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INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT TEETER

My research indicates you've been polling in presidential races longer than anyone currently in the game. Jeb Magruder's book describes your groundbreaking work for Nixon in 1972 -- was that your first presidential contest?

It depends. I had ~~just~~ gone to work for Market Opinion Research at the end of 1966 or ~~the beginning of 1967~~. They were doing the presidential polling for Romney ~~early on~~ while he was viable. ~~Could~~ I was associated with it in a fringe way, but you couldn't say I was a strategist or anything like that -- not like in 1972.

~~Clearly by 1971 and '72, when the Nixon people asked me to do the polling and, innovate and be involved with the strategy of the campaign, it was in the traditional role of the pollster.~~

How has polling and the role of the pollster changed since that period? How did the Bush operation differ, if at all, from previous survey-research teams?

Conceptually, I don't think it was ~~that~~ different. Polling, from 1960 and particularly from 1972 on, has served the same basic purpose. Polling gives you the information about where to focus your resources, where is the undecided vote, where you're ahead and behind and who the undecideds are. ~~And it gives you information in order to tailor the message, information about the issue concerns of the voters and their perceptions of the candidates.~~

~~Now~~, there have been major refinements over time:

- the ability to collect information faster;
- collecting a continuous flow of data, in terms of tracking designs (which we were the first ones to do, in 1970);
- the ability to use various kinds of multi-grade analysis; and
- the speed with which you can poll with phone banks and WATS lines; and
- the computer^s software available to analyze the data.

All those things are very important and allow you ~~instant~~ results. In 1968, surveys were almost all personal interviews, where you had to go out into the field and get the interview. By 1972, when we really began to do telephone tracking, ~~that~~ was an incredible advancement.

All of those things have changed dramatically, and are much more sophisticated. But, in terms of what polling influences in the campaign, the truth is that you still do it for the same reasons, and it influences the same things. That's why I think ~~sometimes~~ the role of polling in campaigns gets a little bit overblown.

In the 1988 campaign, we focused ~~on state~~ ^{primarily} ~~data~~ ^{data}. ~~The~~ ~~things~~ ~~we~~ ~~did~~ ~~different~~ ~~was~~ ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~Reagan~~ ~~people~~ ~~in~~ ~~1980~~ ~~and~~ ~~1984~~ ~~used~~ ~~more~~ ~~national~~ ~~tracking~~ ~~data~~ ~~in~~ ~~order~~ ~~to~~ ~~tailor~~ ~~their~~ ~~message~~; ~~we~~ ~~used~~ ~~probably~~ ~~more~~ ~~state~~ ~~and~~ ~~electoral~~ ~~data~~. Remember, too, ~~that~~ ~~in~~ ~~1984~~ ~~Reagan~~ ~~was~~ ~~not~~ ~~in~~ ~~a~~ ~~tightly~~ ~~contested~~ ~~race~~.



You were a senior adviser to the 1984 Reagan-Bush campaign. Had you done a great deal of presidential polling in 1980?

Yes, quite a bit. I had polled for Bush in '80 ^{two} ~~and really~~ with Jim Baker and I were the ~~kind~~ ^{two who were} of people who went over to the Reagan campaign. We did some general election polling, subcontracted from Dick Wirthlin and under his supervision.

Can you list for me your duties for the Bush effort? It seems your role was far more than that of a conventional pollster

We had ~~our~~ ^{the} G-6 group most of the time in the early going -- ^{responsible for} ~~that really worked~~ ^{the two who were} Lee Atwater and I were responsible together for the strategy. We worked it out, figured it out, and talked to each other five, six, seven times every day on the phone -- we were always in sync on that ^{part} ~~part~~

Then, basically, we divided up the implementation of it. I was responsible for the message ^{of} the campaign. I was responsible for the design and ~~overseeing~~ ^{the} of the polling, ~~and the~~ voting analysis, ~~and the~~ issue research, ~~and I was responsible for~~ policy development, ~~for the development of~~ Bush positions and policies -- ~~overseeing the work done by~~ Debbie Steelman, Bob Zoellick and Dennis Ross. And, obviously, ~~I~~ ^{also} was responsible for speech writing -- getting those policies written into the speeches and enunciated -- working with Peggy Noonan, Bob Grady, ^{also} ~~and others.~~ ^{had some}

David Toll

Also, I was responsible ^{had some} together with Roger Ailes, in the orchestration of the advertising ^{message} -- what was on the air, when ~~and~~ where our buys were, and how large our buys were; That's what Janet Mullins did for us in the general election. ^{the targeting of the ads}

What is your version of what happened in New Hampshire at that pivotal Saturday meeting, February 13, when he gave the OK for the "straddle" ad? Some of the published accounts have the Vice President reacting sharply to some poll numbers you gave him about Dole.

