

America's Unpopularity Contest: How Personality Will Shape the Presidential Election



By Merrick Rosenberg, Co-Founder, [Team Builders Plus](#)

The 2016 presidential race may be the first unpopularity contest in American electoral history. The winner will not be the candidate who attracts the most voters. Rather, the President of the United States will be the candidate who drives away fewer people than the opposition.

The personalities of [Donald Trump](#) and [Hillary Clinton](#) will sway the course of American politics. But, are these candidates really so different from past presidents?

Yes, they are.

Not long ago, Republicans voted for Bill Clinton and Democrats voted for Ronald Reagan because they liked the other party's candidate, not because they disliked their own. How did that happen? What can Donald and Hillary learn from these former presidents?

Great [leaders](#) use but do not overuse their personality strengths. They also display flexibility by adapting their personality to each situation. Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton have both taken their personalities to extremes. They

have also displayed a remarkable lack of style flexibility.

To unpack those two shortcomings, let's start by examining the four personality styles based on the DISC model. I have linked the four styles to birds to make them easy to visualize and recall:

- Eagles are dominant, results-driven, decisive, competitive, direct and authoritative. Politicians include George W. Bush, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dick Cheney and Newt Gingrich.
- Parrots are interactive, social, passionate, enthusiastic, optimistic and entertaining. Politicians include Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, John F. Kennedy and Gary Johnson.
- Doves are supportive, cooperative, humble, patient, harmonious, and peace-makers. Politicians include Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, Abraham Lincoln and Tim Kaine.
- Owls are conscientious, logical, prepared, diplomatic, factual and private. Politicians include George H. W. Bush, Al Gore, Mitt Romney, and Mike Pence.

You can probably guess that Hillary Clinton is an Owl and Donald Trump is an Eagle. Both overuse their personality strengths, which in turn become their weaknesses.



In overuse mode, Owls can be detached, stuffy, distant, impersonal and rigid. They share data to make their point but don't convey passion or charisma. They focus on fixing problems through policy initiatives instead of embodying optimism and hope. That's Hillary most days. She's unapproachable and uninspiring.

We rarely see the real Hillary. But recall that people said the same thing about Al Gore during his presidential campaign. On-camera, he was stiff and impersonal. Off-camera, he was relaxed and casual.

Hillary needs to humanize herself so that the voters feel connected to her and trust her. She needs to replace statistics with stories and humor.

How about Eagles at the extreme? They become blunt, insensitive, egotistical, demanding, domineering and stubborn. Their confidence turns to arrogance and even narcissism. Their direct communication can offend the people around them, and they don't like to apologize or admit they are wrong. Sound familiar? Donald needs to dial down his aggressiveness to soften his image and appeal to those who don't like him as a person. Less name-calling and more policy details would boost his appeal.

In addition to overusing their strengths, both Hillary and Donald lack style flexibility, which candidates traditionally need to lead the public.

Consider how Ronald Reagan adapted his style to the situation. As an Eagle, he pounded on the lectern at the Berlin Wall and said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" As a natural Parrot, Reagan always wore a big smile and cracked jokes. Even as he was wheeled into the operating room after taking a bullet, he told the doctors and nurses, "I hope you are all Republicans." And when Ronald Reagan fell into a scandal, his Parrot nature deflected the issues so adeptly that he became known as the "Teflon president." Nothing ever stuck to him. Hillary, on the other hand, can't shake the scandals that have damaged her credibility. She tries to fight with logic, not charm.

Remember, too, how Reagan's Dove-like speech to the family members of the Challenger astronauts touched the nation. And

recall that he often shared statistics like a good Owl would. Reagan used all four style like a chameleon, adapting to each moment. That's why he was and is respected on both sides of the political aisle.

Bill Clinton also displays chameleon flexibility. Just watch him in action. In one speech, he will stand up straight like an Eagle and point right into the camera as he makes his case. As a Parrot, he brings humor and laughter with his contagious belly laugh. When he enters Dove mode, he speaks softly and puts his hand on his heart. As an Owl, he shares detailed stories with names of people he met in a small town or statistical projections to make his points. Bill appeals to the public because he flexes to all four styles. If Trump could only emulate Bill instead of bash him, the Republican ticket might win voters who will otherwise flock to Hillary out of fear and repulsion.

Trump and Clinton have overused their styles and behaved inflexibly. Here's the big question: which candidate can tone down his or her personality and adapt to the diverse needs of the electorate? The answer to that question will be the 45th President of the United States.

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