



## The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

### **Interviewee: Ken Mehlman**

Current: Member & Global Head of Public Affairs, KKR

In 2004: Campaign Manager, George W. Bush 2004 Re-Election Campaign

### **Interviewer: Dr. Michael Nelson**

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**December 13, 2013**

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Q: OK. Your connection with George W. Bush, how did that come about?

MEHLMAN: While I was born in Maryland and went to school in Pennsylvania and in Massachusetts, for some reason I, for a long time, was a Texan, by employment. So I worked originally, out of law school, for a law firm that was based in Texas, Akin Gump, and then I worked for two members of Congress, both who were from Texas -- and in that process got to know Governor Bush, got to know his record, and really respected the approach he took, which he described as compassionate conservatism, whereby he looked for using conservative means to accomplish broader societal ends, whether it was improving education, whether it was the approach you took with respect to immigration, whether it was using civil society to help fight poverty and to provide people with more mobility. These are all things I really [01:00] believed in and I was inspired by. So as I became more politically active and as I became more involved as a business-- first as a lawyer and then working in -- from two members of Congress, I looked for opportunities to get to know folks in the Bush administration and the governor's administration. And that's how I got to know him.



Q: Well, I picked up in a bio that you also had a John Kerry connection, in the sense that you worked for Bill Weld --

MEHLMAN: I did.

Q: -- when he ran against Kerry in '96. Did you inform any impressions of Kerry?

MEHLMAN: It wasn't '96. I worked for Governor Weld in 1990, when he first ran. So I started a group called Harvard Students for Weld. There were like four of us. (laughter) Actually, there were more than you'd think. That year, if you remember, he ran against John Silber. And he actually did very well, as I recall, both among Harvard students and, generally, among people who worried about -- then it was the president -- of Boston University -- Mr. Silber's more combustible [02:00] personality and liked the approach that Governor Weld took -- or then candidate Weld took.

Q: And what was your job, in the 2000 campaign?

MEHLMAN: In 2000, I was the National Field Director.

Q: And looking back on that campaign, coming out of that campaign, were there lessons you learned from that experience -- you and the campaign, generally --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- that stood you in good stead, in --?

MEHLMAN: There were definitely really big lessons that we learned. I've always thought that, in life -- and it's not just in politics -- I think about it in business too -- what you do wrong is more important than what you do right, in some ways, if you can learn from it. So, often, sustained success can be dangerous, because it can lull you into believing that, in fact, you're so great, when, in fact, often you're just fortunate. And similarly, mistakes or things that don't go as well as you want can be huge opportunities for growth. So if you think about it, we lost the popular vote in 2000, by 500,000 votes. And in the final several days before the election, our numbers went down. And part of that [03:00] clearly was the DUI revelation. But part of it also, we thought, was we could do a much better job in how we turn out voters. So we came up with a concept we called the 72-hour effort, around the last 72 hours of the campaign. And we literally studied every aspect of how you target, how you identify, how you motivate, and how you turn out voters. And we used the 2002 election cycle as a giant laboratory for how we would identify more effective tactics, going forward. And it's one of the things that ultimately led to the use of essentially data analytics, which was, at the time, called micro-targeting, which was very important to our success in 2004. And it also convinced us the important of person-to-person, of me as your neighbor talking to you about



the candidate, rather than relying simply on kind of paid operations, paid calls or paid efforts. So the two, kind of, critical pillars of the 2004 campaign, which was more precise targeting [04:00] of voters, through all kinds of means but using data analytics, big data, as they say today, and, secondly, mobilizing a giant army, or person-to-person persuasion -- we -- much more effective and more anonymous persuasion, both were born out of the lessons we learned from 2000, that we thought we could do better in four years.

Q: I think there was also a sense, in 2000, that a couple particular groups didn't have the kind of turnout that you were counting on, evangelicals and, given Governor Bush's support among Latinos in Texas elections, Latinos. So were those particular groups that you thought you could...?

MEHLMAN: Yeah. I think that what you saw in 2000 with respect to evangelical voters, in part was a reaction to the DUI. I always felt that was part of -- a group that was particularly potentially impacted by that. But I think both of these groups were also groups through which more precise targeting... What do you care ab--? Remember, more precise targeting means we figure out more specifically what you care about, what issue motivates you, how to talk about it motivates you, [05:00] and who you find to be persuasive to make the case to you. That was something that would affect all voters but including those two groups. For Latino voters, I definitely think... You know, we went from, I believe, 39% to 44%. By the way, it's no accident that the only time in the last six presidential elections the Republican Party has won either a majority of the vote or the popular vote was in 2004, the election we got 27% of the nonwhite vote. If Republicans don't change the denominator, if they don't add to the number of people they're potentially targeting, they're going to keep losing -- we're going to keep losing elections.

Q: Two thousand two, you mentioned. That...

MEHLMAN: That was a good election. (laughs)

Q: Pardon?

MEHLMAN: A good election.

Q: Was a very good election, and one in which the president played an unusually active role for a president. I mean, he did more fundraising events, might have done more campaign appearances. You all were involved. And by the way, your job in the White House...

MEHLMAN: I was the Political Director in the first -- or in the 2002 midterm.

Q: You all were involved in [06:00] recruiting more --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.



- Q: -- Republican candidates. Two thousand two, can you talk about that?
- MEHLMAN: Well, sure. Look, the president, when he ran for office, said his goal was to avoid a lonely victory -- the first time. And he felt the same way in 2004. Our goal wasn't just it would be cool to be president, it'd be fun to have (laughs) Air Force One, the White House is a nice, you know, residence. His theory was he wanted to accomplish some pretty important things, whether it was education reform, whether it was tax changes that would spur more economic growth. He had a pretty robust platform. And if you're going to do that, then electing likeminded men and women is quite important. And so, throughout his presidency, he worked to try to do that.
- Q: That's very unusual, isn't it, I mean --
- MEHLMAN: Well, I think...
- Q: -- especially for a president running for reelection?
- MEHLMAN: Yeah, I mean, different presidents have done it different ways. I think we had also the benefit, in 2002, of the fact that the president, in that cycle, was very popular. So people wanted him to come in and help them. So that was also helpful to us. I think most presidents [07:00] would like to do that. It's a question of how helpful they are or not. There are cycles where presidents are more helpful and there are cycles where they're less helpful.
- Q: The Breakfast Club.
- MEHLMAN: Yeah.
- Q: Can you talk about that?
- MEHLMAN: Sure. In addition to being a good movie --
- Q: (laughs)
- MEHLMAN: -- it was a -- it was a group of us that would get together, usually for brunch -- it was like late morning, early afternoon on Sundays -- at Karl Rove's house, during the 2003, 2004 period, leading up to the 2004 election, and really do some, kind of, long-term planning. So if you think about a presidential campaign, you can't control almost anything. Right?
- Q: Mm-hmm.
- MEHLMAN: There are, every day, crazy things that come up. So the way I believe you deal with an environment like that... And again, this is a great lesson not just for politics but for business. If you're going to live in a volatile world, as many things as you can take off the table and plan away beforehand, you want to do. So the theory was let's, together, figure out, think about, and resolve issues we know [08:00] are going to come up in the next week or two weeks or three weeks, so



that we can spend all of our mental energy and have command focus on those things that are unexpected, that come up. And it served us very well.

