Vice President Joe Biden’s Rhetorical Problem

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I like Vice President Joe Biden, but find unacceptable his making light of touching women by saying he had “permission” in a speech on April 5. I am amazed that a person as politically experienced as Biden at minimum is so challenged rhetorically; you can't say you “understand” and will be “mindful” of this matter in a video one day and several days later joke about it. This shows he may not get it and lacks message discipline—a well-documented weakness of his.

Making a few women feel uncomfortable didn't have to be and shouldn't have been an issue for Biden, but his latest response now may make it an issue. As a communication scholar, I believe there is a rhetorical lesson here for Biden and all politicians. When accused of wrongdoing (whether true or not), think through the appropriate way to handle it, offering one and only one response. Don’t let a 24 hour news story turn into one guaranteed to keep on giving; every time you try to clean up a prior response simply garners additional media scrutiny.

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