First of all, I don't recall him ever getting mad at me. The fact is we did not ~~ever~~ do any polling ^{that week} ^{in New Hampshire those last two weeks}.

So you were getting poll data from other sources? ^{reports of other private polls}

We were living off the public polls. The spending limitation was so severe. We had to assume that, going into the New Hampshire week, we were behind or no better than even; we had to give them everything we had in order to win. We kept hearing about public polls and other people's polls coming out during the week showing us behind. We knew that we'd gone from being eight or ten points ahead before Iowa to, if you listened to the polls, seven, eight, or nine ^{points} behind.

We ~~and~~ said, let's embark on a strategy that says we've got to overtake ~~this~~ ^{the} guy -- it's a two-man race and we've got to beat him. It didn't make any difference to us if we knew we were two

Dole



points behind or one point ahead. What the hell good is that to us? It's not going to change our behavior -- so, let's save all the money we had and put it into operations.

What do you see as the two or three pivotal events of that week?

Lee and I have talked about this -- there were many things we did in that week, all of them important. But the key strategic decision was made early -- ~~on the way up there~~ and the day we went up ~~there~~ to focus the folks in New Hampshire on the two leaders. Remember that, ~~by any polls~~, we were ahead before Iowa. ~~I always felt that while we might be behind after Iowa, a week or ten days before, there were enough people who had a propensity to vote for Bush to win.~~ *and we had to get them back.*

OK, keep

So, New Hampshire was not a case of going into a place locked against you. We'd lost some people over Iowa -- we needed to get them back. They liked Bush. ~~We had to convince them that he was a good guy --~~ ~~We~~ knew we had a market we could appeal to. Next, we focused them on Dole, made it a Dole-Bush race and ~~really~~ draw a sharp contrast between the two. To those people who ~~basically~~ liked Bush before, we'd say, "Look, one of these guys is going to be our nominee. Here's what's right about Bush and what's wrong with Dole."

Did you feel that, at some point, Dole would crack?

No, I didn't, and ~~I don't think he did~~ *it until after* ~~the last~~ of the election.

How do rate in importance the Sunday debate at St. Anselm's College on February 14? You had a good performance by the Vice President, Kemp coming on strong, and Du Pont challenging Dole to sign the no-tax-hike pledge?

It was important, but we had the thing rolling our way before that. I think the Vice President's campaigning, his speeches and ~~then~~ the contrast advertising on taxes were critical -- and then the debate. They all fit together, and without any one of them we might not have made it. I don't see the debate as overwhelming in that regard, but it did take away Dole's chance to get his lead back. I really felt by the end of that next day we were probably about even. *that*

What was frightening was ~~how~~ Dole, on the day before and the day of the New Hampshire primary, acted like a guy who had it won. The afternoon before the election, he went around and visited his own headquarters. I knew Wirthlin was polling for him, and Wirthlin's a good pollster. That gave me, frankly, as much concern as anything. ~~I knew about.~~ There wasn't anything to do about it. It was always one of those cases where we had a strategy, we stuck with it, and for seven days there just wasn't anything ~~you could do.~~ *else to*

The Bush campaign received some of its toughest criticism from April, when Bush clinched the nomination, until his speech in



New Orleans. How do you look back on that period, seen by the press as a dead time when Dukakis built his huge lead?

From April ~~on~~ ^{to June} there was a feeling we couldn't sustain a high level of interest ~~from~~ the public, hold the center stage for all that period of time. We had to go at partial speed -- continue to campaign during the final primary months and ~~emphasize~~ ^{spend} money and time in states where it would pay us some dividends in the general election. Bush ~~would spend~~ time in California and New Jersey, ~~even though the primaries weren't contested~~. He'd ~~really~~ not try to dominate the national news, but invest that time in ~~these~~ key electoral states. That was the first phase of our pre-convention strategy.

From June forward, ~~and~~ particularly between the conventions, we used the time to begin laying out a base of Bush issue positions. . .

And also to attack Dukakis. The Houston speech to the Texas state convention was the first time he really took off after the Governor -- June 8, to be exact.

He started to draw the contrast. ~~That was two days after the California primary.~~ He gave a similar speech in Colorado. The strategy was to use the period up to California and New Jersey to ~~simply show up and try to gain some ground in those important states.~~ Then after that, two more phases.

One, Dukakis and Bush at that point were ~~seen~~ ^{needed to} both as nice guys. ~~the press was saying this.~~ We ~~would~~ ^{needed to} really sharpen it up and say, "Look, these are very different candidates. They may be fine fellows, but their fundamental ideas and positions are very, very different from each other."

Two, we then went to a period ~~in mid-summer~~ ^{put} where we ~~really~~ ^{put} did stake out a whole series of policy positions, ~~many of them on the second-level issues~~ -- for example, the July speech in Albuquerque on child care. There were a whole series of ~~these~~ ^{issue and policy speeches}. It was during this period that Bush clearly became the candidate of ideas.