Q: So who was part of this group?

MEHLMAN: The group was a broad group. It included, in addition to Karl, myself... Karen Hughes was often a part of it. Ed Gillespie was part of it. Nicolle Wallace was part of it. Marc Racicot was often a participant in the effort. Dan Bartlett was part of it. And others would come in and leave as necessary. Steve Schmidt was often part of it. Sara Taylor was often part of it. Matthew Dowd was part of it. But the goal was, again... Terry Nelson often a part of it. Mark Wallace participated often in it. But the goal was, in all of these situations, to bring as many smart people as you could together, to resolve these issues you knew were going to come up, don't wait, so you can spend all your energy in reacting --

Q: So wha--

MEHLMAN: -- and thinking about the best way to react.

Q: -- so what were the issues that you thought you could anticipate or...?

MEHLMAN: Well, every week there were things we knew th-- We knew when employment numbers would come out. We didn't know what [09:00] they would be. But we knew when unemployment numbers would come out, for example. We knew when key announcements would happen. We knew when the debates were going to be. We knew when we would announce how much we had raised in the previous several weeks. And we knew when the Democratic primaries were. So plan a -- develop a plan of action around those now. And then you can spend all your time and all your energy on these other questions.

Q: This group was a combination of White House people and --

MEHLMAN: It was.

Q: -- RNC and other political people.

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: How -- what's the relationship, for a president running for reelection, between --

MEHLMAN: It's a huge question.

Q: -- the White House...?

MEHLMAN: And, in fact, if you look, historically -- we studied this -- one of the biggest lessons from previous reelection campaigns, is the typical dysfunction between the White House and the reelection campaign. Usually, everybody in the reelection campaign thinks that the people in the White House are slow idiots --

Q: (laughs)

MEHLMAN: -- they could do their job better. And vice versa, between the White House --



toward the presidential campaign. And we thought, “How do we avoid that challenge?” And one way is those kind of planning sessions. Another way was that we made very clear that, while there’d [10:00] be a whole lot of different conversations going on, in terms of real decisions, the decision-making was between Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman, as campaign manager and as Senior Advisor to the President. And so, while other may have ideas... And they could communicate it. It wasn’t like you only talked through us. That would be ridiculous. But in terms of when you have the authority of the White House talking, it’d be the two of us talking.

Q: So at some point, you left the White House --

MEHLMAN: I did.

Q: -- to become campaign manager. When was that?

MEHLMAN: March of 2003. I think it was March -- February, March, sometime in that period. Although I knew I was going to do... I mean, the -- President Bush had asked me to do this back in 2002.

Q: And going into 2003, were you all making any...? Maybe assumptions is too strong a word. But did you have any thoughts about who your likely opponent was going to be?

MEHLMAN: We didn’t know that. We knew the following. One, it would be a tough campaign. We assumed that from the beginning. The country had been polarized. It was still polarized. The president’s approval was good but not great at all. And we assumed, which turned out to be the case, [11:00] he would win reelection with lower approval than any previous president in modern times -- which he did. He was -- he had about 51%, 50% approval, upper 40s leading up to the election. And he got 51% of the vote. Usually presidents are either, like President Reagan or President Clinton, over 53, which case they’re clearly going to get reelected, or, like President Carter or the 41<sup>st</sup> president Bush -- their numbers were much lower, in which case it’s a really uphill slog. We were in the middle. By the way, President Obama was in the middle too. So we assumed it would be a very close election. That was the first thing. Second thing is we assumed, and I think this is very important, elections are usually about attributes, not issues. One of the mistakes, in my opinion, that people make who watch politics and who are, therefore subsumed in issues, is to think the average voter is similarly subsumed in voters -- issues. The average voter... You know that book *Blink*, by Malcolm Gladwell?

Q: Yes.



MEHLMAN: The average voter makes those kinds of reactions to candidates. And ultimately, it's a job hire [12:00]. When I hire someone here in my job, at KKR or at one of our -- looking to recommend a hire to one of our portfolio companies, I'm looking not just for what substantive experience they have. I'm looking for what kind of person they are. I'm looking for their attributes. And I think, similarly, in a reelection campaign or an election campaign, attributes are critical. So we thought the president's attribute that would be most important and relevant to voters was the fact that he was a strong leader, particularly a strong leader at a time when the country faced a war and a, really, existential threat. So those, to us, were most important. And we didn't know who the opponent would be but we thought, "Tough election. Attributes are important." And we also thought critical to the election would be how we did among Latino voters and how did among suburban women. They were the two most important constituencies that were most volatile.

Q: It's interesting, because in 2000 Governor Bush's appeal was strongly on domestic issues. And you [13:00] mentioned the compassionate conservatism.

MEHLMAN: But that was an attribute appeal too. So when he talked about education reform or compassionate conservatism, people didn't say, "I like this aspect of his education reform plan." It was an attribute thing. People elected President Bush in 2000, in my opinion, because they thought, first, he was going to bring honor and dignity to the White House, which they liked, and, second, because they said, "The approach he takes to issues is an inclusive approach, it's a thoughtful approach, it's an approach that we think can help make our country better because of the kind of leader he is," rather than the specifics. Issues are lenses through which voters look and make a judgment about an individual candidate.

Q: OK. So from an attribute standpoint, I mean, the big surprise in '03 was that suddenly Governor Dean was a phenomenon.

MEHLMAN: Right. (laughs)

Q: What did you see in the Dean campaign? Did you think -- how did you think it would play out? Did you want to run against Dean? Did you think he would win?

