

Focus Group Guidelines
October 16, 2006
Clifton Park, NY
NY-20

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions

Alonzo – Wilmington, DE. This is what I do. Married, 3 girls, 6, 3, 18mos.

Zelda – 1 grown son. Works for Catholic Charities.

Yvonne – Work at HS, married, 3 kids. 26, 23, 19. Volunteer.

Xena – 2 grown children, 3 grandkids, raising one of them. Live in Clifton Park, work with Church.

Wanda - 1 daughter, worked as a paralegal.

Vicki – 25 y/o daughter. Work for a medical office.

Ursula – 4 kids, 23 to 5, 1y/o grandson. Maintenance foreman for NYS canal commission, EMT.

Tina – 6 kids, 10 grandkids. Unemployed.

Siena – Married, 1 son, 15. Special ed aide.

Rhonda- Married, 3 children.

Queen – nurse, 3 grown kids, and 1 grandkid.

II. Direction of the Country (20 minutes)

1. Thinking generally about the country, are things moving in the right direction or wrong direction? [**VERY EXTENSIVE – PROBE AND LISTEN**]

That's a tough question.

Talking the war? The school system?

Immediately thought about the war.

War?

I wish we never went there.

I don't like it.

I don't like it either. Too many kids dying and a lot of them are young.

And not trained properly, they're reservists and guard. It's sad.

Lot of their people dying too, innocent that shouldn't be. Along with ours?

Why still there?

Depends who you talk to.

I don't want it to end up like Vietnam. I think there'll be no winning. You could say we won because we got Hussein, but what did we win?

I think there's weirdos out there — his followers, there's never an end to it.

You can't win a religious war.

They shouldn't have come here either. I don't know what the answer is. . .

I'd like to know really why they're there.. Said WMD, but they weren't there.

And now we're dealing with north korea.

Other issues?

I don't — not a big person on politics — I was brought up a republican, but I don't always vote republican. But I don't like the way the politicians are all bashing one another.

It's a waste of time. Doesn't deal with the issues.

Races which stand out as particularly bad?

Sweeney — they won't debate unless she hands over her income taxes.

Neither one are talking about the issues.

They're both acting like children. I met him, and I remember that he was on the phone when his son got in trouble. He got really nasty on the phone with his son.

I think the whole bashing thing is just lowering morale. I'm totally disgusted. People are angry more than enthusiastic.

How does that impact your feelings for the election?

I keep hoping there'll be something — the games will stop. I have no strong feeling one way or the other.

I've always been one to say you should vote no matter what. . . I can tell you this is the first time I've considered not voting.

What issues are on your mind?

Education

Gas prices.

Medical.

Medical. Middle class people are drowning. No medical care for the young, the poor.

The elderly.

Spitzer had a really good ad on playing on the heartstrings of the older generation. He's saying the right things, but then I think what are you going to do. Same with Gillibrand. I'm not hearing specifically what you're going to do. How are you going to fix it?

As far a spitzer goes, his record speaks for itself.

I don't even know who the other gentleman is.

Violence in the schools.

It's scary. Everytime you open the paper something happened in the schools.

You mentioned healthcare for the older folks. Any experience with Part D?

- What things are going right?
- What things are going in the wrong direction?

- **Probe national direction vs. local direction**

2. How about the economy? What's going on with the economy here in New York?

- **[PROBE]** Rising prices (especially gas and health care), employment, any inflation fears
- How did things get to this point?
- What direction do you think the economy will go from here – will it continue to get worse, will it start to get better, or will it continue at the current level?

3. Let's talk specifically about the war in Iraq...

- **[PROBE]** What are your feelings about our continued involvement over there?
 - **[EXPLORE]** Loss of American lives, cost, no plan or exit strategy, weaker at home; war on terrorism

4. **[OLDER VOTERS AND SENIORS]** How about the new prescription drug program through Medicare? What are your impressions of that?

Social workers took care of it for the residents in the nursing home. It's a nightmare if you don't have someone out there who can champion — an advocate.

It was very confusing when they had to pick a plan. I had access to information that regular people didn't have, and it was confusing. It's worked well, but very confusing.

Very confusing.

Very confused.

I've been in the business for 20 years and it was confusing to me

III. Associations (25 minutes)

1. Hillary Clinton

I don't like hillary.

Bill Clinton.

It's hard to look at her as an individual in her own right.

If the ads are right she has accomplished a lot.

When she was first running, I didn't vote for her, but she's done a good job.

Watch out — some sneaky way about her.

Personal agenda.

Say or do anything to get where she wants to go. Too many promises.

Wolf in sheep's clothing.

2. John Spencer

Who's that?

I don't know the name.

Running agains HRC.

I guess that's who I'll vote for.

3. Eliot Spitzer

Attorney General

Man of his word.

Says the right things.

Positive

Positive direction.

Positive record.

4. John Sweeney [**Extensive**]

Slime.

Arrogant.

Trouble. He's got a lot of trouble attached to him.

Lot of baggage. Corruption.

Seems to have his own agenda.

Never heard anything after his son got arrested.

I don't like the using the girl that disappeared. The lyles. That ad.

