

POST ELECTION STRESS AND ANXIETY (PESA)

By Janlee Wong

The shocking perhaps terrifying election results are in and many social workers are dismayed, depressed and severely anxious about the country's future. Already suffering from election stress many are now suffering from post election stress and anxiety (PESA). As professionals who help others, here are some ideas on helping ourselves.

- Learn about post election stress and anxiety (PESA)
- Self care
- Avoid self medicating
- Change it up
- Connect with a support group

POST ELECTION STRESS AND ANXIETY (PESA)

We might be feeling "how could this happen?" and are we that "out of touch" with the millions of people that voted the other way (roughly 59.7 million)? We can get past those feelings with some post election analysis.

Here are some non evidence based theories (opinions). That candidate who won, employed some effective tactics, methods and strategies that were unconventional and perhaps not even considered by his opponents. These include a masterful use of the media in a mass audience way and a unique application of a multiple target audience strategy.

The ideal communications strategy is always to get your name and your message out so you can amass enough support to win. In this case there is no greater communications outreach than to have 24/7 media exposure that's free and constant. Was there not a day or moment when this candidate was not in the news, in social media, talk shows, newspapers, the internet, etc.? Who tweets at 3am in the morning? The first debate pulled in 60 million viewers. What if you had the 60 million audience every day for 15 months straight. Now that's reaching a massive audience.

However to get 24/7 media coverage you can't just be an average person. It definitely helps if you are already a big media star with a popular TV show, have a personality bigger than life and an image of a successful billionaire businessman. But media celebrities aren't always successful politically. For that you need a message that resonates politically. Ronald Reagan was our first example of that. This candidate had not just one message, but a whole litany of messages. People had choice of which message resonated with them and they chose them.

While everyone doesn't agree with everything this candidate said (outrageous, sexist, racist, xenophobic, non-inclusive stuff), if you're bombarding 40-60 million people every day with these

multiple messages, you're bound to reach millions of them with a message that they agree with. People who are unhappy enough with the current situation will gravitate to one or more of the messages that explain the reasons for their unhappiness. For example, if you're feeling you're losing economically, many of these messages can explain it (international trade, immigrants taking jobs, over taxation, excessive government regulation, incompetent government, etc.). If you don't agree with some of the messages, you can forgive the candidate for those messages if you agree strongly with the others.

So you've got free mass communication program and your messaging strategy. There's yet another twist that helped propel the victory. The opposition underestimated the candidate and his supporters. Let's say using the communications and messaging tactics and strategies described above, you're able to reach millions of non-voters who decide to turn out and vote for the first time. We don't have solid researched numbers but even if just 10% of those who agree but have never voted (say 2 million) came out to vote, that would be enough to swing the swing states.

And the candidate's poll numbers are understated because these never have voted people don't show up on any lists to be polled or if it's simply a poll of all eligible voter people that's misleading because the popular vote can go one way and the electoral college can go another as we all know.

If we accept this explanation of what happened we can not only not blame anyone for the outcome including ourselves, but we can improve our understanding of that candidate's supporters and move away from demonizing them. That would be the first step towards recovery and maybe even reconciliation which we need to do for this candidate's first term so we can fight for the second term.

OTHER STEPS

Self care. We social workers can and do practice what we preach to our clients. Good rest and sleep, healthy diet, exercise and relaxing activities.

Avoid self-medicating. Don't overdo the stimulants or depressants such as caffeine and nicotine, alcohol, drugs, etc. By the way, coincidentally, California legalized marijuana in this same election but there's a two year implementation window.

Change it up. If your mind starts to dwell too much on the election results and those fears and anxieties start to appear, go for a walk, focus on some activity, task or function, find someone to talk to.

Stay connected. Being around people we care about and care about us is a wonderful way to get away from it. You may end up talking about the election but you'll just as soon start talking about something else. We're lucky to have two or more major holidays after the election to do

so. And, NASW is also a wonderful place to connect with colleagues and professionals who know about feelings but also about our ethics and values, our social justice, social action and political action goals. Many social workers are moving forward on these fronts with a resolve to struggle further and not give up the fight.