

Election Campaign could come down to one crisis



By
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It's said stage drama is real life with the boring bits edited out.

Elections are a dramatic compression of the real life experiences we all have. Like a stage play you can see in an evening, you can see politicians' lives pass in front of their eyes in a few weeks.

In industry this would be called crisis management. The classic definition of crisis management is a rapidly moving event that taxes your resources beyond their limits and causes people to question your legitimacy and the legitimacy of the system you're operating.

But in industry, you don't usually lose your job if you wear a goofy outfit at your local plant, fumble a football at the company picnic or get a fact wrong in a speech.

In politics, these things can end your career in an eight-second sound bite on TV.

In industry, if the corporate jet breaks down the CEO bellows at the executive responsible. In politics, the media bellow at the leader as if the leader is responsible for everything.

Is this fair?

Sure it is.

First, Winston Churchill

was right - democracy is the worst system of government imaginable, except for every other one. And, everybody knows the rules.

An election campaign uses planes, buses, signs, food, phones and balloons. Media want interviews, pictures and facts. All candidates have had months if not years to prepare for this moment in their careers and if they fail, it's not just the media event that caused their failure - it's a lack of preparation.

The best prime minister we never had, Robert Stanfield, is said to have lost an election by fumbling a football he was tossing around. But who's the fool who tossed it to him and why'd he agree to play?

Joe Clark sounded foolish trying to explain mortgage deductibility, but nobody forced him to adopt this policy.

John Turner probably lost his election by stating "I had no option" on the issue of dozens of political appointments - but of course he had options.

Paul Martin probably lost his election long before the writ when he chose to make a big deal out of the sponsorship scandal.

Stephane Dion was derailed by his wet dishrag personality as much as by not having a plane on the first day of the campaign.

Jack Layton and all his predecessors in the NDP have always run very good campaigns with slogans in place of substance. David Lewis and his "corporate welfare bums" resonated in the 1970s, but Layton's being all in favour of families (who isn't?) is too vague to vote for.

So we all have options. We can hire the right people, procure the right assets, and test out saying the right things. If we fail, we usually get a second chance in business.

There are some second chances in politics, but they only come four or eight years down the line.

This federal election, at least two party leaders can't wait that long.

Allan Bonner is a former journalist who has coached 25 heads of government and party leaders as well as 60 cabinet ministers.