And the soldier. His mother.

How does he get these parents to do these ads?

Like he's really going to help.

Just bashing whathername and vice verse.

Years ago I worked with him, he was DWI coordinator and he struck me as very ambitious.

Then you see the ad with a bunch of college kids drinking.

Lived in the same apartment complex I did and never went out of his way to be nice to people.

5. Kirsten Gillibrand[**Extensive**]

Teacher's pet.

She's a mom.

That comes out a little bit.

She's thinking of the future of that child. She's trying to make change for the better.

But all you hear is them against each other.

You don't know what to believe.

I believe she said something about bringing the troops back.

Of course she has war profits. She's never owned up to any of the information.

6. Congress

If I got as little work done as they do, I'd be out of a job.

Just wonder what it is that they really do.

- Is the current Congress worse than in times past or is this just politics as usual?

I think they're all the same.

I'd like to know more about these pay raises. My husband is self employed, and we pay taxes through the nose, and insurance is so expensive, and we hear they've given themselves payraises.

7. [IF NOT MENTIONED IN PREVIOUS DISCUSSION], Mark Foley [**Extensive**]

Oh!

Character counts.

If you're in a public position like that you should be all the more careful.

You've got people in congress and they're supposed to be upstanding. I'm a practicing catholic and this is like that.

I think there's probably a lot more of that going on that we never know about.

I don't think he was punished like he should have been. I think in certain positions you have to be to a higher standard.

Is is mostly about him, or does it go further?

That's what it is. . . IT goes further.

It's almost as bad.

With my license, if I know about child abuse and don't report it, I can lose my license. Certain people seem to be above what you and I would be held to.

- What does the Foley case say about Congress?
- What does the Foley case say about Republicans in Congress?

[Written Exercise – Handouts #1 and #2]

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

- What good things come to mind when you think of Bush? [**Discuss**]

I've got nothing.

Family man.

I put Republican.

I couldn't think of anything.g

I think he thought he was addressing September 11. I think he still thinks it.

I really think he thinks he's addressing it.

Deep down he cares about our men and women over there.

- What doubts do you have? What worries you about him? **[Extensive]**

Is he an honest man? He appears sneaky or something. If he had sons, would they be in the war?

Seems to favor rich people over the middle class.

I agree.

I think he has no clue about the average American.

He had a very privileged life.

I don't think rich people know what it's like to struggle.

He's an extremely poor speaker.

He has this smirk about him always. You want to slap him.

Makes you want to slap him.

Hides behind that name of his father.

Little slow on getting things done. Like with Katrina. Busy doing personal things. Don't think he really checks into the people in charge of things. I think he sits back. Like with 9/11 they didn't act on the warnings.

I put down gas prices. Along with the war.

Well he owns oil companies, right.

Did you notice that gas is coming down now right before the election.

I think that in this day and age there's no reason our cars can't be running on a combination of things.

I'm also concerned about how he knew about the woman with the CIA. You have any boundaries. . . .

She wrote a book.

Just whether or not he'll do what he promises. Follow through. Like with Katrina.

Not a feel for the poor.

It was the poor it affected more than anybody.

I think there's something fishy about how he got in to begin with.

IV. Election 2006 (10 minutes)

In less than two months, we will have elections for Congress, so let's talk about the upcoming elections now.

1. For you personally, what is this upcoming election about? What is the most important factor that will determine how you vote for Congress?

■ **Probe on personal traits, but push through to issues as well**

Just being undecided and not liking feeling that way. For Sweeney and Gillibrand to stop talking about themselves and tell us what they'll do.

I want someone who'll bring results. I want to see it.

Taxes.

Gas.

Property taxes. I'd like to see them come down. Even school taxes.

I have a personal issue. I'm a state worker and I think Republicans need a boot in the rear end.

We're losing jobs.

School issues.

School safety, that has to be addressed. Not just NY, nationwide.

I'd like to see a break for the elderly, on taxes. Health care.

2. So what are you hearing so far in this election? Have you heard anything from the candidates here in Connecticut, the candidates that you will be choosing from?

■ **Stay focused on House race**

Nothing.

We haven't gotten a lot of information out in this election.

I feel like I don't know much and nobody else does either.

"Caught red handed" and then Sweeney turned around and did it to Gillibrand.

Gillibrand's teacher likes her.

I'd like a little list of what they'll do

3. Let's talk about the Republicans and the elections for Congress in November.
 - When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Republicans?
 - And what holds you back from voting for the Republicans?
 - What are the consequences if Republicans remain in power?
 - **Probe on Iraq, Social Security, gas prices, health care, any other concerns that have been raised**
4. Now, let's talk about the Democrats and the elections for Congress in November.

- When thinking about your vote, what reasons are there to vote for the Democrats?
- And what holds you back from voting for the Democrats?
- If Democrats take back control of the House and/or the Senate, how will things be different in this country? What, if anything, will change in Washington?

We'd have more control over whether or not we'd stay in Iraq. It seems that the democrats don't want to stay in Iraq.

Maybe there'd be more scandals like Clinton had. It's weird because I lean more toward republicans, but it seems like you hear more about democrats.

