

How do you know who to vote for when there are so many candidates?

There are thirty (that is 3-0) people running for Montgomery County, Maryland Council. Voters are allowed to vote for up to four. There are also eight candidates running in the Democratic primary for Maryland Governor (the incumbent, Larry Hogan, is a Republican and is unopposed). Voters also get to vote for County Executive (six Democrats running), U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Delegates, Judges, even for the Clerk of the Circuit Court. In short, there are a lot of people competing for votes in Montgomery County, Maryland. And with so many people running, it's a real challenge to stand out.

And it's because of the crush of candidates that every registered party voter in Montgomery County (where I live) has been inundated with campaign literature. (Read today's Washington Post story, In Montgomery County, voters face a deluge of campaign literature mailings, about it). And that is all in addition to the countless political commercials that have been airing on both the local TV stations and the political talk shows on cable TV. And the many sponsored ads on Twitter and Facebook. And the ubiquitous lawn signs and placards placed throughout the county.



Placards outside Silver Spring Early Voting Center

I know because I have received dozens of door hangers and flyers on my doorstep, dozens of flyers in the mail, tons of emails, and even personalized texts to my cell phone (I am still trying to figure out how they got the number). The most notable piece of campaign literature that I got was a form letter from a candidate stuffed inside a handwritten envelope.

The name of the game

When a race is so crowded, you have to really fight to stand out. When you are running against 29 other candidates, name recognition matters. And so you spend a lot of money to make sure people know and remember your name.

So you need money to succeed in politics

There are two big problems with making name recognition a

priority. The first is that you need a lot of money to be able to make people remember your name, which means candidates with the deepest pockets have a big (unfair?) advantage. And indeed, in Montgomery County, two self-made millionaires (David Trone, who is running for U.S. Congress, and David Blair, who is running for Montgomery County Executive) are leading in the amount of money spent. Both these guys are saturating the market with flyers, TV commercials, placards and so forth.

And a stand voters agree with

The second problem is that we don't vote on name recognition alone. Serious voters (and primary voters tend to be serious) vote on where candidates stand on issues they care about. Name recognition is helpful for sure, but it doesn't inform voters sufficiently. If voters care about issues, it becomes incumbent on them to research the candidates' positions. Thankfully, the League of Women Voters publishes a Voters' Guide. And most candidates have websites.

In the end, you vote for people who reflect your priorities and values, not for the person with the most lawn signs or door hangers. To really stand out in a crowded field, candidates need to be able to communicate who they are, what they stand for, and why they are the better choice. That takes a lot of money, great communications know-how, and superb political skill.

May the best candidates win! And if you live in Maryland, don't forget to vote on June 26th.

UPDATE: Today, I received an additional five pieces of campaign literature in the mail, three of those promote ONE candidate, and the other is the tenth or so piece I have received from another candidate. Sending three pieces of mail about one candidate strikes me as overkill, and could backfire. Certainly the other candidate, who clearly has very

deep pockets, has shown he will spend (waste?) as much money as he can. There's no added advantage to sending a piece of campaign literature every day. It becomes junk mail, quite literally. Direct mail does not benefit from frequency as does radio/TV.

Why I share political views on Twitter but not on LinkedIn

Lately, I have seen a couple of opinion pieces written by marketing people that state you should never, ever share your political opinion, at the risk of losing clients and alienating your network.

I don't agree. I think it depends on several factors and there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. You will need to consider at least two issues:

1. Are you an employee or are you representing yourself? Are you sharing a political opinion for a company or for yourself?
2. Where you are sharing your views?

Let's start with the where.

I don't think you should ever share political views on LinkedIn, no matter if you are a company, individual or small business owner. But you should (in certain cases) on Twitter.

LinkedIn is a professional, business-oriented social network. Twitter is not.

People go to LinkedIn specifically to network and to research your professional background. They do not go to LinkedIn to find out about your views on Hillary Clinton.

Twitter is real-time conversation. LinkedIn is more static.

I know that you aren't supposed to talk about politics or religion in polite company. But Twitter is not polite company. It's a rapid-fire issue-of-the-minute national and international conversation. LinkedIn, on the other hand, is not that. It's a staid, share your credentials and network sort of place.

There are millions of tweets every hour. On LinkedIn, your network probably shares a few updates a day.

People go to Twitter to share their opinion and see what others think.

During the presidential debates it was pretty easy to see who doesn't live in the United States and who uses automated tweets. Those were the folks who didn't weigh in on the Clinton-Trump stand-off and/or tweeted about non-political matters.

