

The Candidates' Temperaments Transcending Party Lines

By Dr. Susan Edelstein, Glenda Gracia and Michael Edelstein

When Barack Obama accepted the Democratic nomination for President on August 28th, he challenged his Republican rival, John McCain, to debate “who has the temperament and judgment to serve as the next Commander in Chief.” The following day, McCain announced Sarah Palin as his running mate — a Governor whose State’s proximity to Russia seemingly conferred upon her the requisite foreign-affairs experience to be his second. McCain’s choice prompted Jonathan Alter of Newsweek to utter, “Maybe there are questions about McCain’s temperament?”

References to temperament in the news have increased steadily since Obama’s challenge.

“Can a dismaying temperament be fixed?” asked George Will in the Washington Post. “Only one of them demonstrates the needed intellect, fortitude and temperament,” declared Hugh McColl, Jr., former CEO, Bank of America, throwing his support to Obama. And most recently, Time Magazine’s cover story, “Does Temperament Matter?”, has attempted to add more depth to the “Fiery McCain”-“No-Drama Obama” question.

Indeed, we should know the candidates’ temperaments. It can provide great insight into how each is likely to act as President. And not just at 3AM when the big hand is on “Crisis!” in the White House, but every minute of the day. The word temperament, however, carries with it a host of meanings, including mood, nature, character, personality, disposition as well as pre-dispositions. And where there’s ambiguity there is often a lack of precise analysis.

At thenewtemperament.com, the word “temperament” has a specific usage. It refers to the way people perceive the world, and, based on those perceptions, make decisions about it. As an objective, diagnostic measure — to the extent objectivity is possible anywhere in the universe — you would never declare a person “stable” or “unstable” on the basis of a temperament assessment. Nor would you use that determination to judge someone’s character. It does not reveal, for example, Adlerian-like ambition, Freudian-like obsession, or any particular psychological complex whatsoever. Nor is it a measure of intelligence. It’s simply a reflection of how each of us perceives and organizes information. However, based on these two dimensions, one can make surprisingly accurate conclusions about individual preferences and behavior, and much of the richness and complexity of a person can be revealed.

An Historic Election

Obama’s winning the Democratic nomination for President of the United States is a remarkable achievement. It is a testament to his political skills and how far our nation has come in healing its racial divides. But let us address what from a temperament perspective is also remarkable. Obama — in The New Temperament parlance — is an “Advocate.”

Why is that so groundbreaking? Because, in America, it is rare for someone competing for the highest office in the land to possess the Advocate temperament. In our estimation there have

been very few, if any. What is an Advocate? In The New Temperament system, an Advocate is someone who operates from a “Center of Compassion.”

Advocates care deeply about people. They are capable of listening to others and giving them the time they need to express themselves in a way that naturally surpasses most other types. Since their own judgments reflect a need to take into account how they and others are feeling, Advocates are usually more poised and comfortable with emotional issues. They are also forward-thinkers who welcome new ideas.

In both the primaries and in the general election, Obama has been criticized for appearing much less critical of his rivals. He hasn’t embraced the kind of rough-and-tumble, bar-fight mentality we’ve come to expect in American politics. He’s never attacked his opponents with the same vehemence, terms or tactics. Instead, he’s demonstrated a calm and an integrity rarely witnessed on the American scene.

But, we’ve got some news. While Obama’s behavior may seem out-of-place in the political arena, it’s nothing new for an Advocate. To criticize anyone in an uncaring or uncivil manner violates their sense of self. Even “W” — who most Americans are ready to consign to the shadow-side of history — has been spared any invectives from Obama.

Indeed, so novel is this occurrence that when a political leader comes along who stands up for empathy, authenticity, and articulates a message of hope, many of us are skeptical. In the case of Obama, some have even condemned him for it, as if he were either a Socialist or part of some messianic order trying to stage a second coming. It’s quite astonishing how a show of compassion can incite such a response.