MEHLMAN: Well, we thought Governor Dean appealed to, obviously, a growing restiveness among a big part of the electorate, [14:00] with respect to the Iraq War. And it was a real appeal. And Governor Dean also benefited from strong grassroots. And he built a strong grassroots... At the time, they called it netroots. What's interesting is... There's... I cite books a lot. I apologize (laughs) for that. But there's a really good book called *David and Goliath*, by also Malcolm Gladwell.



And one of the theses of the book is that underdogs have certain advantages, they just don't know it yet. And one of the advantages an underdog have -- has is that many underdogs, because they're underdogs, have to be more innovative than their more well financed or well positioned incumbent challenger. And Governor Dean didn't have that much money, when he started, and wasn't as well known and didn't have the national network, say, that a Governor K-- Governor -- that a -- that a Dick Gephardt had or Joe Lieberman, having run for vice president, had or John Kerry had or other people. And so he had to innovate more. And his netroots they developed, the use of essentially social media, [15:00] meet-ups, to mobilize people was a very smart move. And it was interesting to watch. And certainly, I felt like we learned, watching Governor Dean and watching what Joe Trippi put together -- we learned something about, again, the power of neighbor mobilizing and influencing neighbor. And we tried to adopt similar tactics in our effort.

Q: Did you think he would -- his candidacy would continue to be as strong, on into '04, or did you think...?

MEHLMAN: Was -- it was unclear. I mean, you know, you can't ever predict who your opponent is. At the end of the day, the challenge I think he faced was whether his more grassroots effort, more kind of prairie fire could catch and spread, without the resources -- you know, kind of the supply chain, supply lines that a more well financed campaign had. And he ultimately didn't have that.

Q: Seems like there's a tremendous -- looking at President Bush now, is a tremendous advantage for an incumbent president who doesn't face a primary.

MEHLMAN: Huge advantage. There is, no question. [16:00] And if you stop and you think about it, in recent elections Repub-- Democrat and Republican presidents who have not faced a primary challenge have almost consistently been reelected. So I can't think of a situation where they haven't been reelected. When they face a primary challenge, they've almost invariably lost too, 41, President Carter being the two most recent examples --

Q: In fact --

MEHLMAN: -- President Ford too.

Q: -- other than Clinton, every recent president, st-- back to Ford, had faced a primary challenge.

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: So was this ever something that you worried about as a potential problem?



- MEHLMAN: You know, we didn't think, if you looked at where the country was and particularly where the right side of the electorate was in 2002 and -3 -- I did not think that that was a real risk.
- Q: OK. By the way, what are the advantages that a president gains from...?
- MEHLMAN: Well, I mean, like a president has the ability to set the agenda. And the president has an ability to plan. And a president has the ability to raise resources. You've got the biggest bully pulpit in the history of the world. You also have a lot of problems. Everything bad that happens, you own. So there's challenges too.
- Q: Well, you all start-- once it became that [17:00] John Kerry was going to be the nominee... First of all, when did you come to that understanding.
- MEHLMAN: (laughs)
- Q: An--
- MEHLMAN: We had predictions, along the way --
- Q: Yeah.
- MEHLMAN: -- a lot of us did. John Kerry, if you thought about it, was the most conventional choice, I think, to be the Democratic nominee for president. And so, while you saw the prairie fire of Howard Dean catch, you also thought... John Kerry was always a -- quite a formidable candidate, I thought.
- Q: And had you observed him, when you were in Massachusetts, in particular, or since then?
- MEHLMAN: I hadn't observed him much in Massachusetts. We certainly watched him in the Senate. And we watched him, obviously, as a candidate?
- Q: And in March of '04, you all started advertising --
- MEHLMAN: We did.
- Q: -- in a big way, on the assumption that Kerry had the nomination.
- MEHLMAN: Right.
- Q: What were -- what was the ad ca-- Why was it timed then? What were the themes th--?
- MEHLMAN: Well, look, again, in a world where -- as exists today massively but then, to some degree, too -- a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention. So the traditional thinking, which is advertise a lot in the fall -- is a time where there's [18:00] absolutely an absurd amount of information on the airwaves. If you live in Ohio or Florida or Pennsylvania or others -- Virginia -- today, in the fall you're not paying attention (laughs) too much, because there's so much coming at you. And what we thought was, to be able to, when there isn't as much information, capture people's attention probably made some sense. So that's why we thought



it made sense to do that. And also, look-- defining things up front, we thought was important.

Q: So wha--?

MEHLMAN: And we thought it was important -- if you recall the ads we launched with -- it was important to remind people the kind of leader President Bush was. These were ads, in the beginning, that were about President Bush and the leadership he had shown.

Q: The vice presidential nomination for th-- on the Republican side, was it ever in doubt? Was there ever any thought that an alternative to Vice President Chene--?

MEHLMAN: Well, as you know, from President Bush's own book and from Peter Baker's book, there was a brief discussion. [19:00] But I don't believe it was ever seriously thought about, a change.

Q: Discussion... Can you describe that?

MEHLMAN: A discussion involving whether it made sense for -- Senator Frist. And it was a discussion with about three people. And it never went anywhere.

Q: OK. You mentioned unexpected events earlier, the kind you can't anticipate, which the president owns. So maybe you could take one of those and talk about how you all handled it. And I'm thinking of Abu Ghraib in April of '04.

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: So if something like that happens, tell me -- tell me what the response is in the c--

MEHLMAN: Well, the reality is that's not a political or campaign issue. That wasn't something Ken Mehlman is responsible for handling. That's something that the Defense Department and the National Security Advisor are focused on. We have to deal with it. We have to explain their reaction to it. But it's not our issue, in the sense that they're saying, "OK, Ken, how do we respond?" President Bush would not have done that. He did not do that.

Q: No, I understand that. But an event like that clearly, in c-- along with other things that [20:00] had not gone as well as people had hoped, in Iraq...

MEHLMAN: Sure. Remember the nu--? We had one month where the job number was like one. (laughs) Or there was a terrible jobs report, I remember. I remember, that spring, there were a couple of just awful mornings.

Q: So politically... Granted you're not making the policy decisions. But politically, what do you do, once -- when you pick up the paper one morning, or whatever the equivalent is today, and see, "Here's an i-- here's an item on the national agenda that could hurt us" --

MEHLMAN: Well, you have to try to --



Q: -- "How do we keep it f--"?