But it matters who you are, too.

On social media, not everyone is treated the same.

If you are tweeting as yourself and you are not claiming a company or organization in your Twitter profile, then you should say what you want.

If you are tweeting in name of the organization, then you need to be very careful what you say.

If you are representing a consumer-oriented organization

(like a restaurant or manufacturer), then you should be probably keep quiet. People do not generally follow a product or brand to see what political views it has.

If you work for an organization that works in a political or advocacy space, then you must make your views known. People follow political/advocacy accounts precisely because of a specific viewpoint.

If you are like me, an individual who owns her own business, then you should make a decision that best fits you. I choose to share my political views on Twitter, not on LinkedIn. Be aware that not all your current or potential clients will share your views, and may choose not to do business with you because of those views. On the other hand, some people will share your viewpoint and will choose to interact with you precisely because of that view.

We are human

In the end, we must remember that on social media, we are not automatons, we are human beings. Sometimes we respond viscerally and in the moment. For example, when people found out about the horrible massacre at Newtown, they shared their horror and some also shared their views on guns.

Human beings have ideas, likes, dislikes and of course, political opinions. While political opinions can incite strong responses, your likes and dislikes can generate controversy too.

You win some, and you lose some

Ultimately, you will need to accept that sharing your opinions (political and otherwise) may create a backlash, or it could result in support. Your opinions can lose you followers, but they may also gain you a following.

What do you think? Do you share your political views? What is

the main reason you do or do not? Let me know in the comments.

P.S. If you care about my political views, follow me on Twitter at @DBMC.

Truth vs. facts vs. journalism: an editorial

I just watched the movie “Truth,” starring Cate Blanchett and Robert Redford, about questionable documents, used by producer Mary Mapes and reported by Dan Rather on *60 Minutes II*, which purported to prove that George W. Bush may not have served his full duty in the National Guard.

The movie came out last year around the same time as “Spotlight,” also a movie about journalists. “Spotlight” (which I saw last year) tells the story of the *Boston Globe* reporters who investigated child abuse by Catholic priests in Boston, and the subsequent Church cover-up. Both movies are based on real stories, and both deal with reporting, but that is where any similarity ends.

“Truth” portrays a major screw-up at CBS. “Spotlight” portrays a major triumph by the *Boston Globe*.

Also, “Truth” is about broadcast journalism and “Spotlight” is about print journalism and the differences are stark. In “Truth,” facts are not properly sourced essentially because of

time constraints associated with broadcast deadlines. In "Spotlight," the reporters are told they have to dig out and track down the sources until the story is right.

The bottom line is that having enough time to fact check and substantiate a story is the deciding factor between getting things right and screwing up.

These movies also show a different understanding of what a journalist's role is. As the title implies, "Truth" is about getting at a truth, even though the facts may not be right. "Spotlight" is about not only getting the facts right, but getting enough information so that what is being presented can't be easily challenged.

Facts and truth are not the same.

Facts are provable. The high temperature in Washington, D.C. on February 15th was 29F as recorded by the weather watchers at Reagan National Airport. You can check that.

Truth is a belief, and it is changeable. What is true to someone, such as he/she believes that chocolate is the best flavor may not be true to someone who prefers vanilla. The only facts here are that chocolate and vanilla are flavors.

When we write, and especially when we edit, we have to check the facts. Are names spelled correctly? Are the numbers used accurate? And further, we have to check the sources. Just because many people are saying something on social media does not make it factual. Not being careful with fact-checking leads to a story blowing up as it did in "Truth." It may or may not be true that President Bush skirted his National Guard service, but it will never be proven without checking sources (are they reliable?) and facts carefully and thoroughly.

Is the campaign trail a fact-free zone?

And that brings me to political journalism today. As has been

evidenced countless times on the campaign trail, many of the candidates are not dealing in facts, but rather in their own truths or beliefs. And many political journalists are caught up in trying to question the “truth” without knowing or researching or checking the facts. So we hear statements that are not fact-based such as America is “less safe” today because of Barack Obama’s policies or that Obamacare is hurting the economy. These are not facts. They are beliefs and they are not provable.

Journalists who are covering the campaign have a duty to find and point out the facts. Sometimes we’ll see them do this. For example, on *Fox News Sunday*, Chris Wallace pushed back against Ted Cruz’s assertion that Obamacare has been a job killer by quoting the jobless rate, which is the lowest it’s been since 2008. Cruz then punted and blamed the fact checkers, saying they were not impartial. You can read more [here](#).

