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From: Sidney Blumenthal <[\[redacted\]](#)>
Sent: Sunday, October 7, 2012 10:56 AM
To: H
Subject: H: Really, very, completely, totally bad advice that O really, very much wanted to heed.
Sid

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<http://nymag.com/print/?/news/politics/powergrid/romney-obama-presidential-debate-2012-10/>



The Etch-a-Sketch Moment

At the debate in Denver, it finally happened—but Obama looked like the one who was shaken.

- By [John Heilemann](#)
- Published Oct 5, 2012

But here's the crazy thing: For the first time in a long time, many Democrats are asking the same thing about Obama—so perplexed, confounded, and just plain pissed off are they about his dismal turn in Denver. The mystery of what happened to the president there is perhaps a bit less mysterious than it seemed on first inspection. Five factors, I think, were at work.

First, for weeks now, the Obama campaign has been playing it safe, sitting on its lead, executing a four-corners offense and a prevent defense; Obama's low-altitude, low-risk speech in Charlotte was part of that game plan, which in Denver amounted to an effort to avoid unforced errors. Second, consistent with that, Obama had been advised essentially to ignore Romney and talk directly to voters; as his strategist David Axelrod put it the next day, "He made a choice last night to answer the questions that were asked and to talk to the American people about what we need to move forward, and not to get into serial fact-checking with Governor Romney, which can be an exhausting, never-ending pursuit." Third, Obama's team is intensely focused on preserving his main electoral advantage, which is his likability. Indeed, much of his debate prep was spent coaching him to contain his simmering disdain for Romney; onstage, that seems to have translated into Obama's studious refusal to make eye contact with his rival. Fourth, incumbent presidents become accustomed to being accorded unceasing deference (and gratuitous toadying); it's been four years since anyone got up in Obama's grill and told him he was full of shit, and the shock of it was palpable. And fifth, Obama was prepared to debate the Romney who has been on display for the past two years, the Romney imitated by John Kerry in debate prep—a very different Romney from the one who took the podium. Like the rest of us, Obama was gobsmacked.