

The Power of Preparation: Clinton 1, Trump 0 (Op-Ed)

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

It's a fact: The best prepared person has a winning edge: in sports, in business, or in an adversarial encounter on television such as Monday night's Clinton-Trump presidential debate. It was clear that [Hillary Clinton](#) prepared thoroughly for Monday night's presidential debate and [Donald Trump](#) did not. She clobbered him. The result had to be very painful to Trump supporters as they watched their man blow the big game. Shades of Sarah Palin!

Both sides needed to win this one: Trump by appearing calm and presidential and Clinton by showing her competence and giving the kind of straight, direct answers to tough questions that would give her many doubters a reason to trust her.

She won hands down, putting pressure on Trump to win big in the next two. Las Vegas would probably give you 75-to-1 one or better odds against his doing that.

This was an uneven contest because Clinton could cite chapter and verse and Trump was reduced to sneers, insults, interruptions, and the same old tired, unsubstantiated, and often false claims. A boxing referee would have stopped it after six rounds.

It is very frustrating to me, and I suspect to many others, to watch a spectacle in which one contestant (Trump) childishly interrupts while the other is trying to make a point. It's also frustrating when one candidate (Hillary) takes an encyclopedic approach to answering almost every question. All questions are not created equal, and the length and detail of the response should be appropriate to the particular question. She needs to master the art of the bullet point

list and the technique of starting her responses bottom-line-first.



(Photo Source: Twitter)

To her credit, she came up with some good sound bites, such as the one about Trump living in his own universe, that are likely to stick. She needs to do more of this.

Why is a candidate permitted to interrupt and talk over the opponent, as Trump loves to do? A friend of mine suggested cutting off the microphone of the person not speaking. I like it.

I'd also like to see the mic cut when a responder goes more than 10 seconds over the allotted response time. You wouldn't have to do that very often before they got the message. Clinton is a worse offender than Trump in this regard.

[Lester Holt](#) did not have a triumphant night as a moderator even though he did challenge Trump on a couple of lies. He should have challenged a lot more often, insisting that the

candidates directly answer his questions. And, when he said they had 10 or 30 seconds to respond, he should have held them to it. He is a capable news anchor but not a good choice to moderate a contentious debate.

ABC's Martha Raddatz will moderate the next discussion and that promises to be good news for those of us frustrated with what we've seen in this debate and the ones in primary season. She's tougher, and she's more experienced in [interviewing](#). She is less likely to let a non-responsive answer to a question slide by without challenge.

Here's what the candidates should do in preparation for the next debate.

Clinton: Practice on condensing and bottom-lining responses, select and rehearse bullet-point lists such as the ones used in questioning whether Trump pays any taxes or contributes to charities, and work on showing more warmth and your private side. Make us like you. Tell some personal stories that make points and emphasize your experience and give examples of sound judgment.

Trump: Do your homework. Study, study, and then study some more. Create and deliver specific proposals for dealing with the challenges of the day. Stop whining about unfair treatment and faulty microphones (we heard him fine.) Donald, you're good at diagnosing people's pain, but your prescriptions for relief amount to hyperbole. Get real; show that you have substance. And, for pity's sake, stop lying and winging it as you go.

I look forward to the next two debates. I hope they offer us more substance, more civility, and stronger moderating.

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.