If you recall, the press was nailing Dukakis, saying that he had no ideas, where were his positions -- and Bush was coming up with all this stuff. We were doing something to a greater degree than I ever thought possible -- getting credit from the press that we were the guys who had something to say. We were grinding out the proposals, trying to stay one foot ahead of the pack all the time. That's when our issues and policy people, I think, really did yeomen's work for us. Even between the conventions, we were still unloading significant policy positions.

Even at this late date, Bush still was personally holding back until the convention to break away from Reagan. How did the Bush campaign strategists deal with this?

There were two key thoughts along that line. One ~~that I'd always argued with Bush~~ was ^{that} "It's not so much breaking from Reagan and being different from Reagan, as it is stepping out on



your own. The goal we're trying to meet here, the hurdle we're trying to jump, is for you to be seen as someone who is the Republican candidate for President -- independent, in your own right, a potential President of the United States. Whether you're sometimes the same as Reagan, sometimes different -- all that doesn't make any difference. What we're really interested in, is making sure that people see you as independent, someone on your own, not simply Reagan's Vice President."

Bush agreed with that. ~~We debated a lot internally about when that moment was.~~ He went into it always with the instinct that the convention was the right time. There were times when we talked about doing it as a follow-up to the Texas and the Colorado speeches in June. ~~He would be saying, "This is the time -- the primaries are over, and I'm not going to be vice president any longer (or at least not as much). I'm going to be the candidate, the Republican candidate."~~ ^{this}

Then, at various times as we were losing our lead during the early summer, we debated about doing ^{between the conventions or} at different times during the summer. But, it really was Bush's basic instinct not to do it until the convention. He would use the convention and the acceptance speech for that purpose-- which obviously worked masterfully. He gets the lion's share of the credit for that.

Going into the general, you were in an unusually good situation, where you had a convention acceptance speech that was made to order for some really good ads. Had you planned for that beforehand?

No. We didn't know before Bush gave that speech ^{was} in New Orleans that it would turn out to be as good as it did or as useful to us. Our policy was for Sig Rogich and his team to film everything that was important. ^{going to be.} Nobody knew until after he gave the speech how good it was. Sig and the others looked at the film, and there was a whole set of ads there.

In preparing for the 1988 general election, what special problems did you see in terms of polling and strategy that had to be overcome? What lessons that you'd learned over the previous four presidential cycles were important to this election?

The first thing ^{we} you had ^{was a} ~~were a couple of~~ unique challenges we hadn't faced before -- ~~for example, where you had the Vice President of a ongoing Administration running for President.~~ Nobody in our lifetime had faced that. The problem ^{was} really, ~~the more I think back about it,~~ how do you get elected to a third term? ~~What new is there to say?~~

One of the ~~pure~~ rules of ^a presidential campaigning is that you must control the agenda. You really need to dominate the debate and -- to the degree you can -- influence the criteria the voters are ^{use} using to evaluate the two candidates. I've always thought a huge share of the voters make up their mind by deciding which of the two individuals they would like to see as President.

But Reagan, in some ways, changed that. Reagan made



ideology and policy, ^{person} direction and basic ideas more important. He was the first ~~guy~~ in 30, maybe even 50 years to come into office fundamentally on the basis of changing the direction of American public policy. ~~When you have a guy like Reagan in for two terms, you have to think about how you're going to control that agenda.~~

Did you see Bush as capable of controlling the agenda like Reagan?

We always thought Bush was a very good candidate, and he would ~~probably~~ be a better candidate and more likable than anybody the Democrats had to put up. We also felt that message alone at the end of two Reagan terms was not enough. ~~That might get you two-thirds of the way, but it was not going to get you to where you needed to be.~~

Message alone

~~There had to be content to Bush's campaign -- a fundamental idea, or set of ideas, driving it in order to control the agenda. We tried to come up with that, and we found it's very difficult for a "third-term" situation like 1988.~~

~~We~~ Lee and I agreed ~~by about the early summer of '88~~ that there were four basic objectives of the campaign:

- setting a Bush perception;
- controlling the agenda;
- separating the two candidates and making a clear contrast between them; and ^{awareness of}
- raising ~~Dukakis's negatives~~ *record.*

~~I think we learned you had to control the agenda and that, probably in this case, the personal popularity of the candidate alone would not be enough. We had to add something to that.~~

and focus groups something else

We also saw ~~something else~~ from the surveys that was important. For ten years, the country had been focused almost exclusively on two big issues (the economy and national security/foreign policy). Now, that was beginning to fragment. There was an increasing interest and concern ^{toward} about a variety of domestic ~~agenda~~ ^{issues} problems (environment, education, ^{crime,} drugs). We called them "quality-of-life" issues.

