

Dcorps, Male, College-educated, Oct. 6, 2004

**Focus Group Guidelines
October 6, 2004
Milwaukee, WI
Male, College Educated**

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions

II. Direction of Country and Campaign (25 minutes)

1. Thinking generally about the country, are things moving in the right direction or wrong direction? **[QUICK]**

Socially, economically?

JUST YOUR GUT FEELING.

It's up in the air.

Some days yes, some days no.

I think were just treading water.

I think there's some concerns, price of gas, cost of living, with a big family you start wondering if we are going in the right direction, I think sometimes no.

We were the big fish in the sea for a long time, we aren't anymore, a lot of countries are catching up, look at gas prices in Europe. We gotta start thinking differently.

Yeah, things are up in the air, everyone tries to solve everything so fast, we need to sit down and look at things.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

Healthcare, I work for a small company, we pay for all our health insurance, we switched companies, from 600 to 900 a month, that's a lot of money, and I have a family. Somewhat shouldn't cover the whole expense, but when's it going to stop, it affected my quality of life, we has just purchased property before that, and I'm in a pinch.

What's you deductible?

100 bucks.

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From economics, the stock market, I'm 20 years away from retirement, will my funds allow me to retire? With the market and stock markets as they are, being driven by the war, gas prices, rising utilities. It concerns me, I have 5 kids, their needs grow with their age. We bit the bullet and bought a house, now with mortgage we can make it, but things are tight.

The deficit, 1 terrorist act and we face another recession. Eventually that money's gonna come due, we'll have to raise taxes, and companies are gonna cut benefits. Greenspan's talking about it, but no one's listening. Our kids are going to pay for it.

Terrorism and security effect the economy.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ECONOMY?

Hanging in there.

I can't believe it's improving, especially what I deal with daily- gas, utilities, cost of living. The market hasn't reflected recovery.

A lot of the companies I work with, they say we're doing alright. But with China, everything is made there now, that concerns me. Like he said, we were once the superpower, but I think we're too quick to help other instead of helping us.

It's interesting, the government regulates with interest rates, they say it's improving but we don't feel it-jobs going overseas, service industry doesn't pay much.

It's manufacturing, but those jobs are going away.

Well, we all said we're interested in sports, but our society is too focused on sports-athletes, contracts, etc.-We don't focus on the right things-education, home, church. Back in the 40s we were more modest.

I work at footlocker, we look for teenagers who'll spend 100 buck on shoes.

WHAT OTHER ISSUES?

Crime, when I see what's going on in Milwaukee, how vicious kids can be, What causes a kid to get vicious like that? You'd here about that stuff in New York, but now it's even here. I don't know the answer, but it's scary.

Alternative fuels, we haven't progressed much.

Until the oil runs out, they won't progress. As long as oil is cheap and plentiful.

I heard the President elected this term will have a tremendous influence on judicial nominations.

WHAT ABOUT IRAQ?

I think we need to be over there, but we aren't getting a lot of support. I don't think it's going to end.

Yeah, we had to do it, it started with Osama, then they went to Iraq. They never finished 9/11, Iraq's dominated the news, that's all they talk about.

Was it worth 100 billion dollars? It could go into our own economy, but nobody liked Saddam.

It's like Israel, people don't even know what we're fighting for.

Yeah, U.S. isn't that far from another attack, but we come together as a people and we've fought terrorism. Where else can we go? With all this oil? We can use it to make them free and start democracy.

It's not going to be easy.

I think we jumped in too fast. We went into Afghanistan, and didn't work out, so then we went to Iraq so that we could finish off Saddam. Why are we there? The oil? There are atrocities all over the world, why did we choose Iraq?

But it did take a long time before we went to war.

But how long does it take to plan something like that?

I think they believed it would be like Desert Storm, I'm a father of a 15 year old boy, I don't want to see him being sent overseas. What can we do to prevent this from being a 10year conflict.

WHAT ABOUT THE CAMPAIGNS? THE ISSUES?

They're bashing each other.

Who's telling the truth, they look you in the eye and tell you contradicting facts.

No solutions, just fingerpointing, they just tarnish the other candidate to look better.

That's politics these days, just mudslinging. They talk about plans, but they just attack each other.

BUT WHAT DO THEY ACTUALLY TALK ABOUT?

