



Ben W. Heineman Jr. - Ben Heineman Jr. has held top positions in government, law and business. He is the author of *High Performance with High Integrity* (Harvard Business Press, 2008).

Barack Obama, Organization Man

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Romney ran on his business record, but Obama's campaign proved itself more adept at the very skills that make corporations run effectively.



An intriguing irony: Mitt Romney ran on his record as a business leader and manager -- understanding markets, choosing good leaders, delegating, getting results.

But in the most important organizational task of his life, Romney, the private-equity maven, was bested in dramatic fashion by Barack Obama and his political organization.

The results, and media reports, clearly indicate -- when viewed through a business lens -- that Obama's "business leaders," David Plouffe and Jim Messina, were superior to Romney's.

Yes, presidential elections are about the character of the candidate and the issues of the time. But they are also elaborate marketing campaigns. And here Team Obama excelled, and avoided classic business mistakes that plagued its opponents.

- They defined the future changing demographics of the United States in their "must-win" markets, the swing states, and were not bound to an outdated, static view of the electorate -- a classic business mistake.

- They used new technology, including behavioral science, to target members of the key demographic groups in those markets -- Latinos, blacks, women, youth -- and worked for 18 months to identify specific individuals, belly-button by belly-button.
- They enlarged their market, another classic business technique, by registering members of those groups.
- They precisely targeted their campaign messages, both positive and negative, to the key "consumers" -- voters -- in states where it really mattered.
- Their market research (that is their polling) was more reality-based than the market research of the Romney campaign (another classic problem). Romney's researchers really seemed to believe, along with pro-Romney pundits, that Romney was going to win, rather than lose every swing state except North Carolina.
- Finally, the Obama team turned out high numbers of their potential consumers to buy the product -- i.e., vote for the incumbent president in the toughest economic times since FDR ran for his second term.

When evaluated as a business case, the community organizer from Chicago did a demonstrably better job of leading and managing a complex campaign organization than the private-equity veteran running as a business leader who knew how to lead and manage.

On the day after, even Republican political operatives admitted it.

One wonders how the many current business leaders of America who supported Mitt Romney through endorsements or money or both would compare and contrast the organizational skills of the two campaigns. Hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars is a lot to invest in an inferior organization.

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