But not all journalists point to facts. We’ve seen many debates where the candidates’ assertions are not challenged. This is partially because there are so many such assertions, and partially because journalists do not necessarily know the facts. Just this weekend during the Republican debate, most of the candidates said that Obama should not (could not?) appoint a justice to the Supreme Court to replace Antonin Scalia (who died Saturday). Some claimed there was precedent for this. We’ve since learned of the so-called Thurmond rule, where, according to Senator Strom Thurmond, no appointments would be confirmed in the summer previous to the end of a president’s term. However, this is not actually a “rule” but rather a tradition, and one that is not really enforced. But, facts aside, Republican candidates keep insisting there is precedent. We even saw Ted Cruz state that if Obama appoints someone, the Second Amendment would “die.” I didn’t see any push back, perhaps because this is so belief-based there are no facts to counter the argument with.

And then, if journalists do push back...

Remember when Donald Trump claimed he saw Muslims celebrating the 9-11 attacks in the streets of New Jersey? To him, the truth was United States Muslims celebrated the country being attacked. The facts were that no such outdoor celebration occurred in New Jersey. None. Some journalists pushed back, citing the facts, but Trump doesn't care about facts, especially if they do not substantiate his beliefs. And especially if continuing to refute facts gives him more publicity, but that's another story.

Our democracy is in real danger when beliefs trump facts. Journalists must do their job make sure that they are presenting facts and not beliefs. They should not let the pressures of the 24-7 news cycle make them into Mary Mapes, seeking some higher truth but not checking the facts. They should not let candidates' questionable assertions go unchallenged. Many people—voters—get all their information from one source, their favored news outlet, and don't fact check or examine the source of the information. They assume the information is reliable and make decisions based on it. Those decisions help elect presidents and do have consequences.

Do you feel that journalists are doing the best they can? Could they do better? What makes a good journalist? Please share your opinions in the comments.

Too many words, too little

meaning

Warning—this post is somewhat political since it uses a politician as an example, and not in a flattering way.

In case you missed it on Tuesday, Sarah Palin endorsed Donald Trump in the campaign for Republican presidential nominee. Her speech (if in fact what she did can be called that) has been described as rambling, patriotic, fiery. What is has not been described as is clear (or meaningful for that matter). The New York Times has a great article, *The Most Mystifying Lines of Sarah Palin's Speech*, that analyzes different parts of the speech and interprets what Palin may have meant, a kind of Palin translation if you like.



Tossing up a salad

Following is an excerpt of Palin's speech (taken from a Washington Post article and transcript):

"Trump's candidacy, it has exposed not just that tragic ramifications of that betrayal of the transformation of our country, but too, he has exposed the complicity on both sides of the aisle that has enabled it, okay? Well, Trump, what he's been able to do, which is really ticking people off, which I'm glad about, he's going rogue left and right, man, that's why he's doing so well. He's been able to tear the veil off this idea of the system. The way that the system really works, and please hear me on this, I want you guys to understand more and more how the system, the

establishment, works, and has gotten us into the troubles that we are in in America. The permanent political class has been doing the bidding of their campaign donor class, and that's why you see that the borders are kept open. For them, for their cheap labor that they want to come in. That's why they've been bloating budgets. It's for crony capitalists to be able suck off of them. It's why we see these lousy trade deals that gut our industry for special interests elsewhere. We need someone new, who has the power, and is in the position to bust up that establishment to make things great again. It's part of the problem."

Here's how this paragraph could be rewritten for clarity:

Trump's candidacy has exposed all sorts of problems in politics and has shown people how the system really works. Seeing these problems has made people angry. Campaign donors have been dictating to the politicians they support, in order to keep our borders open to get cheap labor from Mexico. Also, the politicians have been creating bad trade deals that help special interests in other countries. We need a new type of politician who has the power to bust the establishment, which is part of the problem.

Notice the difference?

It's shorter, it gets to the point, and it avoids jargon and cliches.

Yes, I know, it no longer has "color." Palin is known for throwing in all sorts of colorful phrases such as "he's going rogue left and right." When giving a speech, the speaker has more leeway to use attention-getting phrases than in written communication. In Palin's case, her reliance on "color" overwhelms any message that she may actually be trying to deliver.

Palin has been criticized for delivering "word salad" speeches that toss together a bunch of words and phrases. Her speech on

Tuesday seems a perfect example of this tendency.