~~We had to address these.~~ The big issues were still the most important -- the ones that would drive the campaign ~~and the ones where we had the advantage and could win.~~ But, if we ignored the quality-of-life domestic ~~agenda~~ issues, we'd be ignoring too many voters. ~~The agenda, and the control of it, is central.~~

One thing I ~~really~~ learned from this campaign is that, if you get rocked back and you're ever having to debate on someone else's agenda, you are in trouble. You must ~~have that control.~~

the agenda

Another lesson: while polling is extremely important to ~~the~~ a campaign, providing the information used to make decisions, you can overdo it. There are appropriate times to poll. But, there are other times when ~~it doesn't matter how much you poll,~~ because you ~~can't find out what you want because the voters just haven't focused on it, or just don't know.~~ *the campaign.*

shouldn't

Any specific examples of this from 1988?

Yes. Fred Steeper and I feel it's a private little success



of ours that we ^{only} managed to win and we saved a lot of money. We were careful to poll at appropriate times. ~~Now, Before we ever started,~~ ^{the campaign} there was one national survey done for the Bush campaign. But we did not go in and ~~really~~ start polling on issues and Dukakis until July -- after we knew who the candidates were going to be.

Our national polls were used to design our message; what we wanted to focus on about Bush, what we wanted to focus on about Dukakis, and what ~~policies~~ ^{issues} we wanted to highlight. Not until the ~~middle~~ ^{end} of summer did we begin to concentrate on individual states, because there just wasn't enough awareness of Dukakis. ^{We} ~~You had to wait~~ until after the Democratic convention and, in some states, after the Republican convention, to poll.

When you speak of polling, are you including the now-famous May and June focus groups conducted for the campaign in Paramus, N.J., Livonia, Mich., Orange County, Calif. and Birmingham, Ala.?

I call that "research"; before, I was referring to sample survey polling. ~~The focus groups were intended to generate ideas, get a better qualitative insight on our message, and also to test ideas and concepts.~~ ^{options} The focus groups done in late May and early June, in those four areas, took all the opposition research ~~you guys had come up with~~ about Dukakis, and tested the efficacy of each of these arguments. ^{various}

The Paramus focus groups became the most infamous, but ~~it~~ ^{they were} ~~really~~ treated as only one of the four. ~~It was "infamous" because we were all there, because of The Washington Post story about it, and because it was scheduled first.~~

Concentrating on the survey polling, did you, Fred and others bring any new refinements to this particular race?

The biggest one is fairly ^{data} technical. It was our system of analyzing the one-day tracking. We had a ~~whole~~ series of states in which we were doing 100, 150 or 200 interviews a night. ^{results} We developed the ability to plot those one-days and increase the sophistication of our analysis of that data, ~~to understand what was happening, whether things were really moving or not at all.~~ ~~We thereby saved ourselves from many false lurches where you see something happening for two days, then you panic or get very concerned.~~

^{to do,} We also felt we had enough experience to know how much ~~to~~ poll, what to ask and when to poll, so that there wasn't any wasted motion. ~~knowing when we could influence things and when we couldn't.~~ There were also some ~~real~~ advancements in advertising testing; we used what was known as a "perception analyzer," one of these devices with dials for registering reactions. That had been done before -- we'd used it a long time ago, but by 1988 the state of the art was advanced substantially.

The Bush campaign's decision to micro-manage the trafficking of its TV ads, to make media buys in spot markets and avoid network



buys early on was a major departure from the 1984 Reagan campaign -- indeed, from all previous presidential campaigns in the TV era. What was the genesis of this strategy?

This is probably the one major strategic move we made that has not gotten the attention it deserves. ~~It came from a fundamental strategic decision I made, and Lee and Jim Baker certainly agreed with entirely.~~ ^{plan} That is, our game was to get enough electoral votes to win, -- ~~we~~ we were always focused on a 270 electoral-vote strategy. We wanted to get 270 and not have a lot of wasted motion.

I've always thought many people ~~before us~~ had made a mistake in trying to get in a situation where they're going after everybody -- all 50 states, all demographic groups. ~~Now, I've been way behind before in a race [Ford, 1976] -- maybe Dukakis had been in this situation, or maybe he hadn't -- where you're so far behind, and behind everywhere, that you can't see where you're going to get your 270 to win.~~

What you do in that situation is to throw everything you've got against the cement wall in front of you. Hit it as hard as you can, and then stand back and see if there are any cracks where we can expand. ~~It may be a little different when you're ahead or behind, but~~ ^{however that we would} it was our thought throughout ~~and we really held this until the last two or three days -- and we were not deterred from continuing~~ to reinforce and stick with our 270 strategy.

electoral votes

Maybe this is where experience counts, but it was our feeling that, if George Bush raises his hand on January 20 and gets sworn in, we were successful, period. ~~There isn't any other measure of success.~~ ^{to} The way he gets there is if we get 270. The way you get 270 is: take the resources you've got, then concentrate and focus them in ~~these~~ states -- and ~~these~~ markets within states -- that will get you those 270 electoral votes.