MEHLMAN: -- you try to -- you try to explain it in the context of what your overall thesis about the campaign was. And so our thesis about the campaign was that the country wanted a strong leader at a time of war. And at the same time, we thought it was very important... The president -- the substance was the president was furious about that and felt terrible about that. A huge part of what we were trying to do in Iraq, and this expanded when we did the surge, was not just to simply remove Saddam Hussein but the thesis was that a democracy, in the heart of the Middle East, would be very important to [21:00] dealing with the underlying poisonous feeling that, to some degree, leads to terrorism. And that was what President Bush believed. He believed that the autocracies that existed in the Middle East bred terrible resentment, which, and in turn, made terrorism much more likely to be supported. Doesn't justify it but democracy would be the solution. So when you have a situation where the people that are involved in liberation are also engaging in such deplorable behavior and disrespectful behavior to the population that you're dealing with, it's terrible. And President Bush felt that way. He said it. We thought that your job, as the campaign, was not to get in the way of his saying, was to echo his messaging if we were asked about it.

Q: Well, y-- back to the attributes theme. What did you think were the attributes that Senator Kerry had as a candidate that were in his favor and that you thought were wea-- potentially weaknesses?

MEHLMAN: Look, the fact that he served his country in an honorable way [22:00] was a huge advantage. He was an experienced senator. He was a obviously credible president, from day one. I think, if you looked at his record in the Senate, you looked at his service to our country, he was someone who, from day one, was credible as a potential president. So he overcame that very important threshold, that a lot of candidates, by the way, don't overcome. I also thought he was somebody that, if you looked at his record in the Senate, was a thoughtful guy and had approached a number of issues in a way that was not always just the conventional way of thinking. So I thought he brought those attributes to the table. I think his challenge was -- and it's a situation that a lot of candidates face -- was that in the primary, because the primary voters were very upset about the war in Iraq, that he had voted for, how does his square that vote with those primary voters, how does he navigate that very complex situation. I thought that was a challenge. Secondly, I think senators generally have a... There's a reason that, in our lifetimes -- in my lifetime, one, and that is Barack Obama, [23:00] and



other people who may be watching this, two, John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama, two senators are only elected president. And that is the skills one gets as a senator are not necessarily the skills that leadership -- are most amenable to leadership. And that doesn't mean we don't have great senators who are leaders but they're different kinds of leadership skills. One is more negotiation. One is more cajoling. The other is more advocacy and setting a position and persuading others to join that position, one-to-many as opposed to one-to-one. And so I think any senator faces that challenge. And I think Senator Kerry did.

Q: I saw you quoted somewhere as saying, and maybe based on your experience in 2000, that, when a -- when a campaign ramps up from a relatively small operation to a large operation, there's a sorting out period there in which the campaign may not be functioning, in that transition time --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- at peak efficiency.

MEHLMAN: Right.

Q: Did you anticipate that would happen with the Kerry campaign, as it ramped up for [24:00] the general?

MEHLMAN: I thought it was possible. Look, at the end of the day... It's interesting you mentioned this. And I'm glad you brought it up. The two books that I encouraged people that worked on my campaign to read were *Moneyball* and *Good to Great*, not political books.

Q: Yeah.

MEHLMAN: And the reason is because, at the end of the day, I viewed my job -- I was the CEO of a company. It was a billion-dollar company, it was a company that would be on the news every single day, and it was a startup. And it was a company that, our business happened to be politics. But my job was management. My job was resource allocation. My job were things that the CEO of any company has to address. And too many people in politics view their job as primarily politics and not management. And so any campaign faces that challenge. And I felt that the Kerry campaign, clearly... Mary Beth Cahill, who ran it, I know. I have huge respect for her. I think she's a smart, very effective manager, as well as a political mind. And that was something that she had to deal with. It was absolutely a challenge. [25:00] All of us... I had to deal with the same challenge.

Q: All right. The Democratic Convention nears, in August. First of all, why is it that the out party's convention is always earlier --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.



- Q: -- than the in party's convention? Because when it comes to the funding for the general election, bo-- And both campaigns took the federal money.
- MEHLMAN: A lot of it is just tradition, I think. And it's just kind of how it's happened over the years.
- Q: What it meant for the Democrats, though, was they had \$75 million to run a three-month campaign --
- MEHLMAN: Right.
- Q: -- and you had \$75 million to run a two-month campaign.
- MEHLMAN: Right.
- Q: Surprised that both parties agree to observe that tradition, when that's....
- MEHLMAN: It's interesting. You know, today, at least, with the participation of outside groups, I feel like that makes less of a difference. But look. In 2004, if you look at outside groups too, we were outspent by more than \$100 million. And we thought that would happen. I remember President Bush, one point, asked me my view what we should do if Senator Kerry had opted out of the federal match. If you remember, that was something he talked about. [26:00] And I told him we should stick where we were. And here's why. It gets back to what I said a minute ago, about good management. Too much money destroys a lot of companies. Too much money loses your focus. Too much money bec-- makes optionality your strategy, as opposed to a real strategy. And I thought that \$88 million, between Labor Day and November 2<sup>nd</sup>... We -- I spent a tremendous amount of time thinking about the budget. I mapped it out six dozen different ways. That money would have gotten us reelected. Extra money would have diverted our attention. It would have had President Bush trying to win states we definitely couldn't win. It would have made optionality our strategy, as opposed to having a serious business strategy for victory, which is what we needed.
- Q: Would it also...? Um, I'm struck by that lonely victory possibility that President Bush wanted to avoid. Would it also have sort of drained money for the presidential, that would have made it harder for...?
- MEHLMAN: I don't think so, because... Look, we -- even with our... [27:00] Having a limited budget, if you've got a really good plan, is not a bad thing, because it imposes discipline. And a lack of discipline, in my experience -- more campaigns have lost for a lack of discipline than anything else. A presidential campaign is rarely -- if you're the nominee, is rarely lost for a lack of resources. It's almost always a lack of discipline or a bad strategy or, at the end of the day, the opponent you're running against is just too strong. And so we were able, with a limited budget, to



not have a lonely victory and to work very closely with House and Senate colleagues.

Q: Did you work with the national organizations --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- or the state-by-state s--

MEHLMAN: Both.

Q: -- individual campaigns?

