

We want to own up to something: we've intentionally constrained you. We've put bounds around your thinking in the exercises and discussion and avoided talking about certain things.

We've done this so you focus on important things liberals are not currently doing that need to be done right. We're also trying to set the stage for some *unlearning*. We often do things that don't work, or even hurt our efforts and we must stop doing these things. We bet you have questions.

### *Are you really saying we can't use facts and logic?*

Of course not—you do need to know what you're talking about. And, of course, it's perfectly fine to make well reasoned arguments in situations where people have the time and inclination to consider things rationally. A five minute conversation with a voter at their door, a TV ad or a 250 word letter to the editor is not that place or time.

Facts and logic are great as far as they go —and they don't go as far as you'd imagine. In fact (pun intended) a century of scientific data reveals that human brains, though marvelously capable of employing facts and logic, most often don't. ([That's everybody, by the way](#)). The preponderance of scientific evidence shows that facts and logic are just not very effective and often counterproductive in persuasive conversation and that biases, beliefs and other cognitive and perceptual mechanisms are far more influential.

In other words, facts are certainly necessary, but not sufficient. They don't go far enough. Many make the mistake of thinking that the reason we take a position is because the facts support it. The reason we take a position is actually deeply rooted in why we care —why it matters to us. For example, all the evidence points to a climate crisis needing immediate attention. Coastal cities will be flooded, crops will dry up, pollution will increase. Why do you care? Because you have empathy for the people whose lives will be upended; talk about why you care about those people. Make voters *feel* your position by appealing to their emotions and moral values; talk about what is right and wrong.

Drew Westin describes, in decreasing order of effectiveness, how voters make decisions:

1. Feelings about the Party
2. Feelings about the candidate
3. Feelings about the issues
4. Rational evaluation of the Party
5. Rational evaluation of the candidate
6. Rational evaluation of the issues

In short, **voters aren't persuaded by *what* you believe, they are persuaded by *why* you believe it.**

The point here is that we must start leading with our values, because we hardly ever do —and it's the most effective form of persuasion. It will take attention and practice to change our old habits; that's why we're forcing you to do it. After all, if people aren't going to listen to reason, (and the science says, by and large, they won't), then why are we trying to reason with them?

There's also a great advantage in using values in the field: think about the voter contact you've done: there is considerable fear in both the volunteer and the voter that they'll be caught in a factual or logical error or not being able to speak knowledgeably. Mutual fear is not a good way to start up a persuasive conversation. On the other hand, everyone has a sense of right and wrong so everyone can have a moral conversation.

Lastly, conservative strategists are well aware of our fondness for facts and logic and bait us all the time with patently absurd statements, twisted logic and alternative facts -because they *know* we'll take the bait and argue with them. Conservatives understand that facts and logic aren't terribly effective, so they want you to waste as much time as possible debating your facts against their alternative facts. *Don't take the bait!* Remember, you are under no obligation to respond to anything a conservative says. Use your time to speak from our frames instead.

This is not about winning a rhetorical argument, it's about changing the frame your listeners to use when considering an issue.

*We've kept you from debunking, fact checking and otherwise bashing conservatives.*

We know you feel obligated to set the record straight -to promote a “reality based agenda”, but while you are debunking a conservative message, **you remain in the frame conservative strategists have chosen for you.** Every moment you spend in a conservative frame strengthens it -even if you negate the frame (remember “[Don't think of an elephant](#)”)? It's also wasted time that could have been spent speaking about who we are and why we care and why someone might want to give our worldview a try.

Speaking from within our value system strengthens the neural pathways to *our* frames and our values that already exist in our listeners' biconceptual brains. In fact, most people, no matter how they identify, generally agree with us on most issues anyway. As our friend Steve Bucher says, framing is the art and science of convincing people that they already agree with you.

*We've made you focus on high level moral frames.*

*“In politics, the high-level frames are the moral systems that define what is “right” for a conservative or progressive.... Higher-level frames, deeper in the system, have a disproportionate effect.” George Lakoff*

This makes sense: high level moral values have been built up in people's brains over a longer period of time. They guide our thinking and behavior. The relatively small set of moral values we hold is also associated with thoughts on a whole host of issues. Lighting up those brain cells will not only help you win on one issue; it strengthens the listener's high level value frame across *many other issues*. This is the *strategic* value of framing: over time, as our values are strengthened in voters brains, our worldview can, once again, become dominant and our candidates won't need to "move to the right to win". If we're *really* successful, conservative may feel the need to move left to win!

We've asked you to choose values from the values list because, as liberals, we never seem to get around to *why* we advocate for the positions we do. We don't communicate our high level moral values, consequently voters don't really know who we are. In fact, even die hard lefties have a hard time articulating a coherent description of what liberals believe and while we were asleep at the wheel, millions of people have adopted the description of liberals that conservative strategists have given them. The values list will help you remember to speak in our moral frames.

