



Stop arguing and start communicating about politics

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Have you had enough? Don't get angry, get strategic!

Table of contents, summary and chapter descriptions

Introduction:

Driving in the political dark

Running a country without reasonable dialogue is like driving in the dark. If it's true that we are as healthy as the things we can talk about, we need intensive care. It is rare for any of us to have informative, principled, thought-provoking, and reasoned political conversations. Instead of communicating, we argue, attack and stubbornly defend our positions. This introduction outlines the issues around political conversations, and it tells the story of how this book came about.

Do I hear some "yeah buts?" This introduction challenges the five most common excuses for not talking about what matters most to us as a nation. It sets the stage for people like you and me to play new roles in shaping the political dialogue. Those roles are: Truth Sleuth, Deception Detective, Fallacy Finder, Fact Fanatic, Accuracy Advocate, Concerned Citizen and Voice of Reason.

You are invited to Unite and Concur and learn how to turn arguments into reasonable and productive dialogue.

Section I:

What you need to KNOW to Unite and ~~Conquer~~ Concur

1. From ~~divide and conquer~~ to Unite and Concur: possible and necessary

What does thirty years of training and mediation have to do with political dialogue? The answer is: everything. This chapter applies the author's extensive training experience to political dialogue. "Divide and conquer" on the national level has poisoned the political discourse at the individual level. But the same skills and

techniques that trainers apply to bridge demographic and psychographic divides also work to bridge the Great Political Divide.

The only place reasonable dialogue is likely to begin is with you, your Uncle Joe and your neighbor...and...

This chapter shows how seemingly irreconcilable differences can be reconciled.

2. “They” should be like we are – “perfect in every way”

People are generally drawn to other people who look like they do, think like they do and act like they do. They are even more drawn to their sound-alikes in political dialogue. However natural, it’s unproductive to gravitate toward those who are carbon copies of your favorite person – you. Learn how to moderate the “like me = good, not like me = bad” tendency with the counter force of attraction to differences.

Curiosity may have killed a few cats, but in healthy political dialogue, it kills ignorance. This chapter offers examples of how others have bridged the divide between different groups, styles, demographics and psychographics – resulting in healthy, supportive dialogue.

3. Less pain = more gain

You gotta be tough if you’re gonna be stupid. But strategy, compassion and intelligence will get you farther with less wear and tear.

While the truth can hurt, it usually doesn’t have to decimate to be effective. In fact, a proportional response typically is your most productive one. Learn how to get the results by minimizing insult and injury and maximizing mutual support.

The context of a group dialogue can make the difference between hostile attacks and reasonable dialogue. The context of a group dialogue can take a group who placed targets on each others’ backs to a (mental) group hug. The context of dialogue will transform your political conversations.

When you approach political dialogue with a CURT attitude: when you Criticize, Undercut, Rebuke and Thwart, you create resistance that is unlikely to win you positive results.

You’ll get better results when you are CLEAR: when you Consider, Listen, Explore, Assert and Revise. This chapter tells you what that means and how to apply it.

Less pain = more gain for your political conversations.

4. The inner game of political divisiveness

Are you operating like a third-wit? Most of us are – especially when the conversation

gets political. Our three “brainlet” system (I explain what that means in this chapter) was designed to work with each brainlet working in harmony. Instead, our brainlets work in isolation and opposition. Find out what Reptilian Regressions, Mammalian Meltdowns and Neocortical Apartheids are. Yes, you do want to know that – because that’s how you keep from being manipulated by those who would divide us. You’ll also learn how to keep yourself and people with opposing political ideas from getting stuck in third-wit, reactive brain functioning. Learn the characteristics of each brainlet and be aware of the hazards when one brainlet dominates.

5. A fine art of feeding fear

You’ve got one, I’ve got one, and so does your political opposite. Learn all about your powerful but elusive Reptilian brainlet, or “Izzie.” Izzie is your “I” brainlet. Izzie is narcissistic, competitive, territorial, judgmental, simplistic, reactive, concrete and egotistical. Persuasive appeals consider Izzie - and manipulative appeals exploit Izzie.

Learn how to “upshift” from a Reptilian Regression into balanced consideration that applies reason, emotion and instinct. That’s the frame of mind you’ll have your most productive political dialogue from. And, sorry, shopping isn’t one of the techniques I provide.

6. They feel your pain (and often exploit it)

We each have one of these too. In this chapter we explore our socially meaningful Mammalian brainlets, or “Webbys.” Webby is our “We” brainlet. We’ll consider specific persuasive and manipulative appeals that sing your Webby’s tune, and we’ll explore what a Mammalian Meltdown is. (Hint – we’ve all had them – we just didn’t know what they were.)

After we’ve explored Webby, we’ll learn how to upshift from a Mammalian Meltdown into balanced consideration that unites reason, emotion and instinct. We’ll also examine the common ways politicians and advertisers manipulate our Webbys.

By the way, did you notice how I changed the tone in this chapter description? “We,” “our,” “each”.... this is the language of Webby. Learn why Webby matters in your political discussions in Chapter 6.

7. Rationalize = rational-lies (and other neocortical cons)

This chapter depicts and analyzes the neocortex, or “The Prof.” The Prof is the “It” brainlet.

This chapter further instructs you regarding the implementation of cogent arguments the Prof respects. It also advises you of the possible perversion of reason, resulting in rational-lies. It postulates about inveiglement of a Neocortical Negation.

(I didn't know what inveiglement meant either, but it sounds erudite.)

Learn why “ivory tower truths have consequences”...and how to come down from that ivory tower without losing the pleasure of the view. This chapter provides implementation instructions to integrate your reason with your emotion and instinct – and to communicate politically so others benefit from your complete wisdom.

