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The Presidential Game Changer - Inclusive Leadership and Governance

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The U.S. Presidential Election Game Changer Inclusive Leadership Behavior and Governance

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Earlier this week True Blue Inclusion released the results of a survey that summarized the views of top diversity officers (CDO) across the country about who is best positioned to lead the country over the next four years. The overwhelming consensus was that President Obama and Vice President Biden would be the better choice. As a CDO I believe that personal leadership behavior exhibited by both camps was the game changer – not Hurricane Sandy, not the economy, or issues like the response to the Benghazi attack. They were very important, but not the pivotal game changer.

Over the past six months I observed the way both sides conducted their campaigns. Both were aggressive and quick to point out the weaknesses and flaws in the other's platform. However, the President took a very inclusive approach – inviting a wide and diverse array of stakeholders to share in the process and the journey. These stakeholders, many of them middle class and hard working Americans, were from every ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age demographic that makes up the growing diversity in America. The President was careful not to be disparaging or to encourage others who served in his campaign to be disparaging as well. Unfortunately, Candidate Romney and his team, and others who supported the emerging Republican agenda, did little to denounce actions, commentary, or behavior that was extremely disrespectful.

It did not go unnoticed.

So the first game changer to me was behavior not “**respectful**” of all points of view. The willingness to listen, to understand, and to encourage thoughtful dialogue was missing. The strategy was highlighted when Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell mentioned that the primary objective of the party was to defeat the President in this year's election – not to work on pressing economic issues, winding down the war, or the looming deficit and others.

I also noticed a staunch unwillingness to build relationships with diverse communities. As a former trustee of the National Urban League, candidate Romney turned down an invitation to address the organization. And, there were many other similar requests that appeared to have gone unanswered. Building an effective outreach and inclusion strategy to a broad swath of the American demographic did not appear to be in the organization's game plan.

As a casual observer, it was very noticeable at the National Republican Convention, where people of color were sorely underrepresented. With such little diversity in attendance, it gave the perception that the African American in particular and minorities in general, were not welcomed. Behavior by some of

the conference attendees such as when several workers, who happened to be African American, had peanuts hurled their way underscored a lack of sensitivity and inclusiveness.

While the behavior of these attendees was deplorable, the silence and the reticence to respond to these acts as unacceptable convinced many folks, especially people of color, that this party was not interested in building healthy and positive relationships with these emerging demographic sectors.

This leads to me say that the second game changing error was the inability to develop and foster positive **relationships** with diverse communities.

The 47 percent comment fortified the wall of privilege and exclusion.

I also noticed behavior focused on casting dispersion, belittlement, and blame on the President for the lack of action on economic issues. There was little recognition of the fact that a recalcitrant House of Representatives, bent on ousting the President, did not budge at all on the majority of issues brought forth by the President and other members of the Congress. As a result, little progress was made in solving the major challenges of the day. There were no win-win solutions, no collaboration, and very little give and take.

The overriding strategy of many Republican candidates was to get rid of this President even if it hurt the average American household. American families want a vibrant economy, jobs, education and reasonable health care to name a few priorities. But they also want their voices heard and to be respected. Citizens recognize that the economy and recession will not get fixed over night and that “one person cannot fix it.” If Romney’s mantra had been “We” can fix it, rather than “I” can fix it he might have caused more people to listen.

Therefore, the third major game changer was the unwillingness of Republicans to focus on shared outcomes and “**results**” that improve the lot of the average middle class American.

Perhaps the most striking example inappropriate behavior was the decline in civility, respect and reverence for the Office of the President. A number of individuals routinely characterized the President as un-American, Lazy, a birther, and other language reminiscent of the Jim Crow era. It was ugly, distasteful, and demeaned the office of the President. There were a number of occasions when such behavior could have been “called on the carpet” but sadly, such responses were few and far between. Language that was not true, factually incorrect, and which seemed to pander to the audience of the moment, left many of us with a higher level of distrust for the motives and intentions of the Republican candidate.

If trust and integrity is a problem now, what might be the result if he is elevated to the office of the Presidency?

As a result the fourth game changer was the willingness to forgo ‘**reverence**’ for the office of the President and to mount a number of insensitive, biased and racially derogatory actions aimed at belittling the President and in so doing, the office itself. President George Washington’s “Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation” should be re-read for instruction.

And finally, I believe that Presidential candidates must set a tone that is inclusive, engaging, respectful and uplifting. It must be done in way that invites rather than inhibits healthy relationships across cultural differences. Allowing inappropriate behavior through words, actions and other ways to go unchecked and condoned is not the mark of an effective leader in the 21st Century. By allowing the conversation to shift from the important public policy issues to personal assaults and attack, it shines a light on the leader himself.

Such unethical and disrespectful behavior would not be tolerated in private industry.

My belief is that Romney did not take responsibility for a number of such actions, was very inconsistent in his messages, and swayed deep and wide in the way he communicated depending on the audience. The courage to stand tall and address behavior of others as well as staying firm on principles and beliefs was lacking.

And so, the fifth game changing behavior was how he managed his **responsibility** to demonstrate leadership.

Our leaders are accountable to all of us. They are not omnipotent. Candidates who believe that they are accountable to no one move society towards exclusive and limited governance. America has made a choice in this election as we are reminded by the following remark by Machiavelli: "There are two types of power: the one which feeds the weakness of the people and the one that nourishes their force."

I believe the "nourisher" has won. And for that I am grateful.

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