



Fast Company

10 Ways To Run Your Startup Like The Smartest Presidential Campaign

Future presidents and CEOs are more alike than you'd think. Use these leadership secrets from contenders for the biggest startup of all, America.

With a similarly volatile atmosphere and 24-7 pace, running a startup is a lot like a presidential race.

So what lessons about leadership and success can we expect to learn from this most competitive of contests?

1. Hire Smart People

Every successful leader understands the importance of surrounding him or herself with people that are smarter than themselves. In both the startup world and a presidential campaign the pace is 24/7, and having a super-intelligent team that you can rely on is a sign of strong leadership.

Lackluster leaders hire talent that they can boss around, but when the stakes are as high as they are in a presidential campaign, an inflated ego is a liability.

2. Be Transparent

Successful candidates have the moral courage to own up to their mistakes; humility trumps hubris every time. Hiding from rumors is a recipe for disaster, as is denying the undeniable. Strategic leadership means truthful leadership--both honesty in the content and the willingness to tell the public what it might not want to hear.

3. Know Your Rival

The old adage “keep your friends close and keep your enemies closer” applies double in politics. Knowing what your competition is up to can make or break you.

4. Stick To Your Message

Whether you are building a brand or selling yourself to voters, it’s important to find a theme that is near and dear and stick with it. Don’t clutter your brand with competing messages. Clarity on goals and elegance in message (the ability to convey complex ideas simply and powerfully) are key.

5. Build A Buzz

Entrepreneurs know not to launch a product into a vacuum, but to build buzz first. Similarly, candidates need to build a strong coalition of supporters before they start their formal campaign.

6. The Vision Thing

Whether it’s Steve Jobs’s “Think Different” or Barack Obama’s “Hope,” people need a compelling vision to rally around. A visionary leader can motivate an entire organization to work harder to be more loyal and engaged.

7. Use Your Team’s Strengths

Startups are often spread too thin and use talent in cross functions. A presidential campaign can’t afford to. You would not hire a plumber to do surgery; neither should a candidate rely on his political team for policy analysis. You hire people because of their strengths; make sure you’re always using them to do what they’re best at.

8. Look Ahead

Entrepreneurs are future-oriented, as presidential candidates should also be. They should be conversant with global, social, technological, environmental, economic, and political trends and

drivers. They should be comfortable with scenario thinking, have developed some foresight capability, and approach the future proactively.

9. Be Decisive

Presidents, like CEOs, must be decisive but not impulsive. Important and irrevocable choices have to be made all the time. Having the cognitive ability to source feedback from informed aides and advisors, process the information, and act are critical; so is the ability to withstand the fallout when a decision is unpopular.

10. Fail Forward

Presidents, like entrepreneurs, don't dwell on their disappointments and failures. They look at them as learning opportunities, make the necessary course corrections, and then they move on.

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