Was there a specific method of ranking the states, in order to create the 270-majority configuration?

Fred Steeper and I ^{used} ~~came up with~~ a model of the 50 states, in rank order ~~from 1 to 50~~ on the probability of them voting Republican. ~~It was based on historical data and on current polling data.~~ ^{The model combined} We would rerun ~~the~~ model every two or three days, ~~so~~ ^{voting} so you always knew, cumulatively, as you worked your way down from 1 through 50, where the battlefront was for attaining 270.

What the model said was that ~~x~~ if a state ranked 15th, you had about a 3% greater chance of carrying that state than the one that was ranked 16th. You had about a 3% less chance of carrying that state than the one that was ranked 14th. You always had that rank order.

So, if you had polling from 10 or 12 states, ~~plugged it in and ran the model, it would also adjust the other states? You wouldn't want to try it with just three or four states. But we felt, if you had a big enough database, and ran the model, then you could get a sense of where states would fail (states for which you didn't necessarily have polling).~~ That's what drove our electoral strategy.



How did you integrate this model with your diverse spot-market media buys?

The electoral strategy was driving the media ^{placement} decisions. ~~If you're going after 270 electoral votes, then I don't think it's very prudent to make your target list of states add up to just 280 or 290, because there's too much chance for error. You always need a target list that totals 325 or 350, in that range, to get your 270.~~

In the 1988 race, ^{probably} the data was tight enough, so we pretty well knew where we were going to get our 270; ~~ultimately we got everything we needed. By the last four weeks, we saw there were three ways that we could win:~~

-- One, if all the small states that ~~we think~~ should go Republican do, and we don't have any errors, then we had ~~a way that got us to 273~~ -- with Vermont, South Dakota, everything but ~~not~~ California. That's obviously very risky.

-- Two, carry California. ~~Curiously enough,~~ Early on the key was always California. ~~Without California, you didn't have 270; with California, you did. We always knew that, but~~ This approach was also risky.

-- Three, pick off two of the Michigan-Ohio-Illinois combo (assuming Bush carries New Jersey). If we had Ohio, we ~~were~~ ^{would} always going to make it and we never let off there, even though we were 12 or 13 points ahead near the end in Ohio. We never took anything out of Ohio to put ~~anywhere else~~ ^{where}.

Ohio Democratic leader Gerald Austin went after you with his "Rising Sun" trade TV spot and other tough measures. Didn't Bush's lead in Ohio dip into single digits at some point?

Yes, but barely. Ohio always hung in there for us. I always thought we'd carry Michigan, and felt that Illinois would be the toughest of the three. ~~That's the way it turned out.~~

A close race in Illinois because of GOP slippage downstate?

^{year} ~~Yeah,~~ we had ^{problems downstate} trouble. The National Journal's county-by-county computer map, published the week after the election, ^{clearly} really shows ~~that~~ Republican weakness in the farm areas.

Rather like an eastern version of Iowa. You relied heavily on the Bush campaign's "Rapid Response team" for knowledge of what was happening in the field, in terms of Democratic media buys and rotation of TV spots. Would you get information from them everyday?

^{yes, but not} for every state. The Rapid Response effort was very important and one of the toughest things to do in a campaign like this. Janet Mullins handled this for us. ~~she'd never done this before and it was really tough.~~ They worked hard; it's difficult to find out what the other guys are doing in the way of media buys. (Frankly, it was a little easier early on with the Dukakis



media, because they were all network buys. What we'd find out was they were making network buys and no spot buys.)

The Dukakis campaign's media-buying operation would try things on the air for two or three days, then stop and do something different. Our Rapid Response team tracked that in key states.

About the substance of their TV ads, what was your reaction when they didn't respond to some of the early tough hits the Republicans were giving them? Had you expected the Democrats just to sit there?

No. They were in a tough spot. Remember, the press had hounded them about making Dukakis more likable. They were determined to make him more presidential and more likable. But, at the same time, they were giving up the toughness to go after us. ~~When they did go after us, they did it badly.~~ ↗

~~I thought the worst set of ads in the history of presidential politics, at least in the terms of wasted time and money, were the "handlers" ads, about the Bush staff sitting around. We really did test our ads, and Roger Ailes just hates ad testing (all ad guys do). They hate it when they get an ad they think is right -- and they'd often be right but that doesn't test very well. I think there was pretty unanimous agreement, even with Roger, that the ads that tested well were the best ads.~~

Was there a regular meeting everyday in the fall at the Bush campaign about increasing or decreasing buys in markets?

I don't think we met quite everyday until ~~the very end~~ the last three weeks or so. There'd be a meeting ~~two or three~~ *or four* times a week *prior to that.*

In terms of micro-managing the buys and the message, was that mostly you and what role did Jim Baker have in that?