Iraq, foreign policy.

Each other's military service, I could give a damn, stick to the agenda.

A lot of character attacks Cheney saying he never met Edwards, but later got disproven.

Kerry going after Bush for loss of jobs, but to be honest, those jobs are going to go away. A lot of it is unsubstantiated.

They talk about who has experience, and who is lacking.

Health care, we're all concerned about it, but neither one of them has a solution.

They talk about it, but they don't propose anything.

They acknowledge it's an issue, that's it.

But the President can't do anything without Congress.

SO EVERYTHING IS JUST SPOKEN ABOUT BROADLY?

Well, overseas jobs, can we stop it? Whoever produces the cheapest wins.

Yeah, look at Wal-mart, now they're the biggest importer from China.

Well, we're a global economy now.

- What things are going right?
 - What things are going in the wrong direction?
2. Thinking about this year's presidential campaign, what have you heard recently about the campaign and the candidates for president? **[PROBE]**
 3. As you probably know, the two candidates for President held their first debate last week in Miami. How many of you watched the debate?

I only saw the last 15 minutes, by then, there was no substance, just wishy-washy, Bush ho-humming, wasn't even paying attention to Kerry. Just posturing, Bush was hunched over.

The body language and side shots made a big impression, Bush didn't come across as strong as Kerry. You could see Bush's displeasure with Kerry in his body language.

He looked beaten down, he kept saying “hard work.”

WHO DO YOU THINK WON?

Comes down to who you support, neither side would say the other won.

I think Kerry came across stronger in answers, delivery, body language.

I try to ignore the debates, I saw bits and pieces, but it just reinforced my views of the candidates.

I think Kerry got the edge, with Bush’s body language and reactions, he was like a young child, especially when he said he was tired. It’s not like he wasn’t prepared.

We all work hard, hell!

- What were your impressions of the debate, or what have you heard about it? [**Extensive, probe for detail**]
 - Based on what you’ve seen or heard, who won the debate? Why?
4. Thinking specifically about George W. Bush, what have you heard about him recently? Did Bush say or do anything in the debate that really stood out to you?

He’s really pushing that he’s the commander-in-chief, he has the experience and the respect of the military, and that’ll he lead us through this. You know, he’s staying the course, which kind of scares me a little bit, if it ain’t working, you’ve got to change it.

Yeah, we need to re-examine the course, and stop focusing on just Iraq.

WHAT ELSE?

Getting more people working.

(Have to be picked to answer this question)

Addressing taxes, less government, more money in your pocket, I agree with that.

He’s saying the economy is better, we’re coming out of the recession, but I just don’t believe that.

5. How about John Kerry? What have you heard about Kerry recently? Did he say or do anything in the debate that made an impression or stood out to you?

Change. He says he's got plans, help small businesses. He's the first person I've heard address those issues. Not sure on military, wants to be strong in Iraq, but I hear he want's to cut spending.

I was surprised he wants to help small businesses, that's usually Republican.

Yeah, 7 out of 10 people work in small business.

I think he just champions whatever sticks with the public.

Finishing the Iraq situation. We need to finish it right and get our troops out of there, while also getting country involve.

The flip-flop thing, they just go back and forth, both are.

Kerry needs to turn things around, but what is he going to do in Iraq. I don't his view, does anyone?

I don't know if its different.

He wants to better education, I remember a commercial about it.

- **Probe on flip-flopper, weak on security/terrorism**

6. And what about last night's VP debate in Cleveland? How many of you watched last night's debate?

IMPRESSIONS?

I hear Edward was real strong.

I heard the exact opposite, Cheney was cool and collected, it's just confusion, one guy says one thing, they other says something else.

I think it was a draw, a tit-for-tat.

I thought Cheney had the experience, he knew what was going on, why we're doing this.

I think Cheney was better than Bush.

Oh yeah.

He looked like a strong leader.

ANYTHING STICK OUT?

The fact that they had to sit down, Cheney didn't look at him in the eye, Edwards theatrics as a power-player.

BUT WHAT ABOUT WHAT THEY SAID?

Cheney attacked Edwards for being a trial lawyer, Edwards responded well with tort reform and cleaning up lawsuit abuse. It was a good response, especially the emotional side that connects with the people.

Cheney talked about Edwards 600,000 tax break.

