

BARACK OBAMA AND THE EMPTY SUIT SYNDROME

By: John W. Wallace

I believe all of us at one time or another have either worked for someone or have known someone who suffered from what is commonly called the “Empty Suit Syndrome” or ESS. The term “Empty Suit Syndrome” appeared many years ago in the world of big business and big government and it is commonly used to describe a person, (usually a man, but it can also be a woman), who is usually fairly good looking, who wears stylish clothes, who speaks very well and who generally appears to others to be intelligent and professional, but its really just an illusion.

People with ESS are often underestimated by their colleagues, but they still manage to get ahead in big business and big government because they are really good at what they do. They have the ability to convince their supervisors or even the organization’s CEO that they are exceptional and very valuable assets to the organization. When discussing projects they are working on, they always use the terms “me” or “I” and purposely ignore the contributions of others. Although they usually do not contribute anything of value, they are always there to take credit for the work and look good to the bosses. That’s how they get promoted. People with ESS also tend to have some sort of well connected benefactor, either within or outside of the organization who provides some degree of protection in case they are found out.

People with ESS go to all the organizational and industry luncheons and dinners and always make a point of talking to their own bosses, influential industry or government figures, or anybody else who they believe can advance their careers and they are able to do this with laser-like focus. They are outwardly charming, witty, personable and confident, particularly when they are in the company of someone who can help their career. They are the ones who know everybody in the industry and they make it a point to meet and greet anyone they think is important. At some point, however, they move into the upper echelons of big business or big government and that’s when people start to suspect that the person may have ESS or the “Empty Suit Syndrome.”

In large organizations, office politics, personal contacts combined with clever and sometimes underhanded career tactics will often compensate for the incompetence of the person with ESS. In some cases, people suffering from ESS manage to make it to the very top of big business or big government organizations without having really done anything to justify it. No accomplishments, no management skills, no expertise; just politics, schmoozing, many rounds of golf and important personal contacts. All will go smoothly until there is a serious crisis. That’s when everyone finds out that the person with ESS is just an “empty suit,” with no substance, no expertise, no competence and a strong desire to distance himself from any potential problems and controversies, usually at the expense of others.

Let’s take a quick look at the career of Barack Obama and see if he has ESS and how he made it to the top. He was born in (we don’t know because the records were sealed), he went to Columbia University and Harvard Law School (how did he do? – we don’t know – all the records are sealed), he became a State Senator in Illinois (never wrote a piece of legislation and never voted for or against anything controversial), he became a US Senator (never wrote a single piece of legislation), and then he became President of the United States.

The big question is: Who are the people behind the curtain who helped him get where he is today? He surely didn't get where he is today because of personal accomplishments. On paper, he really doesn't have much of a resume that would qualify him for even a mid-level executive management position, not to mention the fact that most of his personal records have been sealed and very little of what he includes in his resume could be verified by a potential employer.

On April 20th, 2010, there was an explosion on BP's Deepwater Horizon oil drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. Within 24 hours the Coast Guard informed the White House that at least 8,000 barrels of oil were escaping into the ocean. Less than three days later, Mr. Obama was warned that the spill could quickly exceed the environmental damage caused by the Exxon Valdez wreck back in 1989. This is definitely the worst environmental crisis that has ever faced this nation and the actions of Mr. Obama in handling this crisis will not only reveal his essential character, but we will also learn how he will act or perform in a crisis.

From the first days of this catastrophic ecological crisis of the Gulf oil spill, we have seen an astounding level of incompetence, political opportunism and stretching of the truth not only from Mr. Obama himself, but also from a good part of his administration. In true "Empty Suit Syndrome" fashion, Mr. Obama at first tried to distance himself from the crisis by ignoring it. He continued to attend political fundraisers, played golf (at least 7 times), hosted basketball and football teams, listened to a Paul McCartney concert at the White House and delivered many speeches on a variety of subjects. It would be two weeks and a couple of negative articles about his performance appearing in the press, before Mr. Obama would find the time to go to Louisiana.

When Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindahl declared a state of emergency in his state and begged federal officials for permission to build a massive network of sand berms to contain damage to the state's beaches, it took Mr. Obama and his administration about a month to respond and they only gave permission to build 2 percent of the berms requested.

When confronting a crisis that they cannot solve, presidents usually have two distinct choices:

1. Take the "Empty Suit Syndrome" approach by distracting the peoples' attention to other issues even at the risk of appearing to be unconcerned or uninvolved in the crisis, or
2. Take the "Leadership" approach and focus on the crisis to prove that you care and are working hard to resolve it.

Rather than taking the Leadership approach and concentrating on solving the crisis, Mr. Obama has chosen to take the "Empty Suit Syndrome" approach by using the crisis as an opportunity to push new "Cap and Tax" energy and comprehensive immigration reform legislation. Neither action has anything to do with stopping the gushing of oil in the Gulf of Mexico. His seeming lack of ability to deal with this crisis says an awful lot about his lack of management experience. He sent out lawyers and threatened lawsuits to solve the problem, rather than sending in the experts and accepting early offers of help from other countries that had the experience and equipment to help solve the problem.

Mr. Obama's actions thus far are proof positive that community organizers and part-time law instructors simply do not have the qualifications and experience necessary to handle oil spills or any other major crises. This president has also surrounded himself with people like himself, progressive socialists from the world of academia, the legal profession and various social justice community organizations. Unfortunately, many of these appointees have always had the time to sit back, analyze and critique problems, and criticize others from a safe distance. Very few, if any of them, have had any real life experience in dealing with serious, crisis situations. I not only suspect that Mr. Obama may have ESS, but it looks like a good part of his key administration staff has ESS as well.

Let's hope Mr. Obama learns from this experience and is able to shed the "Empty Suit Syndrome." In the meantime, until this oil spill is contained, we need this president to concentrate on the crisis. No more golfing, no more baseball games, no more Paul McCartney concerts, no more parties or entertaining sports teams at the White House, no more demonizing BP, no more threatening lawsuits, no more distractions from doing his job and protecting the American people.

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