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Why Obama Lost the First Debate

by George Lakoff

You don't win a presidential debate by being a policy wonk. Obama violated [all the basics](#) of presidential debating. The best defense is a good offense. You have to set the terms of the debate and press those terms. Obama failed. Here are those basics:

- State your moral values. Contrast them with your opponent's.
- Project empathy and enthusiasm. Connect.
- Communicate clearly and simply.
- Be authentic. Say just what you believe.
- Project trust.
- Present an authentic view of yourself that the public can identify with and be proud of.

Obama did none of this. Instead he talked about policy details.

He needed to come on strong from the first sentence.

Democracy is based on citizens caring about and taking responsibility for both themselves as for the well-being of all. Government is the instrument that citizens use to guarantee protection and empowerment for all. We all, together, provide what is needed for a decent life. Individual accomplishment rests on what other Americans have provided and keep providing.

Building the economy requires public investment -- in public infrastructure, education, research, and much more.

Success is much more than money. It is your contribution to America as a whole -- whether it is teaching, raising children, providing food, healing the sick, making useful products, guaranteeing our rights and our safety, or running businesses that make life better. America needs us all. And we all depend on each other. Personal responsibility is necessary. But it doesn't

Obama made a lame attempt to correct Jim Lehrer's use of "entitlements." He should have pointed out that such money is earned through a life. People have worked for, and contributed earnings.

All policies rest on morality -- upon being the right thing to do. Obama needed to make the case that it is right, as well as to support women's rights, and gay rights, safe food, education, basic research, and on and on.

Obama believes this. To win, he needs to say what he believes, and press Romney.