Can you do advertising by algorithm?

You've seen advertising by algorithm every single time you go on Facebook. If you've done an online search for anything (books, movies, clothing, etc.), you will now see a banner ad for that thing or brand. If you've discussed anything with a recognizable name (politician, specific book or movie or brand) on your timeline, chances are you will see a sponsored post about that thing on your timeline. Those posts are automatically generated by algorithms.

Like this one that appeared last week on my Facebook timeline:



Ben Carson sponsored ad in my Facebook timeline

I had definitely mentioned Ben Carson in my status updates. *In a negative way.* I had shared several articles about his horrible “gun control caused the Holocaust” comments. I

couldn't believe that anyone, much less a person running for president, would be so stupid and so offensive.

And then the sponsored ad popped up. Obviously the algorithm "if that then this" recipe says something like "if a person mentions Ben Carson more than once in status updates, then show the support Ben Carson ad."

But I am the exactly wrong target. I don't like Ben Carson and what I have been saying about him is not supportive. This sponsored post is a #fail as they say on Twitter, and a waste of the campaign's money.

Don't let algorithms fail you!

Automatic advertising has its pitfalls. But is the problem the algorithm or the person that makes the recipe for the algorithm? I suspect it's a bit of both.

There are at least three steps to successful advertising by algorithm:

1. You have to understand how algorithms work

Advertising algorithms don't do nuance. They can't judge emotions—negative or positive. *They can only scan for keywords and then follow recipes.*

Plus, each search engine or social network has its own rules. Apparently for Facebook algorithms, budgets have a lot to do with how and when your sponsored content shows up. Read "The Importance of Understanding Facebook Algorithms, Part 1."

2. You have to provide strategic guidance

Before you launch any advertising, including online advertising, you must have a strategy in place. You need to define your target audience and be as detailed as possible. You need to define your objectives. You must understand what you want to accomplish.

3. You have to measure

And with online advertising, especially when you are relying on computer-generated algorithms, you have to measure. You want to understand your outcomes. How did your ads do? What kinds of people clicked and did they take any other actions? (It's always about the metrics.)

What would you add? Do you have resources to share about algorithms? What's been your experience with algorithms in advertising? Successful or not so much? Please let me know. And if you want to discuss your advertising or communications strategy, get in touch!

Authenticity matters (or, Why Bobby Jindal Won't Win but Chris Christie Might)

Bobby Jindal just announced (via Facebook) today that he is adding himself to the slew of GOP 2016 presidential hopefuls.

There are lots of reasons why Jindal does not have even a small chance of winning the nomination: Louisiana (the state where he is currently governor) is doing badly, he lacks charisma, and he has made a series of questionable/false/stupid comments recently (Muslim no-go zones, for example).

Currently polling at about one percent, Jindal faces tremendous challenges even getting in to the Fox News GOP candidates debate that will only allow the top ten contenders

on stage. It's pretty clear that Jindal is jockeying for a vice presidential nod, but even that is out of reach for him. Why? **He has a huge authenticity problem.**

Jindal, who was named Piyush by his Indian parents, seems to have rejected his background. He converted to Catholicism and changed his name to Bobby. He has even said he doesn't consider himself Indian-American, but just American. The *Washington Post* explores the question about how Jindal views his past in this article published yesterday: From Piyush to Bobby: How Does Jindal Feel About his Family's Past.

This passage from the article (the bolding is mine) is very telling:

Suresh C. Gupta, a Potomac, Md., doctor, gave a fundraiser for Jindal's first gubernatorial bid. But he said Jindal has actively tried to disassociate himself from the Indian American community in recent years.

*"So what if he's Republican? So what if he's Christian? I don't care about those things," said Gupta, who is a Democrat. **"But you can't forget about your heritage. You can't forget about your roots."***

*When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to the United States last September, a host of politicians attended his rally at Madison Square Garden. Jindal did not. **When Jindal's name was mentioned, he was booed by the crowd.***

It's impossible to say what motivated Jindal to embrace being "American" while at the same time downplaying his roots. Perhaps he is embarrassed by his background or perhaps he thinks people can't relate to an Indian-American. Whatever the reason, it's clear that potential supporters are turned off by his disassociation with his background.

Although the United States is a melting pot, and most immigrants try to assimilate, many still have pride in their heritage. And there are many politicians who embrace hyphenation, from the first Italian-American mayor of New York City Fiorello LaGuardia to former Congressman David Wu (D-OR), the only Chinese-American serving in the House of Representatives from 1999 to 2011.