MEHLMAN: Both. And you know why we did? We wanted them to have skin in the president's game. So when we were trying to win Ohio, as s-- The smartest people about Ohio aren't in Washington. They're in Columbus and they're in Toledo and they're in Cleveland and they're in Akron. And they're all over the state. And so -- it's interesting -- after the 2002 election, I went to every single state, [28:00] that was a major, important state, sat down with the governor and/or the senator -- or both, sat down with their top political advisors, sat down with the people in the top congressional offices, all the people that understood that state. And I said, "Give me a mind dump" --

Q: (laughs)

MEHLMAN: -- "Tell me everything I need to know about your state." And I think... It's always amusing to me, where you have these people in Washington who think they know better, who think they're so smart. And, in fact, there's almost no one I know in Washington who understands a particular state better than the particular people. So we constantly wanted to collaborate. And if we want to collaborate with you...? The most important thing for you is your reelection, not ours. So how do we make it in your interest to collaborate? How do we make it a win-win? And that's what I thought about.

Q: Hm. Cou-- taking you back a little bit, could you talk about, as kind of a case study -- do a mind dump on the -- how you all responded to Senator Kerry's appearance in West Virginia --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- "I voted for the 87 billion before I voted against it"?

MEHLMAN: Yeah. Well, as you recall [29:00] -- beli-- I believe it was a speech he was giving to veterans' group. It may have been VFW. I don't recall the specific group. And our thought was that one of the vulnerabilities and one of the important issues for the campaign was he had voted for the war but, then again, when the pressure from the various groups were there, he voted against the funding. And so we ran a



simple ad that said that. And he reacted to that ad by making that famous statement.

Q: And you all made -- as an attri--

MEHLMAN: We...

Q: -- as an attribute campaign, made a lot of that.

MEHLMAN: Right.

Q: And the attribute you were...?

MEHLMAN: Was essentially leadership and strength in the face of this kind of challenge. And obviously, look, Senator Kerry had an incredible record of obvious strength in the face of challenge, by his service to our country. But we thought that this Iraq War vote for funding, which was much more relevant to the American people's minds at the time, was an important issue, where you saw constancy versus inconstancy.

Q: Back to your really interesting description [30:00] of yourself as a CEO of a large organization. I'm thinking, if -- you know, if a corporation finds that there -- that there are other corporations out there making clones of their product, that's not necessarily something they want.

MEHLMAN: Right! (laughs)

Q: Weren't 527 groups --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- in effect, other people trying to do the same thing you were doing, at least in an advertising way? And you can't connect with them.

MEHLMAN: You can't and you don't. And you just know it's a reality. There's nothing you can do about it. Loo-- I mean, the danger of... Obviously, if you ran Louis Vuitton, then you've got people that are making bags that look just like the bags that you make, for less money -- that are identical in appearance and they're essentially cannibalizing your customers. The people involved in 527s, in both sides, aren't cannibalizing your customers, although they might be cannibalizing your fundraisers -- your donors. But that's the difference. That's a real difference in the...

Q: Well, when the Swift Boat ads starting running, in August, [31:00] I guess that was really the first, sort of, 527 effort that really got a lot of attention. Did you feel like, "This is helping us," or, "This is not helping us"?

MEHLMAN: It wasn't clear. I mean, it was something I couldn't control, so it wasn't as -- I wasn't as focused on it. I'm not sure that the Swift Boat effort, per se... You know, it certainly highlighted an issue that was an issue of controversy. I think that often in a situation, though, particularly in the world we live in today -- and



it's more true today but it was even true then -- again, people aren't paying attention to a particular ad. They're paying attention to a larger conversation, a larger narrative. So what was more important and interesting was how it fit into the larger narrative.

Q: Was there any candidate who Kerry could have chosen for vice president who would have been particularly helpful?

MEHLMAN: I think that's hard to know. The reality is that, in my opinion, when it comes to choosing a vice president, there are two things that are really important. One is what you choose reveals more about the president than it does about the vice president. So when President Clinton chose Al Gore, [32:00] it reinforced what he wanted the public to understand about him, new Democrat, moderate, kind of a new approach. S-- and I think, when President Bush chose Vice President Cheney, then, at the time, an executive in Texas but with deep experience -- he was Secretary Cheney then -- it said, "This guy's serious about governing." I think generally, as a rule, though, vice presidential choices, while important and -- a lot of media attention, don't make that big of a difference. And I think that, in the case of Senator Edwards, it's not clear to me that it fundamentally shook up the campaign or changed the campaign. Could he have chosen someone that would have made a huge difference? Hard to know -- and hard to -- hard to recognize. There were some people that were saying, "Chose a Wesley Clark. It reinforces the military credentials." But that was something that Senator Kerry already had - - and it was a strength he already had. If he had chosen, for example, Dick Gephardt... I always thought Dick Gephardt would have been a very strong opponent, because of his appeal to middle-class voters.

Q: In the presidential? [33:00]

MEHLMAN: Or vice presidential.

Q: Or vice presidential.

MEHLMAN: I always thought one of the issues that we had potential vulnerability on was, while the economy was better, without question, there was still an uncertainty with respect to the economy. And there were a lot of folks, I felt like, who necessarily didn't agree that the economy, in their own lives, had improved. And I thought there was an economic argument that could have been made that wasn't made as much, perhaps, that I thought could have made us more vulnerable. And whether Dick Gephardt -- Congressman Gephardt would have made that more effectively, I don't know the answer to.

Q: What did you think the choice of Edwards revealed about Senator Kerry?



MEHLMAN: I think it was a fairly conventional choice, I think, a fellow senator, somebody who clearly he thought would be very effective out there campaigning and would have appeal, and appeal to suburban voters. That's probably what they thought. I'll be interested to hear what Bob Shrum, who's a good guy and a friend, has to say about that.

Q: Democratic Convention. Did you think they made the most of that opportunity?  
[34:00]

MEHLMAN: I thought it was a good convention. I thought that it was, as I recall... And again, this is (laughs) ten years. So... But I thought generally they had a pretty good convention. It was a little bit past... Look. I mean, I thought the, "Reporting for duty," was very dramatic but it was a little bit looking backward, which I think's always a risk. That's a balance you have to have. But on balance, I thought they had a very -- had a very effective convention.

Q: Was that sort of drawing attention to Senator Kerry and national security? Was that a strategic mistake? I mean, if this election was going to be about national security, wasn't that playing into President Bush's hands?

