Willful bungling of the coronavirus crisis cuts across ideologies and political parties. That's the lesson that we learn from the story of Bill de Blasio. He is very different, across many different dimensions, than Donald Trump. But it turns out that he shares something important with Trump: a tendency to place personality over expertise.

De Blasio's initial reaction to the coronavirus was a lot more Donald Trump than Jay Inslee. Washington State Governor Inslee faced an outbreak at around the same time and responded decisively. De Blasio, like Trump, seemed more concerned about the economic impact of control measures than with the virus itself. At the beginning of March, De Blasio said the virus couldn't be spread through casual contact in public places. A week later, as the disease was spreading rapidly in the city, he was still telling people to take basic precautions but otherwise go about their business.

As evidence of the threat to the city grew, de Blasio continued to spread false optimism. He told New Yorkers to "go about their lives" if they weren't sick. On March 10, he did reluctantly close gyms, but he made one final visit to his own gym before the closure. The message to New Yorkers until the middle of March was to take moderate precautions but not to change their everyday lives. By then, the disease was everywhere in the city.

While Jay Inslee in Washington began to encourage social distancing early on, de Blasio actively discouraged it. He finally did take action, but he waited until the epidemic had already begun to explode. By the time de Blasio responded to the desperate pleading of aides and closed the schools, New York City already had more than 2500 confirmed cases. In contrast, Inslee closed the schools when his state had only a third as many cases.

In the early stages of the outbreak, de Blasio relied heavily on Dr. Mitchell Katz, the head of New York City's public hospital system. Katz advised de Blasio to do nothing about the outbreak:

> "We have to accept that unless a vaccine is rapidly developed, large numbers of people will get infected. The good thing is greater than 99 percent will recover without harm. Once people recover they will have immunity. The immunity will protect the herd."

That strategy would have resulted in about 5.4 million infected individuals in the city and more than 54,000 deaths.

De Blasio’s faith in the head of the hospital system is apparently undented. Two weeks ago, de Blasio decided to take the job of contact tracing away from the city’s public health department and give it to the hospital system, according to the *NY Times*

> “Epidemiologists, former public health officials and the city comptroller criticized the move, pointing out that the Health Department has for decades expertly performed contact tracing for diseases like tuberculosis and H.I.V., and had been preparing for two weeks to run the expanded tracing operation for Covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.”

The mayor’s reasons for the shift seem to come down to personality. He likes the head of the hospital system, who gives him crisp, decisive, clear advice and doesn’t trouble him with uncertainties or evidence.

In contrast, according to the *Times*, de Blasio has never liked the public health department. Apparently, it didn’t jump to implement some of his pet policies, on the annoying grounds that they had no supporting evidence. According to the *Times*,

> “Current and former administration officials said the conflict stemmed from Mr. de Blasio’s apparent distrust of experts and his dissatisfaction with public health recommendations, which are often based on scientific analysis of imperfect and at times incomplete information.

Personality-based decision making? Disdain for experts? Impatience toward evidence? They all sound pretty familiar, don’t they?