We often met with him, ~~but in terms of the micro management, that was me~~ *and* I think Baker took our recommendations almost totally, in terms of where we were going to heavy-up our buys. He presided over the meetings, and there'd be three or four of us -- Roger, Lee, Janet, myself.

What would Baker do here that was beyond your purview? Would you formulate the buy, and then he'd review it, make changes and give the seal of approval?

realize He almost always went with it. Baker came in August and oversaw the campaign. He brought a greater coordination to it than anyone else could have. ~~when the campaign was really growing in the fall. I knew what I think some of the other guys~~ *people* didn't ~~realize~~ how much the campaign had to grow in sheer size -- the political operation, media buying, ~~the~~ scheduling and advance work, everything. ~~You had people overloaded with work.~~ *after the convention*



the campaign operation.

~~We spent a lot of time on the schedule -- something else I was dealing with as much as anything. Jim Baker was the chief executive officer that oversaw ~~it~~; He relied on our people to do it; he sometimes made changes, and most often didn't; and he helped keep it coordinated. He really rode herd on the budget very carefully.~~

Baker saw it as critical to reduce expenses such as polling and put more into media?

Yes. I think we ended with a larger portion of our budget ~~actually on the air in radio and television than any campaign ever.~~ *previous*

What did you see as the turning points for Bush in 1988?

New Hampshire. We had just gotten knocked down, *in Iowa* and ~~I was up there all that time trying to orchestrate that show on an hour-to-hour basis~~ and Bush ~~was a good candidate.~~ *was a very strong good candidate.* He knew he was in trouble, but he was ~~seen at it.~~ *seen at it.* He did everything we asked him to do, he had ideas on his own, and his suggestions of editing speeches and things were always good. I thought, "We're in this, and this guy's not going to cave." That was very important.

Another turning point, ~~obviously,~~ was the convention period. Then, during the fall ~~well, I just consider it bad luck to start thinking you've got it wrapped up.~~ In the fall, Dukakis made a couple of runs at us, and then the debates. . .but after the debates, particularly after the first debate, I really felt confident Bush could handle Dukakis.

Even though the first debate was not up to his usual standards?

~~No.~~ *Yes.* I knew around that time that if we didn't have a problem in the second debate, Dukakis was in a very bad position. Dukakis needed so many things to go right for him electorally. There just wasn't any way for him to get from here to there. It was like the situation we were in with Ford in 1976--theoretically, you could figure on paper how you could get 270, but what you realized was that ten or eleven things all had to happen, none of them with a very high probability of happening. You had to have them all.

In 1976 with Ford, the real key was those 14,000 votes we lost in Ohio. But even with Ford, there were fewer of those things that had to happen than with Dukakis. When you looked at where Bush was actually ahead, and then ~~he~~ *knew* said Dukakis had to turn all these places around, the odds of that happening were pretty small.

Dukakis may have been doing *of a* the right thing because his only hope was ~~probably~~ to get enough national movement ~~some way~~ that it would affect a ~~whole~~ lot of states. He didn't have enough time, money ~~and~~ *or* wherewithal to try picking off any three or four states. There were too many for him to focus on.



In your dealings with the national media, was your patience taxed more in this campaign by the press than before?

~~Yeah, I guess. I don't want to get into an attack on the press. In 1988, there was so much more press, and so many more rabbit trails they went down that were not particularly important stuff, and you had to spend a lot of time on it. It was tough, but you have to deal with the press. In retrospect, there's never any point in pounding away at the press.~~

It seems they'd underestimated Bush for so long. Was their treatment of Bush tougher than Ford's bad press?

It was tougher because there was so much more of it. Therefore, smaller things got blown up more in this campaign, ~~than any other I remember. That's always a problem when you've got a national press. It was really incredible -- the competitiveness and the size of the press corps. And then you had the Campaign Hotline out there.~~

difficult

You apparently solved the "third-term problem" that you'd had to face with Ford, and again here with Bush. How was that done?

We realized early on that people who won third terms did it by raising the risk of "letting the other guys in" -- as was true with Harry Truman and Margaret Thatcher. You usually don't go into a third term, particularly if you're the incumbent party, with a whole lot new. If things are bad at the end of two terms, you're not going to win, ~~you're out. So, if things are good, you want to keep them good, and raise the "risk" of letting the other guys in. but, you're probably not going to have a great new direction for the country. The idea of raising that risk is important.~~

Which raises the matter of the tough "comparative" or "negative" ads of 1988, which received so much coverage.

The ads were comparative and they were legitimate. My basic feeling going into this campaign was that you had two ~~guys~~ ^{people} who really were representative of very different ideas. Dukakis's strategy, it seemed to me, was to get as close to Bush as possible, to try to fuzz those differences based on two theories. First, at the end of two terms many people, ~~if they don't see much difference,~~ will vote for change; and second, there are still enough Democrats in the country that, if you don't ~~let any~~ ^{give} of them ~~any~~ ^{the Democrats} have a reason ~~not~~ ^{nominate} to vote for the Democrat, then you'll be in ~~pretty~~ ^{well} good shape.