Yeah, I heard that, in some ways it seems sleazy, but it's also perfectly within the law and the government allows it. It's a tax break.

- What were your impressions of the debate, or what have you heard about it?
- Based on what you've seen or heard, who won the debate? Why?

III. Associations (25 minutes)1. Bill Clinton [**Brief**]

Good on jobs.

Great job.

Well liked.

Strong Economy.

Weak morals.

Strong president

2. Martha Stewart

Made a good example of.

Could've gotten bigger fish.

3. Bruce Springsteen

Good times.

Born in the USA.

Like his music, he's an all-American.

4. Dick Cheney

Intelligent, but not polished.

Arrogant

Halliburton, oil.

Old and strong

Health issues.

A CEO you don't want to work for.

5. John Edwards

Young, slick, polished.

Remind me of JFK.

Smooth, good public speaker.

6. The Democratic Party

Liberal, try something new.

Fight for the masses.

Poor people.

Minorities, but geared towards special interest.

More taxes and government.

Unwillingness to work together, both Reps. and Dems.

7. The Republican Party

Wealthy

Business-oriented

Take chances

Slow and steady

Power hungry

We're right, the y're wrong.

Conservative.

8. Ralph Nader

Idiot.

Thorn.

Not safe at any speed

[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]

9. Now I'd like to talk specifically about George W. Bush.

- What are the best reasons to vote FOR George W. Bush? **[Discuss]**

He already has four years.

He does have ability to lower taxes.

Lead us through 9/11.

War on terrorism and national security, he was a strong leader in 9/11.

The first lady, good representative.

Keep us safe, cut taxes, and national security. We need to finish what we started in Iraq.

I think he's honest and sincere, what you see is what you get, no BS.

He seems like one of us-plays sports, down to earth.

He has a diverse staff.

Yeah, good advisors.

WHO DO YOU LIKE?

Condi Rice, very good and stands out.

People like Bush's one on one approach, he relates to crowds well.

- What are the best reasons to vote AGAINST Bush? **[Extensive]**

The War, there was no WMD, hurts credibility.

Rising taxes, economy.

Rising deficits.

Spent too much on war, isn't a good speaker, in bed with corporations, bad impression with the rest of the world.

Education, No Child Left Behind is going to hurt us, paints too broad of a stroke, kids will be stunted.

Foreign Policy. Doesn't seem to do much with N. Korea.

Dick Cheney, a lot credibility issues, and foreign policy mistakes.

Use tax money and use it for something productive-health care, etc.

Change is good, fresh ideas.

He doesn't express thoughts or ideas clearly. Indecisive, can't think on his toes.

Yeah, I like that too, that's why I liked Perot. I don't see that in Bush or Kerry.

I like Condi Rice, but Rumsfeld has disappeared, doesn't seem to be accountability in the administration. Where's Tommy Thompson.

- Who does Bush care about?

[Written Exercise – Handouts #3 and #4]

10. Now let's talk about John Kerry.

- What are the best reasons to vote FOR John Kerry? **[Discuss]**

Supports middle class, he wants to ensure the tax cuts continue for middle class and that families are benefiting.

Analyzes his options before action.

Yeah, with foreign policy, we need more nations involved.

Good speaker, we'll do more toward health care.

Like Edwards.

Second term may be too tiring for Bush! (laughter)

Comes across confident.

Change of cards and ideas.

In his speeches he always says he has a plan, he's getting more specific.

Hopefully he'll reduce deficit.

Help on jobs and economy.

- What are the best reasons to vote AGAINST Kerry? **[Extensive]**

Untested as a leader.

Don't like his wife, billionaire heiress.

Are other countries going to take advantage of this guy?

He has lots of negative adds-job loss, people uninsured, he blames it all on Bush, a lot fo things go into that, economy helped Clinton.

I don't think he's for the middle class, he's married to a millionaire, he can't come down to our level.

Yeah, you watch him, and sometimes I feel I can't trust him.

Yeah, I feel that.

CAN YOU PUT YOUR FINGER ON IT?

The way he looks, speaks.

I know, he tells you what you want to hear.

Yeah, I gravitate to Edwards, I believe him.

I feel Kerry hasn't articulated his vision for America.

Talks a lot about having plans, but not much there.

Change is not necessarily good if it's just for the sake of change.

