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O?Leary offers ?cocktail of celebrity, business and politics? to oust Trudeau



By Brock Weir

A public persona honed on reality TV is one of the biggest ?misconceptions? about Kevin O'Leary, says the leadership candidate ? but, if his celebrity can mix with business and politics to ?kick [Justin Trudeau]'s ass,? that is a bonus.

Mr. O'Leary, one of the frontrunners in the race to replace Stephen Harper as permanent leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, referenced this ?apparently important cocktail of celebrity, business and politics? as a winning formula during a campaign stop in Newmarket-Aurora on Monday night at Madsen's Greenhouse in Newmarket.

Speaking to The Auroran after addressing a packed crowd of supporters, skeptics, and curious Conservative party members, he said telling the truth is key to harnessing the power of his millions of followers on social media and turning it into engagement and action in a very crowded leadership race.

?What is amazing is it goes to telling the truth; social media is not a press release, it is a dialogue between two human beings, one at a time,? says Mr. O'Leary. ?Yes, you reach millions, but you're having a dialogue with an individual person and they either trust you or they don't. I have built this relationship up over 12 years. It's a massive following and my attitude is: Don't lie to them. The first time you lie to someone you lose 50 per cent of your equity for the rest of your life. Just tell them the truth. Sometimes they don't like it, but it is the truth.?

This amassing of millions of followers over the 12 years is thanks in no small part to his role as a media personality both on the CBC here at home and on other networks abroad. Asked what the biggest misconception is about him during this campaign, Mr. O'Leary says it comes down to his TV persona versus the message he presents directly to the people.

?I have done close to 10,000 hours of television all around the world with five different networks and there is a difference between reality TV and policy,? he says. ?I think, over time, you have only got 130,000 people deciding on this leadership race and I have to talk to them.?

Having 14 candidates in the Conservative race is an ?extraordinary outcome? in Canadian politics, he says, but at the end of the day, for party members, it all comes down to who can beat Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in the polls in the 2019 Federal Election.

?You have to think, what political weaponry do you need now to beat someone that,? says O'Leary of Trudeau. ?Many people think he is unbeatable for a second mandate; I don't. I think I can really give that guy a very tough run. He and his cabinet would be accountable because I can actually read what they do and interpret it to the Canadian people. I think I am in good stead with the people.?

Indeed, during his campaign stop, he repeatedly said he was going to make life a ?living hell? for Mr. Trudeau should he win the Conservative leadership race. What constitutes a ?living hell? for the Prime Minister? Mr. O'Leary tells The Auroran that means ?getting him to tell the truth.?

?He actually doesn't know what that is,? claims O'Leary. ?He's a terrible manager. I am going to have some fun with him.?

?I am going to ask him things like ?,? O'Leary adds, before trailing off for a moment as if in thought, ?I'll wait. I am getting ready to engage him on behalf of the Canadian people. He needs a lot of adult supervision.?

As he criss-crosses the country, he says the primary concern he hears in rural communities is, ?jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs,? particularly when it comes to young people, even those who have post-secondary degrees, still living on the farm. To

this end, Mr. O'Leary says a party can't win a majority mandate without the support of voters aged 18 to 35 and the person to do that, he says, is him.

?I am just going to twist the knife on jobs,? he says. ?That is all I have to do. Justin Trudeau is actually going to elect Kevin O'Leary. He just has to keep doing what he is doing. Those kids have no jobs. He lied to them. He broke that trust. Sunny ways? Bullshit.?

During his campaign stop, Mr. O'Leary faced a number of questions including his plans for the CBC.

He says he would ?probably cut? the CBC outside of news both on CBC News Network and Radio Canada. The rest? They should ?do PBS? with pledge drives.

He was also questioned on his residency, as well as his stance on ?Canadian values,? a primary platform plank of leadership rival Kellie Leitch.

?The deal is this: you come to Canada, you want to raise your family here, and you want to work and build your business, build your family just like mine did, you have to live by the laws of our country,? he said.