

Lessons from Donald Trump to Grow Your Practice

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Advisors can learn something from Donald Trump, but I want to put that assertion (and the title of this article) in context. I am not referring to his comments regarding illegal immigrants, his suggestion that U.S. Sen. John McCain isn't a hero or his personal attack on Fox News commentator Megyn Kelly.



My focus is on how Trump's non-verbal behavior can be emulated to win the trust and confidence of clients and prospects.

Trump “dominated” the debate

Whether Trump “won” the initial Republican debate in Cleveland is open to question, but it's clear he “dominated” it. This headline from *Bloomberg* was typical: “Donald Trump Dominates First 2016 Debate.”

How did he do it? His campaign has lacked any substance on policy. Some of his comments have been controversial and offensive to many voters. He also faces a large field of opponents with vast political experience and extensive track records on key issues.

Trump dominates because, consciously or otherwise, he understands the power of non-verbal signals. He stands tall. His gestures are very broad. You often see photos of him with his hands extended from his body, palms facing the audience.

In contrast, the gestures of some of the other candidates during the debate were small and inconsequential.

The power of gestures

Few advisors appreciate the fact that between 60% and 80% of human communication is non-verbal. Consider the impact of that observation. How you gesture may be more important than the substance of what you are trying to convey.

Psychologist Allan Pease, in his book, *Body Language: How to Read Others' Thoughts by Their Gestures*, noted that: “Throughout history, the open palm has been associated with truth, honesty, allegiance and submission.”

Trump has this down.

By gesturing widely, with his palms open, he is subliminally conveying a powerful message: *I am being totally open and truthful with you. You can believe and trust me.*

Other studies have found that gestures make people pay more attention to what you are saying. In short, they are a fundamental component of effective communication.

Taken together, Trump's gestures have a significant impact. They convey transparency and condition the listener to pay more attention to his message.

Open gestures convey power

Whatever you may think of Trump, he conveys an unmistakable impression of power and confidence. He accomplishes this not only by how he speaks, but also through non-verbal cues. Studies demonstrate that power is expressed through “open, expansive postures.” In contrast, powerlessness is conveyed through “closed, contractive postures.”

The effect of powerful body language is dramatic. Simply assuming the pose of a powerful person causes neuroendocrine and behavioral changes, including increased “feelings of power and tolerance for risk.” In essence, when your gestures

convey power, you *become* a more powerful person.

Lack of specificity can be an advantage

Political pundits lament the lack of specificity in Trump's policies. It's standard political practice to issue detailed position papers on a broad range of issues confronting the country. But maybe Trump knows something the pundits have missed.

Studies have shown politicians were perceived as more powerful, and were considered to possess more leadership attributes, when they used more abstract rather than concrete language. The authors of the study concluded that speakers who use concrete terms to show off their knowledge likely would come across as less powerful and therefore less able to lead.

By not providing specifics (which in the investing world can often be mind-numbing), Trump is perceived as powerful and a leader. Perhaps people who vote for him are likely to conclude that they don't need details because he will somehow find a way to implement his (abstract) plan to "make America great again."

Takeaway for advisors

To be perceived as confident, open and transparent, you can learn something from Donald Trump. Use broad gestures, and keep your statements general and abstract. If your prospects want more details, they will ask for them.

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