

Republicans should embrace the 'Trump Factor'

Donald Trump has been the single largest boon to America's media and chattering class since the invention of the *second coming* headline. Journalism majors and people my age will know what I mean by that, but for those of you who are still learning about 'the quaint and ancient ways of America before the advent of social media and the smart phone' let me clue you in... the *second coming* headline is a term used in news design for the extra-large headline type, usually reserved for only the most momentous of occasions such as the second coming of Jesus Christ.

It's also the equivalent of the ubiquitous now standard television visual called the 'Breaking News Alert' that used to be reserved for only the most earth-shattering events or stories. These days, it seems that almost any story can qualify for such an alert and most editors or producers use the technique to keep eyeballs on the screen. Old media dogs like myself can remember the radio greats like Walter Winchell who opened his program with the sound of a telegraph key and then "Good evening Mr. and Mrs. North and South America and all the ships (and clippers) at sea. Flash! Let's go to..." (insert story location). Winchell understood how to stress the immediacy of his stories much like the gossip columnists and tabloid papers of his day.

'Breaking News' really used to be breaking news (the Hindenburg tragedy, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassination, etc.) We expected someone to break our news rhythm and our concentration with such stories. The newsboy's "Extra, extra, read all about it" tantalized news consumers on America's streets while Winchell was at the top of the radio pyramid in the mid-to-late fifties. New Yorker Gabriel Heatter was the man during the early war years with his sign-on, "Good evening everyone - there's good news tonight." I don't mind confessing that I miss the days of more honest news brokering. I often speculate on what would happen if we dispensed with 'second coming breaking news' and reverted to some good news and reports that lifted us up out of the muck and mire of salacious rumor and fear-mongering that's practiced by the likes of MSNBC (owned by Comcast) and CNN (owned by Time Warner). And what would Trump coverage have been like if every story was required to have a little balance or a sliver of a silver lining?

It would probably have failed miserably and the younger news consumer wouldn't lift an index finger today to tap on it. That said, we must live in the real world of news as a product NOW and not go on a safari to find the next Edward R. Murrow. Fact: Donald Trump has been good for the media. His time in office (and before) and his comments on Twitter kept all the financial plates spinning in the air for the bean-counters at the big media outlets for years. They loved him for it and they hated him for everything else, but they couldn't let him go. They were addicted, big time. So were their audiences. The more Trump they got the more Trump they wanted and so the cycle continued. After all, we Americans like drama.. and intrigue... and controversy... and scandal. We can't get enough. We live vicariously through others and we form a strong bond and relationship with our elected leaders. No matter that we will never share a beer with them or bring them home to Sunday dinner (if anyone does that anymore). The fact is that news is informed entertainment with the accent on entertainment.

Why did half of America like Donald Trump? Because he gave them everything they craved: straight talk (sometimes in a barely digestible way) and elitest pushback. He also gave us a sense that he knew exactly what he was doing and didn't apologize for it. He took reporters' questions and gave us answers. We might not have liked them, but he gave them to us which is more than the current administration is doing. We also liked the fact that Trump valued winning - something Americans have always revered. We never saw ourselves as yesterday's news and neither did Trump. He didn't talk about 'shining cities on a hill' like Reagan, but he did inspire us with his energy, drive and his passion for practical solutions to real problems. Donald Trump was the personification of the old Madison Avenue adage: "Sell the sizzle and not the steak," (once you get them eating THEN they will listen to you). The mainstream anti-Trump media listened. They knew that Trump hatred was a cash cow and they milked old Bossy for everything she was worth.

Now they miss him...badly.

Joe is boring, tedious, uninspiring. He's a bad teleprompter reader and can't speak off-the-cuff (unless he has Cliff Notes written on his cuffs). It's no wonder that his approval ratings are in the thirties. The contrast between the two leaders (who are only three years' apart in age) is staggering. If the election of 2020 were to be held today I am confident that Trump would walk away the winner with millions more popular votes and probably a few more states' electoral votes. That is not to say that the millions who despise Trump would 'see the light' and abandon their cardboard cutout President for a real live leader. They wouldn't, but that should not stop the Republicans from honing in on the successful Trump-era policies and telling Americans how they were working and why.

We need a 'second coming (to Jesus) moment' in our country. It's time we fessed up and admitted that we want (and need) bold leadership at the helm of our ship of state and not people who haven't a clue about management. Time we came clean and rejected the Left's ridiculous anti-American ideological template and told them in no uncertain terms that we will not let them take us down a dead-end cultural alley just so they can see their names in the history books as the new heroes of the (second) American Revolution. Nope. If Republicans want to win in 2022 and 2024 they will need to keep Trump inside the circle as a reminder of what enthusiasm and energy, coupled with common sense America first policies can do to turn a dark night into a brighter day.

Donald Trump is not the Messiah, but then again neither was Barack Obama. However, both of these men inspired us. We loved or hated them or loved to hate them but we didn't hate loving or hating them. They became our 'Breaking News.' We felt invested in their success or failure because we saw our country's success (or failure) as inextricably linked to theirs. That's why Republicans should not push Mr. Trump to the sidelines. I am convinced that half the country still wants his 'brand' of leadership or at least his vision of America to succeed. And while we may bristle when he occasionally goes off on a tangent and becomes a little too self-congratulatory we prefer that to a man who apologizes for being the President or is angry and disjointed every time he holds a press briefing.

So Republicans, look beyond your fear and admit your bias for strong leadership. Tell the American people that there is something more worrisome than a man who speaks his mind, and that is a man who borrows his opinions from others and then whispers them to us for effect.

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