Keep in mind that no one person represents a pure type. We are all a “mixture.” In fact, temperament is derived from the Greek word for mixture. Obama’s legal background, for example, his deep understanding of social and political history, his expressed admiration for “competence” — these are some of the hallmarks of the “Discerner” temperament, which operates from a “Center of Reason.” In this sense, Obama is able to draw upon and integrate more of his innate resources. He shows himself to be someone who would govern with his heart and his head.

“The ultimate foundation of political power is the leader’s willingness to resort to violence,” wrote Arthur Miller, in his short but brilliant book about acting and politics. Surely, one cannot aspire to be Commander in Chief without having the confidence to mobilize our military might when the situation calls for it. But, could an Advocate make such a decision? That’s where any adversary of the U.S. might want to take note of Obama’s strong Discerner leanings — and not expect him to give any quarter. You can be sure Colin Powell, among other military figures, would not have endorsed Obama until he had been thoroughly vetted on this issue.

John McCain, the man at the top of the Republican ticket, is said to be admired by many who have worked with him. But McCain’s temperament contrasts dramatically with his Democratic rival’s. Like many American Presidents of years past, McCain is a “Shaper.”

In New Temperament parlance, Shapers are people of action who operate from a “Center of Enterprise.” They thrive in the moment. They are sensory aware and ready to act with vigor to solve a problem. “I’m not running for President to be somebody,” McCain declared, “but to do

something.” Indeed, Shapers are “doers.” As the Times story aptly notes, “To McCain, words aren’t a form of action; only acting is a form of action.” While Shapers are pragmatic, literal and tend to focus on immediate results, they may often take action just for the sake of action. They are spontaneous, have a great exuberance for life, and, like professional prizefighters, they’re great on their feet. That’s why it’s no surprise McCain loves the Town Hall format.

Compared to Advocates or Discerners, Shapers are not known for their long-term vision. Or, for having the patience to explore issues in depth from a theoretical or conceptual perspective — which is not to say they do not have that capacity. Or, for that matter, that any temperament does not possess any capacity. On the other hand, McCain’s military service, his alleged penchant for gambling, his “maverick” persona that he himself cultivates, all point to his way of operating in the world as squarely within the boundaries of the Shaper temperament.

Let’s get away from the candidates temperaments for a moment and discuss an important word that even exceeds temperament in the word count: change. Change is a concept that dramatically underscores differences in temperament.

Ten years ago, Spencer Johnson, a best-selling business author, put change on the order of a mouse discovering someone “moved their cheese.” But for most of us, change is far more worrisome than that. In fact, it can be frightening. That was Wilfred Bion’s conclusion. The renowned pioneer in group dynamics felt people are inherently resistant to change because it carries with it an impending sense of catastrophe. No wonder institutions and bureaucracies are so entrenched in the status quo. And for change-agents like innovators and entrepreneurs, the world does not feel like a walk in the park.

Today, both Obama and McCain are offering “change.” But what kind of change? Innovative new policies that address the critical issues of our time? Or, just a different place-setting at the same table? As a general principle, the Advocate temperament is more comfortable conceiving and engineering innovative changes. Shapers, as discussed, are more tied to practical concerns of the moment and are opportunistically driven. The citizenry of the country, however, are mostly represented by “Sustainers” — who in The New Temperament system operate from a “Center of Trust,” and retain the strongest bonds to the status quo. That’s the challenge both candidates face when they speak of “change.” Politicians know they have to win the Sustainer vote to get elected. But, the mistake they make is to sell them short.

That is part of Obama’s genius. Along with color, gender and generational barriers, Obama’s message of hope and change is crossing party lines and transcending temperamental boundaries. What do we mean by that? Ultimately, the world’s progress has always depended upon humanity’s evolving consciousness, rather than any one administration or political party. If Obama can rise above his own life’s circumstances and transcend the limitations defined by temperament, so can everyone. His message is an interior call for people to wake up and embrace the larger dimensions of themselves. That, we believe, is the change that’s happening now. That is what people are responding to when Obama speaks.

