

## [Presidential Debate Teaches Us about Ability, Effort and Presenting Skills](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on October 5th, 2012

In 1996, I taped a Clinton-Dole debate. I didn't tape it to make up my mind on the candidates. Instead, I taped it to learn more about persuasion. I no longer have the tape, but I remember being in awe of President Clinton and actually feeling sorry for Senator Dole.

Were you one of the 58 million Americans who watched the debate Wednesday night? Regardless of your political party or who you want to be the next President, there was a great deal to learn about client development and presentation skills from watching the debate and the analysis that has been reported since.



As you know, on Wednesday morning I posted: [Presidential Debates, “Zingers” and Client Development](#). I suggested that the analysts and pundits would spend more time on debate performance and style than on substance. I was right, it has been hard to find any reports or

analysis on substance, but plenty has been written and reported on the differences between the candidates on:

1. Energy
2. Enthusiasm
3. Body language
4. Facial expressions and smirks
5. What they looked at (Romney at Obama, Obama down or at the moderator)
6. Even comparison of the number of times the President used the crutch word “eh” in an answer

While there were no “zingers,” in the debate, because the analysis focused on debate performance, there was wide agreement in the outcome. Given that the [CNN poll of likely voters who actually watched the debate](#) found that 67% concluded Romney had won, there was little to discuss other than why. (Did you see where Al Gore blamed it on the altitude in Denver?)

Yesterday, I gave a presentation on starting right for career success to 110 [Baylor Law School](#) students. Driving to Waco and back took two hours each way. Other than stopping in [West, Texas](#) at the [Czech Bakery](#) for kolaches, it was a really boring drive. I listened to the three news networks on my satellite radio. When a network went to commercial or to covering the “real” news, I switched channels.

Since it was so clear that Governor Romney did extremely well and President Obama did not, the discussion focused on why the President did so poorly and looked unprepared. Do a Google search for the last 24 hours and you will find many very interesting perspectives. To show how social media has changed things, one of the top sites in my Google search was a US News post: [15 Tweets That Explain Why Obama Lost the First Debate](#).

I recently wrote: [Client Development: Change what you think it takes to succeed](#) and [Lawyers: Here Are Two “Must Have” Presentation Skills](#). Neither blog post had anything to do with the debate and I

was not thinking about it when I wrote them. But, what I wrote about effort, preparation and the must have presentation skills demonstrate, at least in part, why Governor Romney did so well and President Obama did so poorly. In one paragraph, political analyst, Jeff Greenfield, made both of my points: [After the debate debacle for Obama, we'll find out if we have a race](#). He said:

Yes, it wasn't the best atmospherics for Obama to look down, purse his lips, appear distracted, while Romney was attentive, engaged, relaxed. But this was much more than atmospherics. This was about one candidate who came with a frame for the evening, and who was prepared to engage on every question; and another who, perhaps because of his documented faith in his own abilities, felt he could wing it with snatches of familiar verbiage.

In my presentation skills post, I wrote about the importance of body language in public speaking. Greenfield accurately described the President's body language. Interestingly, like the Nixon-Kennedy debate, when I could only listen to the debate soundbites on Satellite radio, it seemed much different than when I saw the very same soundbite.

In my change what you think post, I argued that **effort** frequently trumps **ability**. As Greenfield points out, the President may have thought he could wing it because of his belief in his ability. How many times do you suppose President Obama has been told that he is a "gifted" speaker? How many times do you suppose Mitt Romney has been told that he needs to "better connect" with the audience?

I wish, I could see a recording of the Obama debate preparation and compare it to the Romney debate preparation. At the very least, based on what we all saw Wednesday night, Romney likely made a greater and more focused **effort** to prepare. When a speaker is well prepared, his body language generally exudes the confidence he feels.

I want to restate my two main points from the blog posts:

1. The extent and quality of your **effort** in attracting clients will in many cases trump your **ability**. If you have been told that you have a gift for client development, don't take from the kind compliment that all you have to do is show up.

2. When you are making a presentation at an industry meeting to potential clients, expect them to judge how you look in the presentation as much, and likely more than they judge what you say. They will also judge how well prepared you are.

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