- What questions do you still have about Kerry?
- Who does Kerry care about?

IV. News Clips (15 minutes)

Next, I would like to show you some pieces of video from last night's newscasts to see some of the issues that are being discussed in this campaign. We'll watch each one all the way through, then we'll discuss.

- **News Clip #1**

WHAT'S YOUR REACTION?

Cover-up, Administration made him come back in line.

I'm glad Bremer came clean, Rumsfeld never did.

We've made a mess of things.

Sounds like a missed opportunity.

We used "Shock and Awe" but we just weren't ready for peace.

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE ELECTION?

Bush didn't plan well, ignored information, not a good war leader.

Bush needs to admit mistake and learn from it.

I think Bremer was covering his ass.

I think we need to look ahead. What's the solution, what can we do?

DOES BUSH'S PLANNING MATTER IN YOUR ELECTION THINKING?

To a point, where's he going from here? The American public are concerned?

Hindsight is 20/20, but it's difficult when things are happening, but Bush stumbling over words and spoke clearly just increases my frustration. He doesn't speak clearly. This will just pile up.

KERRY SAID BUSH LIED, DO YOU BELIEVE IT?

I don't think he lied, it's a learning experience, you miss something. Hindsight is 20/20

HAS BUSH LEARNED?

Sure

I don't know, I don't think so.

Yeah, here's some information on Iraq, so lets jump on it. Is he going to do it with Korea? Is he too tired for Korea?

I think they've learned, but they don't want to admit because it would give ammunition to Kerry.

I think he would be respected more if he admitted he made a mistake.

I don't know what they're going to do against insurgents and radicals, it doesn't seem we're moving forward. They have to do something.

Iraqis are killing Iraqis, can we change that? It shows our military can't fix everything.

When you live in an environment, it takes a long time. Look at our Civil War.

- **News Clip #2**

Who do you believe? They both throw numbers all over the place.

I think I believed Edwards. Cheney talking about Medicare and Medicaid, it's been a disaster, especially for seniors.

Cheney tried to talk about education, Edwards just bashed Cheney but didn't offer anything about what he would do?

Yeah, Edwards didn't answer the question.

Both of them did that, neither really addressed what they would do in the future. Edwards didn't give any specifics.

Edwards says he's against out-sourcing, how are you going to do that.

Neither said what kind of jobs we would create, or how we would change the education system.

LOOKING AT THE PAST, WHO WOULD YOU WOULD AGREE WITH MORE?

Cheney talked about jobs and education, Edwards just attacked him.

I think Cheney came close and attempted to answer the question, Edwards just seems smug and condescending. At least Cheney tried to answer the question.

I'm the opposite. I like people who take notes. Both through out facts and statistics, both of them could be partially right, but I think Edwards came off a little better, especially with that jab.

I thought it was close, a tie. I wasn't that impressed with either.

1. What do you think about what you just watched?
2. What do you think of Bush/Kerry after seeing this?
3. Which candidate do you agree with more when it comes to [issue of clip]?

V. Ad Testing (25 minutes)

Now we are going to watch a number of the television ads that are being shown on TV right now. We're going to watch the whole reel of them at one time, then I'll have you answer a few questions about what you saw and what stood out.

- Bush – Global Test
- Kerry – Lost, Desperate
- Progress for America – Finish It
- Swift Boat Veterans for Truth-Friends
- DNC IE – Big Hike
- Kerry – Stand Health care
- Bush – Peace & Security
- Kerry-Defend America
- Swift Boat Veterans for Truth - POW Wives
- Kerry – I Believe
- Bush - Windsurfing
- Kerry – Middle Class Plan
- ?? – War on Terror Agenda
- DNC IE – No One
- Bush – Practical vs. Big Government
- Bush - Searching
- Kerry – Ingenuity
- Kerry – Stem Cell Research

[Written Exercise – Handout #5]

Before we discuss these ads, please answer the following three questions for me:

1. What stood out to you in the ads you just saw?

(Several snicker at the Kerry windsurfing ad).

Too negative, I felt that Bush was more negative, especially when they accused Kerry of accusing him of supporting terrorist, they are way over the line.

Yeah I ignore the Swift Boats.

I think the ads that talk about Bush and 9/11 I don't agree with, anyone would've done something to help this country and fight terrorism, it's wrong to take advantage of that.

