

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 19, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: DICK CHENEY
DON RUMSFELD

FROM: BOB MEAD 

SUBJECT: The Role of Radio and Television in
Political Campaign

As requested, here are some thoughts on the role of radio and television in the forthcoming campaign that you might consider.

Communication is the essence of a political campaign. Candidates, in one way or another, must communicate with the voters. Over 170 million radios are in use everyday. Almost 90 percent of American households have one or more television sets, and use them on the average of five to six hours per day -- mainly at night during the prime time hours of 8:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. (7:00-10:00 p.m. Central).

It is no surprise that political campaigns are followed on radio and television by tens of millions of Americans. The American public does not suddenly begin buying the Saturday Review or the New York Times during political campaigns. The circulation of these publications remains substantially the same. Because it is their habit, these millions of people turn to television.

An important point illustrating the use of radio and television during a political campaign: During the 1960 campaign, ten million people saw in person Richard Nixon during his 50-State campaign tour. However, 115 million people attended -- through radio and television -- the Kennedy-Nixon debates. The average television audience was 71 million people. The average family watched the four debates on television for 54 minutes of every hour (four hours in total). This is in sharp contrast to the very high "tune out" rate during regular paid political broadcasts.

I am not suggesting that President Ford debate his opponent in the coming campaign. There are pros and cons to debating, particularly for a President. Cons: In some circles it is thought to be degrading to the Office of the President. In some cases, the President cannot answer or debate a specific issue due to national security interests. Thoughtful silence and quiet dignity are sometimes made to appear as a confession of ignorance. Some candidates feel that debates require a man to keep his mouth moving whether or not he has something to say. It is made to appear that the worst thing that could happen to a candidate is to be caught without an instant answer to a complex question. Pros: He is the President. He is well informed on the issues. He has the best advisors in government and the facts to back him up on the issues.

I personally feel that the President should not have to debate another candidate. However, I would like to see him debate newsmen utilizing the one-on-one/two or three-on-one interview forum -- a forum where he excels. These interviews are conversational self-portraits. The President, like FDR, has the resourcefulness, confidence and wit to do well in this type of arena. It would demonstrate his leadership qualities and human warmth. An important point -- it is not in the President's character to downgrade a candidate. That is a characteristic the public notices, and it's a good one. The President should not even mention his opponent. He doesn't have to. As the President, he can speak about his accomplishments, his goals and what is needed to improve American lives. It is a perfect opportunity to let the voter learn for himself what kind of man is leading the country and who is seeking votes to continue that leadership. The interviews provide the voters with some rare insight into this man's character. Cronkite use to say that "television has an eerie ability to X-ray the soul." John Crosby, an early tv critic, observed that "television throws a merciless white light on phoniness" ... "the candidate had better know what he is talking about" ... "it is not his looks that television puts under scrutiny; it is his ability."

One thing to be remembered: In some circumstances and on some issues, television will have some influence on people. Some people are converted -- or think they are to some extent. Social Scientists conclude that the mass media plays only a relatively small part in persuading voters to vote differently from the way deeper influences would lead them. Communications is more likely to reinforce convictions than change them. So, our candidate, the President, should be projected as himself, and not projected to be what he isn't. It's the best way.

POLITICAL TELEVISION SPOTS

There is a great "tune-out" factor when political spots are seen on television, particularly 60-second spots. Perhaps 30-second spots should dominate our campaign. (They are also less expensive.)

Here are a few thoughts or examples that we may think about. They are dignified but a little different. These spots can be exemplified and put together on film -- but strictly as examples only. Again, what follows are examples with more types to be thought about, and not end-alls, but ones which could work.



PRESIDENTIAL FILMS
CAMPAIGN

NARRATION TYPE (PRESIDENTIAL)

One minute film spots with shots of President Ford working at his desk at the White House in the Oval Office. Scenes of the President in shirt sleeves, on the telephone, close up head shots portraying hard-working, sincere, determined efforts at the job... Standing behind the desk looking out the window, contemplating. All scenes to be silent footage with Presidential narration of text which has little to do with the individual shots.

Narration should be in conversational tone ... natural tone of voice. Speaking about the job as if he is speaking to a close friend. In this, he could talk about the Presidency, the Office, his feelings about it.

(IMPORTANT NOTE:) To get this natural, candid tone, he would have to be tape recorded, as if talking to a close friend or relative ... or just ramble on. From a two-three hour discussion, the best one minute or 30-seconds could be edited and used.

One minute film spots with shots of Americana ... the Grand Tetons, un-used oil rigs, factory workers leaving their jobs, etc., with narration of President Ford speaking in a low-key, natural style about the future, what is needed, where we are going. Style set as in above - conversational to be edited and used. Narration would not fit individual scenes.

Actual running time of above would be 50 seconds/55 seconds with "bumper" tag for visual or audio identification of "candidate", name and purpose.

