

Strategic Communications Analysis: The Results Are In...Clinton Sweeps Debates

✘ *By Virgil Scudder, President, [Virgil Scudder & Associates](#)*

Like a team facing elimination in the World Series, [Donald Trump](#) absolutely had to have this one Wednesday night after losing the first two debates. He didn't get it.

[Hillary Clinton](#) won, granted by a lesser margin than before, but winning is winning and losing is losing. Trump finished the debate season oh-and-three.

The Republican nominee needed to use this opportunity to broaden his base and reach out to groups that he has offended: Latinos, Muslims, Mexicans, and women among others. Instead, he seemed to be speaking mostly to his base. They are already solidly in his camp and they are not numerous enough for him to win the election.

Trump has a tendency to start in a deep hole and then ask for a bigger shovel to dig deeper. The Access Hollywood tape in which he boasted of assaulting women has been in the news virtually every day as many women come forth to say he behaved inappropriately with them. Trump's response was to call them all liars, a hard case to make.

The Donald loves to make headlines. Unfortunately for him, they are often bad ones that drive away some people who want change or distrust Clinton and thus might be inclined to vote for him. The headline on the second debate was his threat to jail his opponent, a comment so outrageous that it overshadowed his admission that he hadn't paid federal taxes for two decades.

This time it was potentially even worse. He refused to commit to accepting the voters' decision if he lost the election which, even before it's over, he claims is rigged against him. The potential implications of such action are frightening in a country where arms are plentiful and resentments among many of his supporters run deep.



(Photo Source: Twitter)

Trump needed to show some dignity and [leadership](#) presence. He started off fine, speaking slowly and calmly. But, when Hillary started baiting him, he once again lost his cool and resorted to interruptions, cheap shots, and outright lies. His snarkiness was depressing and frustrating to watch.

For the first time in these debates, he used a Spanish word but even that backfired. He said that Latino immigrants to the U.S. included some “bad hombres,” hardly a compliment. You don’t have to survey too many people in the Hispanic community to get a sense of how that will go down. Workers in “the dishonest media” (Trump’s term) aren’t going to love him any more for that characterization either.

Trump was better prepared for this debate than the earlier ones but he offered little in the way of specific programs or proposals. The evening was a litany of how awful he thinks things are in this country. Some people see the glass half

empty while others see it half full. Trump sees it cracked and empty.

Clinton didn't have to win this debate; she nearly needed to keep her cool and show her expertise and vision. The smile she flashed as he made some of his most outrageous statements was a big asset while his frustration and anger often showed on his face while she was speaking.

Chris Wallace generally did a decent job of enforcing decorum but wasn't always able to stop the shouting matches. It was often not a polite exchange of views.

My advice to Trump would have been to start by apologizing to people he has offended, be pleasant and humble, show some contrition, and offer concrete proposals. But, he hasn't taken anyone else's advice so I can't imagine he would have listened to mine. Or, for that matter, that he would be able to do it.

So, Hillary takes another one and it's likely to be reflected in the polls. Clinton won the night and the series.

***About the Author:** Often referred to as "The Dean of Media Trainers," Virgil is considered one of the world's foremost communication experts. In a 30-year career that has covered 26 countries on five continents, he has provided coaching and counsel to heads of some of the world's largest corporations and government leaders. Virgil is a prolific writer and speaker. His book, *World Class Communication: how great CEOs win with the public, shareholders, employees, and the media*, written with his son Ken, was named one of the 25 best business books of 2012. His column, *In the C-Suite*, appears in every quarterly issue of the *Public Relations Strategist* and is read by leaders of major public relations agencies and global heads of public relations of large companies. He has*

written or been featured in articles that have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Reuters*, *Investors Business Daily*, and numerous professional publications. Two of his speeches have been reprinted in the prestigious *Vital Speeches of the Day*. Prior to founding *Virgil Scudder & Associates* in 1990, Virgil headed the media training units of two of the world's largest public relations firms, *Hill & Knowlton* and *Carl Byoir & Associates*. Earlier, he was an award-winning news broadcaster at major radio and television networks and stations in New York City. He was a first-night Broadway drama critic for six years during that period, broadcasting reviews on NBC's all-news radio network and all-news WINS radio.