We couldn't allow that to happen. My view was that, if you looked at Bush and Dukakis -- saw them accurately and got the press to discuss their values, records and policy positions -- ~~it would be clear they were very different.~~ ^{ideologically} The majority of the voters in the country were closer to Bush than they were to Dukakis. What we had to do was to make that point -- we didn't have to make it up, we just had to get it across.



The Democrats' harping on Iran-Contra, and the attempts to link Bush and Noriega -- that never seemed to go anywhere. Were you surprised at that?

It did sometimes leave a little cloud over us, because you didn't know what was going to fall out next, ~~or how hard it was going to start raining.~~ But, at the same time, we knew there was no Bush involvement. ~~Bush assured us of that, and there wasn't anything more. There was always the threat the Democrats were going to find out something more, and Bush said, "I'm telling you, there's nothing more to find out, so don't worry about it."~~

Marc Nuttle's theory of the Quayle issue is that it took away the negative issues used by the Democrats during the summer. By wiping the slate clean, he says, the Democrats were forced in the fall to discuss their issue positions. Do you agree?

~~I think~~ That may have been what did it. ~~But~~ Sooner or later, those issues just had to wear out because there wasn't anything new. They were just gone.

At what point did you feel the Bush campaign had taken control of the agenda from the Democrats?

~~You worry about that every week. I'm not sure you can ever feel that way. In fact,~~ We did have a little trouble with the agenda at the end. If you remember, the only time Dukakis ever really seemed to get a leg up was at the very end, when he was accusing Bush of running a "nothing" campaign. We countered by putting out the "Leadership of the Issues" book, a week before the election, detailing the hundreds of policy positions and proposals Bush had made throughout the year.

What was happening to your poll numbers in the last two weeks? There were reports of your being worried about a Dukakis surge. What's the real story?

During that period, my view was that nobody in history has won an election this big; therefore, it's got to get closer. ~~You always operate like that when you're in a campaign with a big lead.~~ The question is, when will it get closer, and how much closer is it going to get.

~~When you're in that situation, you're always embarked on this strategy:~~

~~-- First, you're not going to let it get closer. You're going to do everything possible to prevent that from happening, and delay it as far as you can and for as long as you can.~~

~~-- But second, you also know that nobody's ever won that big, and it is probably going to get closer.~~

What you want to make sure in those last two or three weeks is that you've got an accurate view of whether it's really getting closer, or whether it's a natural closing that must take place, because there's ^{all} some of those people you appear to be getting, aren't going to vote Republican. ~~ever~~ voters

who ever



~~Remember, Bush had huge leads, bigger than we were talking about. In many of the big states, we were looking at 10- to 14-point leads, and 8-10 points in some of the states that were the toughest.~~

We've discussed your 270 strategy, with emphasis on Ohio and Illinois. Which states concerned you most in the closing weeks?

You're always concerned about California because it's so big. New Jersey stayed in good shape, and Michigan stayed in remarkably good shape, even though you always keep an eye on it. Illinois was a great concern to me. Anything in the Farm Belt ~~always was concerned about~~ ^{also} -- for example, we never counted on Iowa.

but we were careful to not

In that last week, we got a little more adventuresome in our media buys and scheduling. ~~We had a couple hidden threats laying back all the time in Pennsylvania. We wanted to go in and go after Dukakis in two or three states we thought we could take away. We kept holding back and holding back because we didn't want to divert resources and get away from our 270 strategy.~~

So you did get the chance to go for some Democratic-base states the way Reagan had in '84, such as Pennsylvania, where the Republicans pounded Mondale in the last two weeks?

We really didn't do that until about five days out. We threw a lot in over the weekend, in Pittsburgh and all over Pennsylvania. We'd wanted to go for Pennsylvania, ~~all the time.~~

Did you do the same in New York this time?

No, I learned my lesson there.

Looking at the results on Election Day -- 40 states for Bush, 10 plus D.C. for Dukakis -- what was the biggest surprise for you?

Probably Bush carrying Maryland. I had a feeling -- based on a lot of experience, a long life of polling, but mostly instinct -- that we could carry Pennsylvania and Michigan. Michigan for sure -- I was telling Steeper that two years ago.

Michigan is your home state and the headquarters of your consulting firm. Did you base that assessment on the rightward trend in suburban counties like Macomb and Oakland?

There ^{are} three ^{major} reasons. One, the state was becoming significantly less Democratic, largely because of a sharp decrease in union influence and membership. The percent of union members in Michigan over the last 10 or 15 years has declined by 11% or 12%. We had carried it in the past four presidential elections. Second, the kind of people who are the ticket-splitters in Michigan -- who you must have to win in Macomb and Western Wayne County -- are exactly the same people who, as long as Democrats nominate a liberal, are not going to vote ~~for him~~ ^{Democratic}.