An even more negative view of Jindal is given in the *Politico Magazine* article by Alan Greenblatt: "The Stupid Party's Candidate: Running to the Right is not Working for Bobby Jindal."

Greenblatt argues that Jindal is pandering to the more conservative base of the Republican Party. He writes:

A governor who reshaped his state by overhauling the education and Medicaid systems now hardly talks substance at all. In fairness, he has released detailed plans on taxes and education, but he routinely spends his time on the stump throwing red meat to the most conservative parts of his party.

He adds:

His pander approach hasn't worked for him. "He is smart, he is policy knowledgeable," says Henry Olsen, a conservative analyst at the Ethics & Public Policy Center, "but rather than build a public persona around his strengths, he has crafted a public persona around other people's strengths."

This adds up to an authenticity problem. Who is Bobby Jindal and why does he keep changing his stripes? People respond best to what is authentic and can generally spot a fake. Jindal seems to be working hard to be something he can never be. As long as he's trying to be something he isn't, he will continue to lag behind in the polls.

Authenticity matters, especially when you are trying to persuade.

What do you think? If you were Jindal's communications person, what would you advise?

Do political ads work?

This year, we have been bombarded with political ads on TV, especially in swing states. I can attest to this since my TV DMA covers Northern Virginia, and Virginia is a swing state, so we have been seeing (too) many here in Maryland.

The spending is in the billions. Adweek reports: Political TV Ads Shatter Records. It's not over yet. According to Adweek, as of last week, 915,000 presidential ads have appeared. Add to that congressional and senate ads, and ballot question ads, and I would be surprised if you have seen even one commercial for Viagra!

In today's Washington Post, Ned Martel writes in the article "Could the campaign ads benefit from Mad Men touch" that the ads are not even that good. He says:

To advertising executives, this onslaught of attack ads looks like a giant waste of money. It certainly runs counter to every risk-conscious maxim the industry has honed since the days of "Mad Men."

Negative ads have been a staple of political campaigns forever. You want to discredit your opponent, that is understood. Unfortunately, this year especially (or so it seems...memories are short), we are seeing that not only are these ads negative, they are also factually challenged. Glenn Kessler, "The Fact Checker" writer at the Washington Post, today rated one of Mitt Romney's ads regarding Obama's so-called Apology Tour four Pinnochios (which means that this particular ad includes falsehoods).

We are seeing a lot of back and forth: Romney says one thing, and Obama answers it. And to add legitimacy, we are seeing the use of news footage. An Obama ad recently used footage from a 60 Minutes interview of Mitt Romney.

But does any of it make any difference in trying to reach the mythical undecided voter? I am not sure. I think it must have some impact but does it change minds? Do people watch the ads or do they tune them out? I don't know. What are your thoughts?

Are the presidential campaigns convincing voters?

Last night, on 60 Minutes, both President Obama and Mitt Romney were interviewed. Scott Pelley interviewed Romney while Steve Kroft interviewed Obama. At the end of the hour, when both candidates gave few specifics, I don't think anyone's mind was changed. If you supported Romney, you liked what he had to say. Likewise for Obama.

Beliefs are not facts but they are just as immutable

The campaigns are facing a very polarized electorate. People either support the candidate or they actively despise him. Take for example a friend of mine who is a very religious Catholic. She despises Obama because she says he “promotes abortion” She has no evidence to prove this (because there is no evidence and besides, there is a huge difference between supporting the right to get an abortion and promoting it) but she believes it, and also that because he is pro-choice, he is immoral. Someone like her will not be convinced by any campaign ad or speech.

Role of undecided voters

We’ve been told that the outcome of this election lies in the hands of the “undecided.” Campaigns are spending inordinate amounts of money trying to sway these voters (if they do even vote). After seeing a group of undecided voters on the PBS Newshour, which interviewed them after each of the conventions, I am not certain that undecided voters can be swayed. Those PBS undecideds seemed to be seeking the perfect candidate, and neither Obama nor Romney measured up. Undecideds may well be perfectionists who are unable to prioritize issues and accept that neither candidate will be perfect, and therefore can’t make up their minds.

In short, I think that very few things that happen between now and Election Day will change voters’ minds. Minds are made up, and any “mistakes” candidates make will further solidify opinions not change them. You would think, for example, that there would be outrage about Mitt Romney’s manipulation of his tax returns. Instead, those who support him say he has merely complied with the law and those who don’t see further proof that he is a rich person trying to protect himself from taxation.