MEHLMAN: Look, I think that the election was going to fundamentally be about leadership and national security. And, you know, the country had been only three years since the 9/11 attack. So I'm not sure... When you say... I would have -- looking back on it... At the time, you ca-- It's easy to be a Monday morning quarterback. Let's stipulate that. Looking back on it, would a -- would a little more on the economy have potentially helped them? Maybe. But at the end of the day, I think it comes down to attributes. And leadership was going to be the key attribute in this [35:00] election.

Q: The Republican Convention, which was about a month later, and in New York... First of all, how did that decision come about, to hold it in New York City?

MEHLMAN: We thought a lot about it. And look, our two conventions that we chose were both in very blue places, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and New York, New York. So one reason it was here was because we wanted to be clear we're appealing to every single voter. You don't win an election -- you do not win an election if you write off part of the country. And we didn't want to write off any voter in any group anywhere. And New York, I think, had that obvious, important message. Second of all, New York -- it's a business decision (laughs) too, right? -- New York put together an incredible plan, between the efforts of Mayor Bloomberg, of former mayor Rudi Giuliani, of Governor Pataki. They pulled out all the stops to get the convention. They put together a very smart and serious proposal. So



those were the reasons I thought... And there's an awesome city. I mean, this is a city that the whole country can identify with. [36:00] And so we thought that was why it was a good choice.

Q: So there was no, sort of, 9/11 association involved in...?

MEHLMAN: Obviously, there was an association. But look, 9/11 was something that was most urgent and acute in New York but the attacks affected all Americans. And the way this city came together and the strength that the people here showed, I thought, was a good tableau for the American people and how Americans respond to challenge. And so the extent to which we would celebrate that response, for people of all political parties, that struck me as a good thing to do.

Q: You know, you said that the campaign didn't write off any voter anywhere. But... And if tha-- if this were sort of direct election of the president by national popular vote, that would be one thing. But you've got to deal with an Electoral College map.

MEHLMAN: Sure.

Q: And so how do you sort of balance not leaving anybody out with going to the states where you really think you have a tight fight but you need to win?

MEHLMAN: Well, first of all, you do it by having a broad and hopeful national platform. [37:00] You run on something that's going to be relevant and helpful to the whole country. I think education reform is such an example. I think tax reform is such an example. I think enhancing retirement security is such an example. I think protecting our country and keeping us safe in the face of very serious adversaries is such an example. That's one area that you do. And second of all, when you're traveling to different states, you don't just talk to voters who agree with you. So I was very proud... And one of the reasons I went to work for Governor Bush was, when we started of, in 1999 and again in 2003 and -4, he wouldn't just talk to education reform in the suburbs, where, quite frankly, it's less necessary. He'd visit poor rural communities or more blighted urban communities, where really improving schools is a fundamental question of whether people will have the kind of mobility and opportunity that all Americans should have. And I think that's one way that you accomplish that goal.

Q: Let's move on to the [38:00] -- to the debates. How did you all approach those debates? With...? What did you hope to accomplish in those debates? And how did you deal with maybe what now is a more obvious pattern of incumbent presidents --

MEHLMAN: (laughs)



- Q: -- having a hard time getting their game together for that first debate?
- MEHLMAN: Well, the first debate was not a good debate.
- Q: (laughs)
- MEHLMAN: It was -- it was -- that Miami debate, I remember, it was -- it was quite unpleasant. I remember watching the Ker-- the Obama first debate, thinking, "I know how they feel." (laughter) Look, at the end of the day, you want the debates to reinforce the same themes that overall campaign's about. They're not about something different. It's a -- it's a campaign. It's a broad effort. And you need to make sure that, in the -- the comments you make on the stage -- the candidates make -- and they're prepped for it -- and the comments afterwards, you're trying to reinforce those same themes. And that's what we try to do.
- Q: So specifically, what did -- what were you -- what themes were you trying to reinforce?
- MEHLMAN: Leadership, strength, at a time of war, the fact that the economy, which was in a recession [39:00] the time President Bush was elected, or was going into one, had improved and had come back, had gotten better, and what we tried to do in his second term, from keeping Americans safe to having more retirement options for people, for more retirement security, to continuing to build on the progress we made with respect to education reform, to the Freedom Agenda, which was spreading freedom around the world, to places where today -- or back then, as well, there wasn't the kind of freedom we wanted, as Americans.
- Q: You know, the Democrats will say that President Bush showed up to debate a caricature of Senator Kerry. They thought it would longwinded. Hence, the red light.
- MEHLMAN: No, Ker-- Senator Kerry, I thought, was very able in the debates. And we didn't think that. Because we had watched previous debates that he had engaged in and he had been quite effective.
- Q: And did President Bush prepare as thoroughly for the debates...?
- MEHLMAN: Yeah. I mean, look, the first debate was certainly not a very good debate by President Bush. I think he would tell you the same thing. But I think he prepared [40:00] and was ready. And I felt the other two debates did well.
- Q: What did you think came out of the debates, as a whole?
- MEHLMAN: I'm not sure the debates fundamentally changed the race. The first debate had the potential to. But because, the second and third, the two candidates were more even or even President Bush, was stronger, I think that it really didn't fundamentally change the election.



- Q: What occurs to me is that, debate by debate, you could argue that Kerry won all three but that what came out of the debates, in terms of memorable things, were global test --
- MEHLMAN: Right.
- Q: -- and Mary Cheney --
- MEHLMAN: Yeah.
- Q: -- which were -- which would -- which worked for you.
- MEHLMAN: Yeah. Interesting.
- Q: So I guess what I wonder is do you f-- your approach to the debates, was it sort of...?
- MEHLMAN: It's an interesting point. If you think historically, there's an -- you know, there's the famous, "There you go again" (laughs) --
- Q: Yeah.
- MEHLMAN: -- or in 1984 when President Reagan says, "I will not use my opponent's age and inexperience against them."
- Q: Yeah.
- MEHLMAN: And he had been killed in the first debate. And even the second one was only OK. But that line made such a difference. Or when President Bush, 41, was looking at his watch not because he was tired but because he wanted to make sure [41:00] he was keeping time. Or when President Clinton went out... It's a really good point that... You know, it reinforces that theory I said about *Blink*. The public doesn't look and pay attention the way you or I might. They have a few things they remember. And those were certainly things, that you identified, that they would have remembered.
- Q: It's not just the public. I mean, you all, as a campaign, seized on those moments and brought them to the -- to the center of national attention.
- MEHLMAN: You know, campaigns do that sometimes but the truth is it's really whether the public thinks they're important or not, I think, as much as anything. I mean, global test was important because it reinforced a certain... I remember, the week before our convention, President Bush was on *The Today Show*, I believe it was. And President Bush was asked about the War on Terror. And he gave a -- an answer that wasn't as smooth as he might have and he basically said, "We're not going to win this War on Terror." And I remember there was a whole effort by a number of our opponents to really seize on that and say, "Ah, see what he's saying?" I remember thinking, "People aren't going to buy this," because it's not in character [42:00] of who he is. And people know how zealous he is in prosecuting this war.