### *We've avoided non-value frames.*

Of course, not all useful frames are moral value frames. For example "Health Care Made Easy" is a useful frame that opens many ways to think about health care from our perspective: health care is hard on people, hard on families, hard on businesses, hard on the economy. "Health Care for All" is health care made easy. The "ease" frame means no more insurance company denials, no worries about losing coverage, everyone's in, no one is out. Many compelling stories can and should be told within this frame.

But "ease" is not a high level moral value frame.

You will, as you learn more about frames and framing, begin to use non-value frames and also metaphors —a central tool we didn't have time to delve into— and that's just fine. But don't forget about value frames.

### *We've mostly avoided contested frames.*

Liberals and conservative both use words like fairness, security, responsibility and freedom, however they mean different things depending on your worldview. We can and must take back some of these words.

*"A major goal of political framing is to get your version of contested concepts accepted by the voters. Messaging can then use these concepts and their language freely and effectively.*

*That is how framing works generally — independent of whether the frames are used in politics. In politics, bi-conceptual voters can shift back and forth on an issue, depending on how the issue is framed in terms of higher-level political systems." George Lakoff*

Here's an example in health care:

Conservative strategists talk about the *freedom* to purchase the insurance plan you want and the *freedom* of companies to sell plans nationally across state lines. Here's another way to look at freedom:

*"If you have cancer and you don't have health care, you are not free. You are probably going to die (a Life issue) . . . Even if you break your leg, do not have access to health care and cannot get it set, you are not free... Ill health enslaves you. Disease enslaves you."*  
George Lakoff

In a more positive way:

Imagine a day when Americans are free from worry about the treatments they need; free from ever being one treatment away from bankruptcy; free to live their lives because drugs and treatments are required to be safe and effective.

*We specifically DID NOT offer a solution to the "Thanksgiving Problem".*

Consider what Lakoff said about neural pathways:

"... Your message will be more effective if it fits existing high-level frames in the brains of voters, and less effective (if) it contradicts such high-level frames."

Your crazy uncle in the MAGA hat with confederate flags flying from his aircraft-carrier-sized pickup is not your audience. His neural pathways have been burned in by State Television Fox News and you may never change that. Further, by challenging his beliefs you are quite likely going to harden his position.

*Practice political triage* -spend your limited time and energy on people who are persuadable.

Of course you still have to talk to your crazy uncle, especially if he's providing the turkey. So here's a suggestion: turn the conversation directly to right and wrong. It turns out that the more off the rails he is, the less likely it is that he will have thought issues through in detail. If you can keep the conversation on right and wrong, say why you care and tell stories of real people to illustrate your point (especially stories of other family members they care about), you will have a less heated discussion and may just put a small crack in his shell that could pay off years down the road.

*We purposely kept away from slogans.*

The goal of the skill we teach is not to reduce everything to a bumper sticker. There's nothing wrong with have a unifying frame and a memorable message for a specific issue. It is also the case that the frame you use to persuade a young family to vote for a school levy, might be different than a frame you'd use for a business owner. One size does not fit all. You will find that on virtually every issue you'll be able to make messages from many if not most of value frames we've provided.

## Framing is both tactical and strategic.

Strategy is a comprehensive plan to achieve a major goal over the long term. Tactics is what you do now to achieve a short term goal that, ideally, supports your strategy.

Unfortunately our tactics and strategy are in opposition.

Liberals are great at tactics. We organize, attract volunteers, door knock, phone call, and write letters to the editor. Our candidates raise money, calculate win numbers, hire campaign staff and carefully analyze the demographics... and, in red districts, decide just *how far to the right they need to move to win*. They move to the right because liberals have not won the hearts and minds of voters. If the district leans red, so the theory goes, so must our candidates. But it should be obvious that if the long term strategy is to attract more voters to our worldview, we're not going to do it by becoming more conservative.

Framing can help you today in this campaign, on this issue —what we call tactical framing. However developing the skill of crafting messages that connect voters to our high level moral frames strategically strengthens these ideas across all issues and helps all our candidates over time.. Look at the **empowerment** frame evoked in these statements:

- "By supporting this public school levy, all our children will have the skills they need to live fulfilled lives."
- "SBA loans empower entrepreneurs to create small businesses in our community."
- "This legislation outlaws voter suppression tactics and empowers all voters to take part in democracy."

You have framed each issue, but you have also strengthened our high level moral frame of empowerment. This is what we call "strategic framing" -making our high level moral values familiar, comfortable and readily available to voters minds. You've primed your listener's neural pathways to more easily use the lens of empowerment on other issues. If



# Post-Workshop Debrief

we do this long enough, voters will once again embrace the liberal worldview and our candidates won't feel forced to move to the right to win.

In other words, we win the long game.