The Vietnam ads are a non-issue, who hasn't changed their views and thoughts in the past thirty years?

I guess I'm shallow, I think it shows me how he'll handle the war. The ads put doubts in my mind about Kerry.

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I agree, the Hanoi meeting really shook me, against his own country.

The sailing ad was also influential.

Yeah, but you can cut and paste things, what were the context.

I've heard Bush commend Kerry's war record, but everyone else goes after him.

I don't like limited facts and figures, both sides do it. We don't know the details behind the flip-flopping, and we really don't know any of there voting records.

I like Kerry's alternative fuel ad, and the stem cell ad.

Yeah, those added to Kerry's vision, which I though was lacking, I liked them.

ANYONE ELSE?

Yeah, we depend to much of foreign oil, but we can't get to the resources here because of groups like Greenpeace.

Five million people losing health insurance, and Kerry promising change.

The one about the elderly not being able to afford their medicine, my parents are getting old and I think about that.

I though Kerry would do better with health care. I have my own policy, not company policy. I agree with Bush's plan.

The Bush plan on national security stood out.

Both talked about plans, but neither of them actually laid it out.

YOU DON'T THINK KERRY DID?

Stem cells and alternative fuels.

We're so fast paced, that we don't have the time to sit down and go through it all, you can't talk of a plan with sixty seconds.

The Kerry camp really made him look Presidential.

WHAT ABOUT KERRY SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO CAMERA AND BUSH DIDN'T?

I think that's positive.

Yeah, the only picture was Bush and his wife.

I think it was positive, but he's talking to the camera, not me.

2. What did they say about George W. Bush?
3. What did they say about John Kerry?
 - **[GO AROUND ROOM, DISCUSS EXTENSIVELY]**
 - **Probe:** Vietnam, other attacks on Kerry – do they still have traction?
 - Earlier, many of you said you wanted to know more about Kerry and his plan for the country. Did these ads tell you anything about Kerry and his plan? What did they tell you? What's missing?
4. Over the final month of this campaign, what issues do you want to hear George Bush address? What questions do you still have about Bush?
5. And how about Kerry? What issues do you want to hear Kerry address? What questions do you still have about Kerry?

VI. Election Day Exercise (15 minutes)

Now I want you to use your imagination for a minute. I want you to imagine that today is November 2nd, Election Day, and you're at your polling place about to cast your vote, and you're planning to vote for John Kerry.

1. You go into the voting booth, and you hesitate. What's holding you back from casting your vote for Kerry?

Trust.

Fear his leadership skills.

WHY?

He's unknown.

He flip-flops.

Fear of change.

Yeah, it's the trust, there's no consistency.

Lack of conviction, flip-flopping, going with what the public wants.

Like his ideas, but don't know how he'll pay for them.

Consistency.

Leadership, at least I know where Bush stands.

The world is teetering, to disturb it with someone else could do serious harm. If you go with Bush, you stay on the balance-beam

2. Then you decide to do it, and you vote for Kerry. What finally made your decision for you?

Fear, the situation is going to escalate in Iraq, I don't want my kid to have to go.

Avoid another war.

The economy.

Change, move forward.

Bush is too stubborn, doesn't want to change.

Probably nothing right now, but I guess change, what do we got to lose?

3. Now go back to the beginning, you're at your polling place about to cast your vote, and you're planning to vote for Bush. But again, you hesitate. What's holding you back?

(Long silence)

Spend, spend, spend, then cuts taxes, doesn't work.

The deficit.

Unwilling to change.

Takes war personally, wants to see it through no matter what. I feel we're stagnating, it's the same thing, people dying every day.

Yeah, damn the torpedoes!

4. Then you decide to do it, and you vote for Bush. What finally made you vote for Bush?

I think if Iraq elections work and things got better, it would be easier to vote for him.

He's done a lot for four years, he deserves another four.

My financial advisor, stock market loves Republican win.

I think Bush's HST would be similar to what I'm looking into.

VII. Debate Question (5 minutes)

[Written Exercise – Handout #6]

There will be two more debates between Bush and Gore, including the final one in St. Louis, where the candidates will take questions from the audience. I'd like you to imagine that you have been picked as an audience member who will get to ask a question. Please write down the one or two questions that you would most like to ask the two candidates.