And the challenge with global test, I thought, was that it reinforced in a concern a lot of people had about the kind of foreign policy that then Senator Kerry would have.

Q: Mm-hmm. Was there a better strategy for Senator Kerry, in that election?

MEHLMAN: It's so easy to look back and play Monday morning quarterback. I felt that Senator Kerry and his team ran a very strong campaign and a [45:00] very strong effort and a smart effort. So, you know, it's easy to look back and say, "I would have done this differently," or, "that differently," but anybody can do th-- That's amateur hour. (laughs)

Q: What di--? I mean, you've seen other reelect campaigns.

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: And usually, a president gets reelected and his party loses seats in Congress.

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: So could you talk about why that didn't happen in 2004?

MEHLMAN: Well, I think there are a couple different factors. One is I do think the country, again -- the increased polarization is one explanation for that. Second of all, [43:00] if you stop and you think about it, at least some... You're electing House. You're electing Senate. You're electing the presidency. So the Senate election in 2004 to think about, is most relevant is 1998. That was the election before 2004. That was the six-year senator was up who had been elected in '98. That was a good year for Democrats. So if six years before had been a good year for one party, that party has to worry, because six years later their tide which had come out to help them usually sweeps in a little bit. So that was one challenge, I think. So you've got, first, increased polarization, second, that unique attribute. In the House, you had the fact that there had been redistricting in '02 that was generally pretty good for Republicans. That helped Republicans. That helps explain it. And then finally, I do think it matters that we tried very hard to avoid a lonely victory, to run a campaign that was very much focused on collaborating with Republicans around the country. And I think those factors all matter. [44:00]

Q: Did you have a sense or did the president have a sense that there's a trade-off there, tha-- you might be able to win a 55% victory by running a purely pre-- and traditional --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- selfish campaign but...?



MEHLMAN: Yeah, we thought about that. And we thought that it was more important to try to win an election in which we could get things done by electing allies than it was to try to say, "OK, let's run up the numbers a little bit more."

Election Day. The exit polls, which I think historically had been pretty reliable --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- by about five o'clock --

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: -- are showing you guys losing --

MEHLMAN: Yeah. Yeah!

Q: -- and losing pretty big.

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: So what do you do with that information, when it comes in?

MEHLMAN: Well, we had developed our own internal tracking system. [45:00] We had identified key counties around the country and key areas around the country that we thought were a bellwether -- they might have been bellwether, because they were Republican strongholds, where we wanted strong turnout, or, alternatively, they were swing areas. And we were tracking our own turnout and our own performance. And our data looked quite good. So when we first saw that, we thought, "This could be a repeat of what happened four years ago," where the exit polls were inaccurate. And we, in fact had pulled the exit polls from four years ago to share with the press. And so that information, as we compiled the two together -- you know, within about three or four hours, we realized that was the case. But for three hours, two hours, we didn't know for sure that was the case. And I remember having conversations with both 41 and 43, as well as with Vice President Cheney, where I walked through, for example, why I thought the fact that there had been huge turnout north of the I-4 corridor all around Florida gave me confidence we would win Florida, whereas the exit polls had us losing Florida, [46:00] and where I looked at Lancaster County and York County, Pennsylvania, two red counties -- Lancaster has become a bit bluer recently but, at the time, two red counties where there had been incredibly robust turnout. And so we looked at Ohio, where, in a lot of the collar counties, outside of the three big cities, again, very strong turnout -- in the -- and not just collar but the exurban and rural counties. And all those things said to me that we might lose but we would lose a very close election. And the exit polls showed something very different. So we became convinced that essentially the statistical model upon which the exit polls were premised had been flawed.



- Q: Were you worried, as a campaign, that, if that became the story, by five o'clock Eastern Time, two o'clock --
- MEHLMAN: Sure.
- Q: -- Pacific Time, if that became story, "It looks like a big Kerry win coming"?
- MEHLMAN: We were but we conditioned people on our team and we conditioned the public to understand what had happened four years ago, the mistakes that had happened with the exit polls. And we thought that was important. I remember going on *Fox News*, at about 8:30 at night, nine o'clock at night. It was 8:30, I think. And I just walked through very specific data about these Florida counties -- occasionally still get people coming up saying, "I remember election night in 2004, when you went on *Fox News*." And so the difference was... They had a statistical model that had proved flawed before. So I came back with my own model, that was real. And I said, "Here's our data. Here's what it shows. Here's what we see in these counties. Here's the initial results in these counties. To me, the initial data indicates our model is a bit more accurate than the model in the exit polls." And it turned out to be true.
- Q: OK. Did President Bush win a mandate in that election?
- MEHLMAN: I'm not sure he won a mandate. Broadly, do I think he'd won a mandate to continue the kind of policies he had at a 30,000-foot level, with respect to the War on Terror? I think he did. Do I think he'd won a mandate for the kind of leadership he showed? I do. Do I think the public, though, at the same time that gave him a m--? Fifty-one percent, [47:00] 51.5% isn't a broad victory. So I think he... I think the way he put it is, perhaps a bit inelegantly, he earned political capital. And I think... Whether it's a mandate, I'm not sure. I think a mandate probably is a larger percentage of the vote that you have to win.
- Q: Was it a mistake, after not really talking much about Social Security reform during the campaign... Talked about other domestic issues --
- MEHLMAN: Yeah.
- Q: -- but not so much about tha-- Was it a mistake to make that his leading agenda item in '05?
- MEHLMAN: I don't know that it was a mistake. I think, if you look back, we didn't get it done. (laughs)
- Q: Yeah.
- MEHLMAN: That tells you that, at some level, it was. If we had done immigration, I think we could have gotten that issue done. We could have had a policy that would have served our country well economically. It also would have been, in my opinion,



humane. And it would have been good for national security. So looking back, I wish that had been our priority.

