it were one individual person and then look in their general direction.” Because of the distance, most people in that block will have the feeling that you are looking directly at them. This will make their experience of your talk more personal,” continues de Burgh. “In turn, you will feel more well-received as a speaker and have a much better speaking experience.” For more confident public speakers, throwing in a few nods or waves can lead to a more politician-like effect, which can be helpful when making influential speeches.

Make others feel important

Politicians are usually very good at making someone feel as if they are the only person in the room. This is known as having a “connection” or “chemistry.” Creating this personal connection can help politicians garner dedicated followers, who feel they know the politician on a deeper level. In-house counsel can use this technique to have more candid and productive conversations with clients, fellow counsel, and others. According to de Burgh, to achieve this connection you need to become very skilled at the following sequence of actions: “First, make direct eye contact with them. Then, during the conversation, focus on them 100%. Finally, listen and demonstrate interest in them by asking

questions about the things they talk about.”

This sounds simple, but it takes practice to maintain this sequence and continue a natural conversation with another person. For beginners, de Burgh explains, “the real skill here is listening to their responses. Some people listen to respond whilst others listen to listen. Listening to listen, instead of being focused on your next response, will make the other person feel important. Don’t listen with your mouth!” Therefore, lawyers should try to listen in the moment. In litigation lawyers are trained to be quick on their feet, always anticipating their next response. In conversations, however, the main goal should be truly comprehending the other person’s side.

“Not only should we listen to the answer, but we should also ask follow-up questions based on that response. When possible, it’s also useful to repeat some of the language that the other person has used,” says de Burgh. For example, if the other person uses a phrase to describe their issue, you should repeat that phrase throughout the conversation. “This demonstrates to the other person that you have listened to what they have said. When we feel listened to, we feel as if we are important to the other person.” Ultimately, the only way to excel at this type of conversation is to practice. How else would seasoned politicians be so skilled at it? “Listening is a skill and it needs to be practiced. It’s critical for anyone who works in a client service delivery role,” declares de Burgh.

Whatever your political inclination, you can use these three strategies to emulate the influence, confidence, and relatability on display throughout the past year of campaigning. Any lawyer seeking a confidence boost in presentations or conversations should give de Burgh’s advice a try. With some practice, you’ll walk away from this election with more than just a new president.

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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

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