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THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2001

Mark Green's Problem

It was a humiliating defeat. And if Mark Green is at all interested in understanding the real reason he is not the mayor-elect of New York at this critical moment in the city's history, he should do the thing he has always done best — look in a mirror.

To get a sense of how quickly and disastrously the Green campaign collapsed, consider that on Friday night the co-chairman of Miramax Films, Harvey Weinstein, served as chairman of a gala "Unity Dinner" for Mr. Green, which was attended by, among others, former President Bill Clinton and Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Charles Schumer.

Seventy-two hours later Mr. Weinstein endorsed Michael Bloomberg for mayor. That is bizarre by anyone's definition.

From Friday to Monday Mr. Weinstein had tried to broker a little real unity between Mr. Green and the Bronx borough president, Fernando Ferrer, who was defeated by Mr. Green in a bitter runoff election.

But Mr. Green and his supporters were afraid of being perceived by white voters as caving in to Mr. Ferrer and his supporters (especially the Rev. Al Sharpton), so they aborted the attempted reconciliation. Mr. Weinstein was so angry he bolted to Bloomberg.

It seems always to be like that with Mr. Green. He infuriates people. He has a level of arrogance that is breathtaking, even for a politician. And his empathy gauge is almost always on empty.

Mr. Green never seemed to appreciate the depth of the anger of Mr. Ferrer's supporters in the aftermath of the runoff. When Mr. Green's own supporters were trying to forge links with the Ferrer camp, Mr. Green kept insisting that he didn't need the Ferrer people to win the election. He needed their support in order to govern successfully, he argued, but he could win the election without them.

Mr. Green's biggest problem was not that he made mistakes, but that he never learned from his mistakes. Almost from the beginning he seemed to take it for granted that he would be elected mayor. He seemed mesmerized by the polls, which almost always showed him winning. So he ran a Rose Garden campaign in the Democratic primary, and finished second, which shocked him. He went down and dirty against Mr. Ferrer in the runoff, which he won, but his tactics turned off Ferrer supporters by the thousands.

If he was chastened, he didn't show it. As the general election got under way, he went back to the Rose Garden. As late as two weeks ago, after a Bloomberg attack, Mr. Green coolly replied, "I don't really have to respond to him."

And when the question of debates came up, Mr. Green said of Mr. Bloomberg, "I'm not sure he's entitled to a debate, but I may give him one." They ended up debating twice.

All kinds of reasons for Mr. Green's defeat are being tossed about. Certainly Mr. Bloomberg spent obscene sums of money. And lots of fingers are being pointed at the city's designated scapegoat, Al Sharpton. (In truth, Mr. Sharpton was treated shabbily by Mr. Green. The two men double-dated with their wives when that served Mr. Green's purposes. And then, when the campaign needed a demon, Mr. Sharpton was available for that role as well.)

> The collapse of a campaign.

But it wasn't Michael Bloomberg or Al Sharpton who loudly proclaimed that he would have done "as well or better" than Rudolph Giuliani in the aftermath of the trade center catastrophe. That was Mr. Green himself. And it was Mr. Green who, each time his lead shrank to near-zero, turned to the pettiest and nastiest tactics. The ad that he ran in which an announcer says, "Kill it! Kill it!" in a reference to a comment Mr. Bloomberg was alleged to have made to a pregnant employee was a grotesque embarrassment.

The margin of Mr. Green's defeat was razor-thin, which tells me that if he had tempered his arrogance and demonstrated a modicum of leadership on the great issues of the day, he would have won.

Lee Miringoff, who directs the respected Marist College Poll, noted yesterday that voters — concerned about terrorism and its effect on the city's economy and overall future — brought "a higher level of seriousness" to this campaign than either of the candidates.

So the guy with all the money won. But it didn't have to be that way. □

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