

Presidential elections and critical incidents

Submitted by Kellie Mundell on Thu, 2016-02-25 12:28

One of the key concepts of psychology is that you can learn a huge amount from a single incident. You may remember the episode of the sitcom *Friends* when Chandler's slightly psychotic new roommate Eddie has everyone convinced he's a nice guy until they spy him abusing the pet duck. ("Step away from the duck!" shouts Joey as the scales fall from his eyes.)



Recent election coverage has reminded me of this critical incident theory. As I write, Hillary Clinton is really struggling with what looked once like a very simple coronation as Democratic candidate. On Valentine's Day an opinion piece in the newspaper was titled "Face it Hillary, the voters are just not that into you". This disaffection flows it seems from a perception that her ambition drives her as much as any social commitment, despite her huge experience and admirable track record in office.

This perception was strengthened when she claimed to have landed in Bosnia "under enemy fire" until pictures emerged of her with her young daughter Chelsea accepting flowers of

welcome at the steps of the plane. This self-serving lie, you may recall, she dismissed as 'misspeaking'. That's up there on a par with Bob Hope's infamous excuse for being caught in bed with a showgirl (yet again) by his wife. "This isn't me" he blurted, explaining later that this was the best excuse he could come up with at the time.

Donald Trump's ridiculing of a disabled reporter (and a few other issues) deserves a knuckle sandwich more than the withdrawal of a vote if you ask me but Marco Rubio's experience is more interesting. He looked a strong favourite to come through as the acceptable face of the right but will likely never recover from an audience titter. Challenged, in a debate, that he was all surface and no substance by presidential no-hoper Chris Christie he responded with a clearly well-rehearsed *soundbite*. Cue audience laugh, and exit Rubio stage right.

FIFA are electing a new President too but from *within* the existing culture of corruption and cronyism. The candidates are all promising enlightened reform and transparency, of course (even the ones that used to be the right hand men of disgraced executives and the one with the dubious human rights record). To even the simple question 'how much will you be paid if you win?' the answer from all is "that's simply not information we share with the public". So it's safe to assume the times they *aren't* going to be a-changing.

In the safety world, the CEO who stands up and reads a safety message clearly written for him or her by the health and safety head sends a powerful message – especially the ones who accidentally read out the reminder "look sincere and emotional here". Typically the phrase "nothing is more important than safety" will be included. Then, half an hour into the annual safety **day** they'll slip out of a side door to attend to something more important. They'll hope no-one notices and that, even if they do, it's not critical. But people always do and it always is.

More everyday examples include a manager turning a blind eye to a risky behaviour because they're busy or having safety as the number one item on the agenda but addressing it in a way that makes clear they are thinking "we'll get this out of the way quickly and then crack on with the important stuff".

These leaders – from president to foreman – say things no sane person would take seriously. They give us clear proof that we're right to be not just skeptical but outright cynical because the truth is absolutely *everyone* understands critical incident theory. But they brazen it out anyway and via the mental gymnastics of denial, rationalisation and self-justification are often indignant that we doubt them!

Challenge: *When you know, you know you know. It may not do any good in this shameless world we live in but whenever you can, stand up and say that you know anyway (they sacked Blatter eventually!)*

Thumbnail Image:



Recommended posts:

It's not me but it's not you either
Heinrich, Beckham, Player and Mozart
The guru, the magician and the Ping Pong Player

Add to Carousel:

no

Blog Type:

[Tim Marsh's blog](#) [1]

Author:

Tim Marsh

*/

Source URL: <https://www.healthandsafetyatwork.com/blog/tim-marsh/presidential-elections-critical-incidents>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthandsafetyatwork.com/blog-author/tim-marsh>