

Mike McCabe of Blue Jean Nation makes the point that Democrats (and Progressives) may gain more in the long run by standing up for their values than by being "smart" campaigners.

MADISON - A great football coach once said “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.”

That line is often attributed to legendary Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi. Lombardi wasn’t the first to say it. Maybe he heard it first from college football coach Red Sanders, who said it close to a decade before Lombardi made the aphorism famous. Maybe he lifted his signature saying from the 1953 John Wayne movie *Trouble Along the Way*. It’s doubtful Lombardi actually believed winning is the only thing. Roughly three years after he made the “only thing” remark, he was quoted in a magazine article offering an amended version: “Winning isn’t everything, but wanting to win is.”

Good coaches are good teachers, and they realize that more can be learned from a loss than a win. They tend to see long winning streaks as fool’s gold, because they know from experience that bad habits have a way of forming while their teams are stringing together wins, and those habits are only exposed as damaging after they lead to a defeat.

So it is in politics. You win some and you lose some. But when you lose, you need to lose with a purpose. Something has to be gained from every defeat. Seeds planted during today’s loss grow into the fruits of tomorrow’s victory. How you lose is what defines you.

In recent times, Republicans have lost much more purposefully than Democrats. Democratic Party dominance in the 1960s and especially Barry Goldwater’s landslide loss in 1964 inspired the 1971 Powell Memo that was a blueprint for a merger of corporation and state and an accompanying Republican renaissance.

The Democratic establishment's response to what the Powell Memo has wrought has been curious to say the least. I wrote in my book *Blue Jeans in High Places* about a young woman in rural Wisconsin who ran for a seat in the state Assembly. Democratic operatives coached her to avoid being pinned down on issues and to steer clear of controversial stands. The Democrats' nominee for governor similarly advised her to be as vague as possible on the issues and said her job as a candidate was to be "present and pleasant." She followed the script. She lost.

In fact, the Democrats lost twice in that instance. Not only was that election lost, but nothing was said or done to get voters to start thinking differently or challenge the other side's orthodoxy. Nothing was said or done to create conditions favorable to winning the next election.

Since my book was published, I've lost count of the number of former candidates for state and federal offices who have told me they received the same coaching. They followed the same script. They also lost. Twice. Democrats across the country are making a habit of running scared for the sake of "electability" . . . and losing anyway.

You lose in politics sometimes. But every loss has to have a purpose. There was a purpose to Goldwater's defeat. Present and pleasant serves no purpose.