Hear more about democrats cater to special interest groups.

V. Ad Testing (50 minutes)

[Written Exercise – Handouts #3-#10]

As many of you have probably seen already, everyone’s favorite part of the campaign season – the television ads – have already begun here in Florida. I’d like to show you some of these ads, and for each one, I’d like you to do two things:

First, rate how this ad makes you feel about your choice in this election on this scale (explain scale, shown below).

<i>More</i>										<i>More</i>
<i>Likely</i>					<i>No</i>					<i>Likely</i>
<i>Gillibrand</i>					<i>Diff</i>					<i>Sweeney</i>
5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5

Then below that, in just a few words or phrases, tell me **in your own words** what this ad says to you – that is, if you were watching television at home and saw this ad, what would you take away from it?

Sweeney Health Care

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
	4	3	1	3						

For children.
 Seems to be concerned about healthcare.
 I don’t need to see him holding a baby.
 Didn’t think he was really concerned about healthcare for women and children.
 He has done those things.
 It was nice that it was an ad about what he was for.
 Informational.

Gillibrand Pay Raise Attack on Sweeney

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					1	1	4	1	1	1

This was more clear than his. It was specific.
 I feel like the troops are sticking their necks out for us.
 That money could go towards them.
 Or towards ending the war.
 I liked the website.
Zero?
 When it gets to this point, I’m not listening anymore.

Sweeney Response

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D

Gillibrand Iraq/100% Attack on Sweeney

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
					5		1	1	1	2

She wants a new direction. There is no direction.
 I think her ad was more for the whole democratic party than for herself.
 That information was not even known until this election.
 Except I see an ad that says the opposite.
 She didn't say anything about her direction.
 She's benefiting from the war.
 I like the promises of change, but I don't see anything.
 I'm all for change and new directions, but there was a slant there.

Iraq Vet Mother for Sweeney

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
1	1	2	1		3			1		1

The ad said he was helping our servicepeople and keeping his word.
 He had compassion for her.
 This is a mother who says she doesn't believe in the war but he acted on it.
 —
 She said he did something, but I want to know what he did.
 I don't know what he did. He said what he planned to do.
 It's taking this poor woman — I don't know what did he do, and who approached this woman.

Gillibrand Cutting Taxes for Middle Class

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
						1	2	2	4	1

It was better directed. Talked about tax cuts, property taxes. Higher education. . . For middle class people, that's good.
 She says what you want to hear.
 Wish you could take away the little printout. . . how is she going to do it?
 She was talking about what she wanted to do. What is she anyway?

Sweeney Attack on Gillibrand

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
2		2			5					1

It was because of the HUD. We live in a HUD subsidized apartment. To know that it's true.
 But on the other hand how did she get where she is if she did such a horrible job. HE's saying the only thing she ever did was horrible?
 How do you get proof of that. They don't say what she did.
 I think ads like that are useless. That's when I go do dishes.
 About this time that I start getting disgusted.
You went five for Sweeney?
 I'd change it now. He's not saying what it is.

Is this raising fair questions?

Sure.

So how can you find out the truth?

That's what he needs to follow up with. Or have a website.
I know Gillibrand has a website.

Roskam Immigration Attack on Duckworth

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
1		2	2	1	3	1				

You're talking about something illegal. That's money going to the wrong people. It should be going to our poor.
Right down to teaching them English. That's a big cost right there.
I agree that they should be here legally. They're wonderful workers and they're here to help their families.
How many of us don't have health care?
Did it say she'd voted this way, or was going to vote this way — I wasn't sure where the information was coming from.

Perlmutter

5R	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5D
			2				2	3	3	2

Said exactly what the issues were. What I wanted to hear about.
What changes are going to happen.
They're going to say we need to do something, but it's never I'm going to do something.
I liked the alternative energy bit.
Are you copying?
It's popular to say redeploy, but alternative energy is a really positive thing.
It was showing the farming — you can get fuel from grain.
That's the type of people we need, who know what they're doing.
An ad like that with them speaking is what you need. So you can see how he plans to do it. I'd listen more to him.
I like candidates more debating, saying what they stand for.

For all ads:

- **Show of hands, then discuss each one**
- **Explore takeaways**
- **Which of these ads addresses what is important in the election?**
- *Probe on takeaways: do Republican tax and immigration attacks hold you back from the Democrat? Are you concerned about Democratic Congress?*

Mail Pieces (No written scale – Rate by hands, discuss)

Sweeney Drunk Driving

I'd shred it.

I'd toss it.

Does it raise questions?

I'd just look at it and say it was trash. I think the headlines are great, but. . .

It says Sweeney had 1 or 2 drinks. . . How many things do these people go to and have a beer.

IT it was a number that was at all prominent, you'd have it there.

Does it matter that he was a DWI coordinator?

He had 1 or 2 glasses of wine. . .

But on the other hand, our leaders are supposed to lead in a positive direction.

VI. Final Ballot (5 minutes)

[Written exercise – Handout #11]

1. Finally, I want you to choose, if the election were held today, which one you would vote for – based on everything we've discussed tonight. Circle which candidate you would choose, then briefly write why in the space below. **[Written only]**