

## **A More Insurgent President**

The most talented communicator in modern political history is in danger of being out-communicated by his opponents. Why?

President Barack Obama must re-energize his presidency with the same kind of insurgent thinking, strategy and execution that elected him in the first place. As a company, we preach, teach and practice insurgent strategy. And, at this point, we're wondering if the Obama Administration has forgotten what put them in power. It was pure insurgency. Today, all leaders, business or political, must communicate within the context of crisis—and so the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States must do three things to lead as greatly as he is capable of leading:

First, Focus and Simplify: President Obama must be less Law Professor and more Communicator in Chief. This means forgoing complex distinctions and not always finishing your sentences or adding new paragraphs. Some may dismiss the Reagan Presidency, but President Reagan understood the most important job our President must do: To communicate the complex workings of our government to the American people; to gain consensus behind his policies; to define America in the world.

Can anyone name one or two themes from the first 18 months of the Obama presidency? The reason you cannot is that the messages have been too reactive; too spread-out and thinned-down. Nothing has stuck—not even the Administration's accomplishments.

For sure, President Obama has the communications discipline to do this. In fact, Candidate Obama's discipline as communicator helped him win the White House and it can now re-energize his Presidency. But today, the President's immense skills are not being focused. Instead, he's being weighed-down by a nearly impossible inheritance and non-stop attacks from the right and left.

Again, think of Ronald Reagan: We still remember his "3x5 card": "Get Government off your back; cut taxes; make America strong again."

Second, Play offense. There was a moment early in the Obama Presidency when he very unwillingly supported a stimulus package not of

his own design—one filled with the kind of pork that he opposed on the campaign trail. This was an important moment. Just as Reagan fired the air traffic controllers early on in his presidency, Obama had an opportunity then, there, with the stimulus package, to push back and say this is not the way we will be governing in Washington.

The same kind of boldness that allowed candidate Obama to brilliantly and courageously transcend the difficult issue of race in a speech about race is needed now. Instead, President Obama seemed to cede the decisions to the Democratic Leadership. The “fundamental change” the American people had voted for was not delivered.

Today, the White House is reacting, even over-reacting, to the extreme left and right. It's time to play only offense, to be declarative, to define who he is, what he believes, how he decides, what the stakes are for all Americans and what future he wants to bring us. And it's not too late.

Third, Use Truth as Propaganda. The President can't dive half-way into the water now. Since he's commented on the issue, he must now be for or against the Islamic center near New York's ground zero. In fact, Americans are yearning for this kind of leadership—leadership that can tell them important and even hard truths—especially during the one year, 2011, when the lack of national elections might allow some headway on the critical issues that government no longer seems capable of addressing.

In 2008, we elected the most skilled and talented communicator I've ever seen or worked with. But we did not do this in order to do political deals or allow his communications team to play defense or to parse statements. Truth is always the best and only effective form of propaganda. Obama told it brilliantly in the campaign. And he must do it again.

This means, for example, weighing back into the formal press conferences that the Obama White House has recently avoided. In fact, this remarkably intelligent and skilled communicator is at his best in free form and under pressure. Amidst the crazy extremes on the right and left, America and Americans need the truth now.

In sum, great leaders and great organizations learn as they go forward; they grow stronger, like the Borg in Star Trek. FDR did. Clinton did. And Obama must. It's time for the White House to re-learn the lessons they

taught us all during the 2008 campaign about insurgent leadership. It's time to launch a more insurgent presidency for the sake of our nation.

*David Morey is an award-winning author of *The Underdog Advantage*, Vice Chairman of Core Strategy Group and advised the 2008 Obama campaign on strategy.*