Here’s another way of looking at this. When the Twin Towers fell in New York City on September 11th, the outpouring of love and support from near and far was extraordinary. On that day, many Americans could feel a shocking and palpable shift. In a sense, their own “towers” were suddenly felled. We’re referring to the supporting structures in our psychological make-up, otherwise known as our “dominant functions,” upon which rests our sense of security and ability to operate in the

world. But hope can emerge from tragedy, otherwise, surely, we would all collapse in despair. Similarly, when for some reason in our personal lives, any one of those pillars is toppled — and not just through tragedy, but some sudden insight — other parts of ourselves have room to awaken. With the world on edge, many people are questioning their place in it in ways they haven't before.

Let's look at McCain's own moment of epiphany that he shared at the Republican convention. As a young soldier, lying in solitary confinement, a beaten, broken P.O.W. at the end of his physical limits, John McCain stared at the walls of the tiny cell he was tossed in and suddenly realized there was far more beyond the confines of his own sense of self. He had at that moment transcended his own temperament, and has never forgotten the experience. He vowed to put himself in the service of something greater. Were McCain to acknowledge that same attribute in his rival — that one! — and not seek every opportunity to belittle him for it, we believe he would be doing more to put our country back on the path for which it was so brilliantly designed than any legislation Congress could possibly approve.

What did Sarah Palin have to say about Obama in her very first speech to America? "My fellow citizens, the American presidency is not supposed to be a journey of personal discovery. What does 'he' actually seek to accomplish after he's done turning back the waters and healing the planet?"

Surely, that's not an Advocate talking. It is more an indication of Palin's own temperament — a Shaper, like McCain's. That's what temperament can do. Make us believe we're right and everyone else, wrong. As human beings, we're all on a journey of discovery, whether we choose to recognize that or not.

"Two things pull people together," wrote Joseph Campbell. "Aspiration and terror." The country has had enough of the latter. Rather than terror-alerts, aspiration and a commitment to restoring our most cherished freedoms would be a welcome change from the White House. What's always been the danger in political theater is to project upon our leaders the power and authority that we as individuals need to own ourselves. In sharing our views about temperament, we're offering what many psychologists and knowledgeable laypeople have recognized for years as an effective means to better understanding our own natures, and thereby contributing to the evolution of a more conscious and compassionate world.

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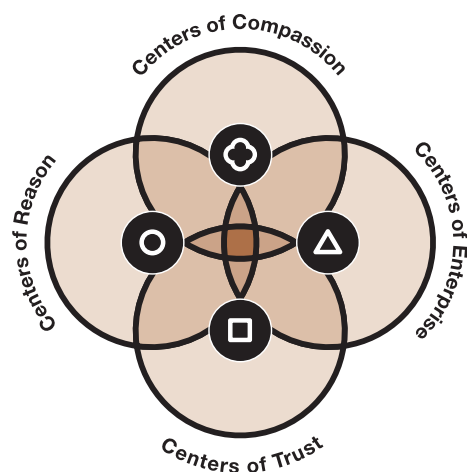
What's Your Temperament?

ADVOCATESM

You listen. You feel deeply about things. You care. You freely offer encouragement and support. You admire healers and teachers. You trust your feelings and intuition and let them guide you. Peace and harmony are more important than being right. You have a better vision of how the world can be — if we all just got along.

DISCERNERSM

You look for principles above facts. You know what appears to be true may not be. And what's working can always work a little better. You are more likely to question authority, rather than unquestionably accept it. You respect competence. And you trust the outlines of a personal vision long before it becomes a reality for others.



SHAPERSM

You are ready to take action. And “shape” action — into art. Into a business deal. Into a moment that brings you and others enjoyment. You understand the needs of the present, and you have the ability to respond spontaneously to what the situation requires to solve a problem or close a deal. Realistic and adaptable, your trouble-shooting skills have saved the day on many occasions.

SUSTAINERSM

You value trust and traditions. Where others take risks, you take pre-cautions. Dependable and hardworking, however, does not mean your life is without excitement. On the contrary. No levy is so high that it cannot be breached. And no lifestyle so secure that it cannot be threatened. You keep watch and keep score. And take pride in winning by the rules.