Narration from the above can also be used as radio spots of 30-60 second duration when edited. Radio spots can be "cross-talked" to provide space for announcer, identification, etc. Ford narration starts and is faded under, then announcer identifies and makes the pitch for the candidate, with Ford narration faded up and in at appropriate time until finish.

Examples follows.

Example of Presidential Film for Campaign Use

Utilizing the Oval Office

This office is well-known as to location and place in history, but few people see it. It is where decisions are made that effect most Americans.

This 30-second film shows pictures of the Oval Office from various angles. This film is then narrated (voice over) by the President himself in a natural conversational tone. It is not a tour of the office, but personal reflections by the President on what it means to him, what he is trying to accomplish for the people here and what he hopes for the future . . . and what he does do for the people from this office.

(This effect also comes from an earlier taped conversation in private.)

Another possibility or "spin-off" of the above is pictures of the Oval Office and camera pan which eventually ends on the President standing there and a short close on camera. Harder to do than the above, but effective when accomplished.



Example of President Film for Campaign Use

MOVEMENT FILM WITH NARRATION

This type of film employs a hand-held camera and moves with the President. This technique can show determined movement, a person going somewhere, getting something done; a movement of going forward to something waiting ... a goal perhaps. Camera follows Presidential moves, with inter-cuts of what he is seeing, i. e. crowd at an airport fence, the greeting of people, etc. Portable camera works very close to body of subject with the normal unsteady movement while being hand-held.

NARRATION FITS MOOD OF MOVEMENT.
Natural Sound of occasions can be used.

NOTE: In a crowd situation, the positioning of this camera is very important and should be quite close to the President with others kept away and extreme cooperation from security is needed.

Example of Presidential Film for Campaign Use

A film which shows a one-on-one relationship with Gerald Ford.
A film which shows he is a man to be trusted. Many voters when actually behind the curtain at the polling place aren't thinking of policy or programs or specific campaign platforms, but "do I like the guy", "can he be trusted?"

The image to be portrayed here is, yes; Gerald Ford can be trusted. He is likable and I see him not only as President but a friend of mine. He looks me in the eye when he speaks to me; he cares about me.

This film would show in a very natural way the President's relationship with another person. Perhaps a one-on-one with a housewife, a close friend, a teenager, college student, etc. - perhaps a simple setting like on a bench in a park discussing problems i. e., the economy, prices, etc. A sincere chat with little knowledge of the cameras around - ala Candid Camera.



Example of Presidential Film for Campaign Use

The following film spot would be recommended to air in select markets, and in areas where the subject matter would not be easily criticized. There is a school of thought that such a message should be aired. Midwest and rural areas would suffice with major cities like New York and Los Angeles eliminated.

The message is a health one with the following scenario:

The film shows a physically fit President. He is not jogging. He is not playing golf. He is engaged in his normal, routine physical fitness program. He is swimming, diving, etc. He is working with his weights. He is eating the prescribed and sensible foods.

This is a 30-second film spot with narration that reads along the lines of a man who is physically fit, is mentally alert. He is not sluggish or tired. He is 62 years old and mentally and physically fit to undertake a great task . . . a grueling, long-houred job. He has always been this way and done this program and won't stop now. He doesn't sleep in until 7:00 or 8:00 a. m. like most. He is up at 5:30 a. m. to put in this work before the Nation's up, and he is ready to meet the day with great stamina. He is strong and alert. He will make those decisions which are ahead.

Example of Cross-Talk Spot (Radio Only)

THE PRESIDENT: We have had a consistently strong policy,
(in conversational tone of voice) domestically aimed at doing something in a positive way about inflation. We have that concern and compassion in finding a remedy to the recession. I want to push forward and get the nation back to the basics which are good for the nation... the people

(voice fades under)

ANNOUNCER: Gerald Ford... He's been doing things to better the country. He wants a better life for the people... when a solution to the energy crisis was needed, HE came up with the plan... etc., etc....

THE PRESIDENT: (continuing from above, fading up and in)
There has been a whole series of things that, in my opinion, have been good for the nation, and when something is good for the nation, the people benefit... etc. blah, etc....

ANNOUNCE BUMPER: Gerald Ford is President. (Pause) Gerald Ford should continue to be President.



RADIO SPOTS FOR CAMPAIGN

The costs of 30-second and 60-second radio time is relatively inexpensive. If well placed on certain stations, they will be heard by millions of people. They should be in good taste and low-keyed to fit the natural style of the candidate - the President. (There is a normally large "tune-out" factor anyway, thus, they must not be offensive to the listener's intelligence).

Radio spots could be done in narration by:

The President, i. e., film spots

General announcer narration

Leaders in industry, i. e., labor leaders, movie stars and educational types

Examples only:

"This is George Meany, President AFL-CIO. We've had our differences and I don't always agree with Gerald Ford, but there's an honest man in the White House who deserves, etc..."

"This is Robert Redford. Television and film people are citizens just like everyone else. We're just as interested in this country as the next person. Personally, for an effective nation, I'd like to see President Ford's programs carried ahead....."