What do you think? What can campaigns do to sway voters?

Built on a foundation of lies

We all know political speech is rhetorical—designed to fire up support. Most political speeches are short on substance and long on promises. This is true for any party, any politician. But how often do you see a political speech that is made up of misrepresentation and falsehoods? Indeed, of outright lies? Look no farther than Paul Ryan's speech at the Republican National Convention last night. The fact checkers have been having a field day, and everyone is saying the same thing: the speech is full of lies. For example, Talking Points Memo lists the 6 Worst Lies in Paul Ryan's Speech. Even a blogger for Fox News calls the speech deceiving (although I have been told the blogger is a progressive pundit with the otherwise conservative news outlet h/t to Brad Phillips).

But we are all fact checkers now.

How can you trust a politician who lies so blatantly and yet so earnestly? (Yes, I know, most politicians lie.) It's like the bigwigs at the GOP are not aware that millions of people, all with access to the Internet, can quickly look things up, comment instantaneously and amplify the response.

Is it an echo chamber?

On the other hand, perhaps those of us tweeting and sharing articles like the one above are really in an echo chamber. We are all talking to ourselves. The party faithful out there think Paul Ryan gave a great speech! He promised that Mitt Romney will show strong leadership, and protect Medicare (even though Romney has shown very little leadership and Ryan's plan actually decimates both Medicare and Medicaid).

What happened to Medicaid?

Actually, you will notice that the RNC is focused on MEDICARE. Why? Because Medicare is the government-sponsored health insurance plan for SENIORS. There are a lot of seniors in Florida (where the convention is being held) and seniors vote. But Romney and Ryan are not talking at all about Medicaid, which is government-sponsored health insurance for poor people. But then again, Mitt Romney has already said he is not concerned about the very poor in this country.

Did you build that?

And of course, the other deceitful thing going on at the RNC convention is the “we did build it” trope—which is based on a statement (perhaps unadvised) by President Obama about small businesses needing the support of government to succeed—that has been taken out of context.

All in all, something built on a weak foundation—and lies are weak—generally falls down on itself. But the question is unless someone points out a lie, do you know it? And more importantly, do the voters going to the polls in November have real, factual, proven information on which to make a decision?

Truth should be as important as presentation.

When people praise Paul Ryan’s speech as being good—what are they saying? And if a speech can be good even though it is built on a foundation of lies, where does that leave us and our democracy?

Root your messages in reality not ideology

Every organization (business, nonprofit, political, association) should have a list of key messages. These key messages should be updated frequently (no less than once a year). If yours doesn't, it's time to start creating a list of key messages. Key messages form the basis of your speeches, press releases and other communications materials.

Key messages should include facts about the organization, the organization's mission and philosophy, organizational goals, how the organization operates and other important information you want your audience to know.

Your key messages should be genuine, and stand up to scrutiny. Some organizations end up with key messages that are not reflective of reality, but rather are ideological. This is especially true with political organizations.

I came across a great example key messages that don't accurately reflect reality in yesterday's Washington Post. In a story written by Dan Eggen on page A7, entitled "McDonnell says stimulus aided Va. –but only in the short run," the first paragraph says:

Virginia Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) wandered off script somewhat Sunday as a surrogate for the Mitt Romney presidential campaign, conceding that President Obama's stimulus measures had helped his state weather the economic crisis.

Of course, the Romney campaign has been arguing that Obama's stimulus hurt the economy, and did not create jobs—because stimulus goes against Republican economic ideology. Governor McDonnell was reflecting the reality on the ground in his

remarks—that indeed the stimulus has helped Virginia. He “went off message” because instead of being ideological, he was being factual, rooting his comments in the reality of his state.

A similar situation occurred last week when Cory Booker said that he was sickened by the attacks on Bain Capital. The Obama campaign’s key messages about Romney’s tenure at Bain were more ideological than factual. Booker was simply reflecting facts that private equity firms are not the way they were being portrayed by the campaign. Booker was roundly criticized for “going off message.”

When key messages IGNORE reality and facts, and simply reflect ideology and beliefs, they are open to attack and leave spokespeople with the opportunity of “wandering off script” or “going off message.”

Most people have a hard time lying when asked a direct question. If your key messages are ideologically but not factually correct, they will not stand up to scrutiny. You don’t want to ask spokespeople to lie, so inject some honesty into your messaging!