Q: Yeah. I guess I wonder. I mean, going into a second term -- or going to any election but particularly a second term, do you really need to think about laying the predicate during the campaign for what you actually want to do?

MEHLMAN: I think you do want to. [48:00] I think you -- I think it's very important to make elections about the future, very important.

Q: Did you feel like, because this was a party victory... You're right. It was narrow. But the coattails were pretty significant.

MEHLMAN: Yeah.

Q: Did you feel like, as a Republican National Committee --

MEHLMAN: (laughs)

Q: -- person, that you were inheriting maybe a Republican replacement of what had been the previous New Deal Democratic coalition?

MEHLMAN: Well, look. I think the New Deal Coalition had been replaced by what President Reagan did, in 1980, the victory he had, where...

Q: But no--

MEHLMAN: I think the -- the -- if you think about it... So FDR's elected in 1932.

Q: Thirty-two.

MEHLMAN: And essentially, there's a Democratic majority, that I think President Kennedy, then, in some ways updated, refreshed, in 1960. It was a very narrow victory. But I think that's what he was trying to do. So 1980, President Reagan's elected. I think th-- I thought we had an opportunity to kind of refresh the Reagan coalition, to build on it. [49:00] So the Reagan coalition took traditional Republicans and added on top of that Southern voters who hadn't supported before, ethnic Americans, Catholic and other voters who hadn't supported Republicans before, evangelicals, who hadn't participated in the process before. And what we thought we could do was -- and we tried very hard to do was to add to that mix Latino voters, some African American voters, Jewish Americans that were supportive, for example, of the national security position that the president took, some suburban voters. We tried to expand and build on that a bit. And we had some success, obviously ultimately not what we hoped would happen longer-term. But that was what we were trying to do.

Q: But the difference between '80 and '32 was that what '32 brought in was a top-to-bottom --

MEHLMAN: It did.



Q: -- Democratic majority --

MEHLMAN: It did.

Q: -- which '80 didn't.

MEHLMAN: Eighty did just the Senate and the...

Q: And I wondered did you think '04 had given you the potential to do that?

MEHLMAN: I -- look, I think that the most... The reason I ask people to read *Moneyball* (laughs) is not only because I think metrics are critical. [50:00] And anyone who I've worked with will tell you I'm obsessed with metrics. But equally importantly the real lesson of *Moneyball* is that the greatest players are not people that hit home runs. They're people that get on base. And if you can consistently get on base and get on base and get on base, you're going to do pretty well in life, whether it's in politics or business or anything else. And so, to me, the key was not to say, "We're going to be the next FDR," or, "the next Reagan." That's trying to hit a homerun. It's can we create durable victories, that are necessarily incremental but they're durable? But we repeat them and we repeat them and we repeat them. And that's the key to success. And that's what we were trying to do.

Q: We began with lessons you learned from 2000. Were there lessons you learned from '04?

MEHLMAN: Look, the lessons I learned was, one, the power of data analytics -- incredibly important... And the power that has is something that I think has been repeated and (laughs) massively improved and perfected by President Obama's campaign, twice, since [51:00] we did it. So that's an interesting lesson. Second of all, in a world where there's a wealth of information, as I mentioned before there's a poverty of attention -- and so the power of a personal recommendation that you believe in... Smart companies care most about, "Would you recommend my product or service to somebody else," the power of recommendation. That's true in candidates too. We built on that. And we tried to build that further. That will be a second lesson. Third, unless Republicans increase the denominator, we will not win elections. So simply showing up late in the game and speaking to La Raza or the NAACP or the National Urban League or the Asian American Association, all of those are not how you win an election. You win an election from, from the beginning, having a real dialogue with communities across this country. This is a much more diverse country than we've ever been before. And that's a strength of our country. And we, as Republicans, the party of Lincoln, the party of McKinley, [52:00] the party of Reagan, the party of George W. Bush, every single time our



party has had real and good victories, we've expanded the denominator. And we've expanded it to new groups and new constituents and new people, around a core idea of freedom! And that's what we need to be doing. We did that aggressively. We tried to do it with President Bush. We came up short in some areas -- no question. Wish we had done better. But that is a very important lesson too.

Q: Is this is an applicable lesson for the modern Republican Party?

MEHLMAN: Absolutely. Absol--

Q: Well, what I mean is groups that have been part of the core of the party are not interested in reaching out to --

MEHLMAN: I don't think that's true.

Q: -- immigrants or...

MEHLMAN: I'm n-- I don't think that's true. I think if you look at, for example, the efforts that you have among a whole lot of evangelical churches around this country with respect to missions in Africa and AIDS, I don't believe that people aren't interested. I think people are quite interested. If you look at the level of commitment to a secure Israel that you have in a whole lot of core Republican constituencies, I think people are interested in reaching out. [53:00] I think it's about leadership that takes that interest and follows it and takes it to the next level, and inspires it, and takes it further. I think there can be that. Look, to -- the real lessons of '04 is this -- are this. Excuse me. Number one, every candidate running for office, the first question they need to be asked is, "Do you have a hopeful agenda?" -- "Do you have a hopeful agenda for the future?" Second, "What is your real experience in, as a candidate for office, expanding the denominator, making the denominator bigger?" appealing to new constituencies that make it so that we don't have to win these incredibly tight elections where, if you make one mistake, there's no way you can win. Three, "Do you have a team that will make decisions based on metrics, as opposed to the old Washington ways of doing things?" Critical to our victory in '04 was our public acknowledgment that we hadn't as well as we should have in 2000. We said, "We can do better." The 72-hour taskforce was a public statement that didn't do what most people try to do, which is to explain why you really did well and essentially do the political [54:00] equivalent of grade inflation. (laughs) It's to say, "We actually can learn from the fact that we came up a little bit short." Are they honest with themselves? That's an important question. And finally, do they have an ability to inspire social media? That's how restaurants fill their tables every single day.



That's how products are sold. Do they think like the world that we live in today, a Facebook world, a world where people rely on their friends and contact those friends through social media for inspiration? And are they able to do that? Those are all things that we try to do. Did well in others. Others, we came up a bit short -- but that are important to the future.

Q: Well, thank you --

MEHLMAN: Thanks, a lot.

Q: -- Ken Mehlman.

MEHLMAN: It's been fun! [54:42]

### Citation

Ken Mehlman Interview, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University, The Election of 2004 Collective Memory Project, 13 December 2013, accessed at <http://cphcmp.smu.edu/2004election/interview-with-ken-mehlman/>

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