The folks in the districts of Democrats John Dingell and Bill Ford?

Yes. ~~You had that phenomenon going on.~~ And third, just ~~instinctively,~~ Michigan had always ^{the} been a good Bush state. People there like Bush, and Bush fits politics in Michigan well. It had gone for Bush in the 1980 primaries; so had Pennsylvania.

You should also remember the amount of time and money we had spent there in that crazy nominating process. If you take any other priority state like Ohio or California, and check how many stops Bush made in ~~all~~ those states ~~overall~~ over the entire cycle, I'll bet Bush made three times as many stops in Michigan as in any of them.

Was California about where you pegged it?

^{yes}
~~Year.~~ Lee ~~went and~~ spent a lot of time ~~out~~ there. We just thought California was going to be 50-50 all the way. ~~Personally, I always thought we'd win it by a hair.~~ With California, there was nothing to tell you that ~~you~~ ^{we} could ever break it open.

Was it similar to the Ford situation in 1976 where Reagan finally went out and did some campaigning to tip the scales for the GOP?

California is just a tough state, ~~and boy, this year it was.~~ Bush did not have any of the natural things going for him in California that he had, for instance, in Michigan. He wasn't well-known, he hadn't been there a lot.

You managed to keep a pretty low profile throughout the campaign. The one time you really surfaced was in September, with the brief furor over the "Landslide" book on the 1984 election, and the controversial audio tape of you and others criticizing the lack of policy direction then in the White House. Any reflections?

Second, It was one of those things that just makes you feel bad. First, you don't want to do anything that ~~either~~ detracts from your own campaign by embarrassing the candidate -- you don't want to become the center of attention. ~~Second, it's embarrassing yourself to be there and have that happen to you.~~ ~~Third, you can't believe, as long as you've been around, that you can be that dumb. If it was my first campaign I'd have felt differently. It was also one of those things that, I guess, if you've been around long enough, you realize life will go on, and that's a short term story.~~

Is that part of your philosophy -- to step back and stay away from the press?

No. I don't make a conscious effort to stay away from ~~them.~~ ^{the press.} There's one thing I've always tried to do in politics, over the last 23 or 24 years, ~~I decided this I was going to get into politics full-time as a profession --~~ if you want to be around for a long time, don't be a shooting star. I've been covered a



lot in the press -- sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes flattering, sometimes not.

~~If you just let it go at its normal pace, when there's some attention on you, that's all right and it may be helpful to you. But when there's not, don't go out of your way to take credit or give any. If you don't force it too hard, either by trying to be too secretive or by overdoing it, you'll be alright.~~

I've had a very simple philosophy for dealing with reporters that's worked very well. One, you cannot lie to them; two, you don't have to tell them everything you know. You cannot lie -- ~~you ought to tell the truth~~ -- but, at the same time, you shouldn't be shy about saying you're not going to talk about something.

A lot of political reporters are bright and interesting people. I enjoy them and enjoy talking to them. I think that's especially true of the ^{ones} ~~guys~~ with more experience. ~~With a presidential campaign, what happens is you just get a wave of new people who don't understand sometimes what it is they're covering.~~ ^{sometimes}

Was Bush's team the youngest staff you'd seen for a presidential campaign?

It certainly was, and until Fred Malek came I was the oldest guy in the building. I was glad to see Malek and Baker show up. I couldn't believe it -- I'd started out in politics thinking of myself as one of the young Turks, and then you realize you're one of the old men, the veterans.

Is there a "Teeter touch" that you try to bring to every campaign in which you're involved?

I think -- I hope -- a sense of overall strategy, a sense of objectives. You may argue about the objectives, and you may change them within the course of the campaign. But, at any given time, you must have a long-term strategy; there's a certain flow to it, and you try to get across certain things at certain times. You must have the patience to know ~~that~~ there's a two- or three-week period where you're trying to accomplish an objective.

It goes back ~~again~~ to controlling the agenda. You get that accomplished and there's a natural flow: there's the period between the conventions, the period between the second convention and Labor Day, and then a two- or three-week period, and so on.

There should be a ^{specific} ~~where~~ plan, describing how you're trying to accomplish different objectives and messages at different times. But when you bring it all together, you've got one ^{plan} ~~piece~~, one message and one overall campaign ~~strategy~~.

You can do this without losing sight of the day-to-day tactical problems you always ^{encounter} ~~run into~~. I ~~really~~ think it's that sense of an overall strategy that says, "Look, here's where we are now, and here's where we want to get to." There ^{are} ~~is~~ nine innings to this game, three or four acts to this play -- here's how we want to do each, here's how they ought to fit together. ~~It's that sense of flow of message.~~

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