

SCIENCE

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EDITORIAL

A Campaign for Science

Science. Dr. Noitall, you are one of the international experts on election campaigns, the man who managed Harry Truman's campaign, the man who arranged the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and the man who got Moses all that favorable publicity in the Bible.

Noitall. A vast understatement of my true worth.

Science. Are there any lessons from the recent campaign that might be transferred to science and science publishing?

Noitall. Of course there are. For example, politicians have learned the advantage of double, triple, and quadruple publication. None of this nonsense of one paper in one journal only. You repeat your message in Boston, Dallas, Terre Haute, and Sacramento until everyone gets so bored with it that they think it's a fact.

Science. That might cause some problems for scientific publication.

Noitall. That's your typical stodgy response that will prevent science from ever being in prime time. A second innovation would be references. You will note that news stories of the election all reported information from "insiders," "foreign policy experts," "economic experts," or, in cases of extreme importance, "a high official." This kind of uncheckable reference has great advantages over the mind-numbing data of modern science.

Science. Did you notice any novel ideas on the moral front?

Noitall. Science should, of course, come out for something like "traditional science values," which would solve a lot of the debate over ethical issues. Traditional science values should be defined as those principles on which all scientists agree, and any deviation from those principles will be considered to be unacceptable and morally corrupt.

Science. What do you mean by deviations?

Noitall. Good examples of deviation from accepted values are fraud, plagiarism, and highly original ideas.

Science. And do you have any ideas for improvement in scientific publication?

Noitall. The anchors on television are a close analog to the editors of scientific publications. And you will note that they never let presidential or other candidates finish a speech, or even a sentence, before they explain to the audience what the poor idiot is trying to say and whether he or she is sincere or just trying to get the Oklahoma vote. Editors should be allowed to insert sentences of clarification within authors' articles and to write little introductions and conclusions on the sincerity of the authors. That is more readable than scientific details.

Science. What about plans for the future?

Noitall. Plans for the future are "pie-in-the-sky" if it's an unlikeable author and "sticking to the issues" if it's a likeable author. A lot of wasted time on data and experiments could be eliminated if authors were allowed to say what they intend to do and wrote results they thought were likely, rather than bothering to go through all the experiments. Authors would be allowed to promise that if they get published, they are planning to get the data for a Higgs' boson or a cure for cancer. Good intentions should be considered far better than past history, such as experiments.

Science. What kinds of behavior should disqualify authors?

Noitall. Clearly, any past character deficiencies or guilts by association should be enough to disqualify an author. It is of course disgraceful that the entropy of the universe has been increasing for years without any imaginative ideas on how to decrease it. And the second law of thermodynamics by preventing perpetual motion machines has an abominably regressive effect on growth. Anyone identified with these notions should not be allowed to publish. Scientists who change their minds are reprehensible. Sticking to one's old ideas regardless of new facts shows steadfastness of character. Change for change's sake is also highly desirable. These principles are somewhat contradictory when expressed together but are very valuable for decision-making if considered one at a time. Selective use of mutually exclusive moral positions allows one to publish nice authors and reject unpleasant authors on principle.

Science. Do you think these campaign ideas will actually help scientific publication?

Noitall. Eliminating references and data will, of course, decrease the difficulty of publishing scientific research, which should mean that the literature will increase astronomically, giving the illusion of productivity. Of course, what is published won't amount to much, but it won't require a tax increase either.

Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.