By the way, did you notice how my tone changed again in this chapter description? I avoid the pronouns “your” and “I.” The Prof is neutral so I was too. Hence the passive voice and the pronoun “I” was employed in this chapter description. The Prof has its place – in harmony with the other two brainlets. Learn why this matters in your political discussions in chapter 7.

8. Words that stroke, evoke, cloak and provoke

One SpeakStrong catch-phrase is: “Speak as if every word matters. It does.” It’s true that every word matters. It is also true that every word matters differently to each of the 3 brainlets.

Take a practical look at the impact of specific evocative words. This chapter is so practical; I hadn’t even finished writing it before I started using it as a reference to write my chapter descriptions.

Learn how to avoid manipulation by understanding the use and abuse of evocative words. Apply this information to transform an unreasonable political diatribe into reasonable dialogue. You’ll be evoking and provoking like an ethical pro.

9. The courage of conviction

So why do you care enough to break the political politeness precepts? Why are you even considering rocking the boat? Sure, some boats *need* to be rocked, but is your “political dialogue boat” one of them?

It is for me. In this chapter I tell you why. I’ll share the tale of my personal devastation that resulted from not speaking up and out when something needed to be said. You’ll understand the high price of silence and why some boats really do need to be rocked. Which ones? This chapter will help you decide and choose your battles strategically.

People don’t care what you know until they know why you care. This chapter will help you know why you care, so they will care what you know.

10. Differences between conservatives and liberals (real ones – not the Madison Avenue versions)

It helps to know who you're talking to. This chapter spells that out. While there are many scales we could use to define ourselves politically, we throw the categories "liberal" and "conservative" around so "liberally" that it's important to have some idea of what these terms mean.

Labeler beware: we'll start with a caveat about the hazards of labels and categorization in general. Then, duly warned, we'll identify seven qualities where conservatives and liberals trend in different directions. Read about the upside and the downside of both political leanings.

You'll even get some exercises so you can avoid making those crooked comparisons between liberals and conservatives that leave everyone screaming BIAS! and leave no one understanding.

If you're talking past anyone, this chapter will help you talk *to* them...and – are we dreaming?...*with* them.

11. Two sides to every story and other dualistic deceptions

Duality is an Izzie thing. Izzie loves simplification and contrast, and dualistic thinking provides just that.

This chapter examines the pervasiveness and limits of dualistic thinking. We think we're discussing issues despite the fact that we limit the scope of our discussions to false dichotomies that exclude the vastness of reality.

This chapter describes how dualistic thinking pervades our political dialogue and dominates our language. It looks at two types of dualistic assumptions that set us up for argument and limits our dialogue.

After this chapter, I stop using the phrase "political opposite" because that phrase creates a false dichotomy. You don't actually have a political opposite. You have a multitude of political spectrums.

12. They don't just see things differently, they see different things

If someone else interprets events in ways that strike you as being reality-challenged, be aware – it isn't just that they see things differently. They also see different things. Here's a shocker – they see different things, even when you're looking at the same thing! This chapter provides perspectives about perspectives.

We are exposed to such different political information that people with different political views probably hear and see very different information than you do. So what do you do? You identify, integrate and shift perspectives so you can look at multiple

perspectives at once. You step into their reality, and lead them into yours. Chapter 12 tells you more.

13. Houston, we have a systems problem

What is a systems problem? Management trainers talk about it continually. We all live within systems problems whether we know it or not. Many of our political conversations point the finger of blame at individuals when the problem is a systems issue that sets individuals up for conflict. Learn the difference between systems problems and individual problems and why understanding systems problems is vital to our political conversations. This chapter tells you how to handle both kinds of communication challenges.

At the very least, you'll come out of this chapter directing your passion where it actually belongs. You'll find out who the real heroes and villains are. It's not who you think.

Section II. What you need to DO to Unite and Conquer

Concur

14. Get your vision, face your reality

Before you speak, know your values. What stable and consistent principles do you use to guide and determine your choices? This chapter will help you discern your political dialogue bottom line.

Once you have your guiding principles, know your options. You may not like all the choices you have, but it helps to know what they are. Your choices are to: change it, accept it, leave it and...well...one more that will probably surprise you. Learn how to choose wisely in your political dialogue in chapter 14.

Your fourth option will probably surprise you. And, it's probably the one you're making without knowing it was a choice.

15. Say what you mean, and mean what you say, without being mean when you say it

When people don't know what to say, they usually say nothing. That's why phrases are so important. If you can't remember hundreds of phrases and communication formulas, just remember this: "Say what you mean, and mean what you say, without being mean when you say it."

Say what you mean, means to express what you think, feel and want.

Mean what you say means to communicate with conviction. (That's why Chapter 9 is so valuable.) Don't be mean when you say it means respect the other person – even if their opinions seem ill-informed.

If you've turned away from political dialogue because the waters seem so muddied, this chapter will help you clean them up.

16. How to “insight,” not incite, others

SpeakStrong communication techniques have shifted thousands of people out of Reptilian Regressions, Mammalian Meltdowns and Neocortical Negations back into their senses. These techniques get unreasonable people to behave reasonably. It all comes with getting CLEAR.

This chapter provides concrete exercises you can practice in low-risk settings before you try them in your adversarial political conversations.

17. Rerail the derailed conversation

Have you ever tried to connect with someone and discovered you were missing each other? In this chapter, you'll learn what to do when the more you talk, the less you communicate. Hint: I could have called this chapter “When brainlets collide.”

The steps will be different depending on if the conversation is logically, emotionally or primally derailed. Use the steps to get CLEAR and get the conversation back on track.

18. Get in this conversation together

Get on the same side of the fence with others, regardless of your divergent political ideas. This chapter helps you uncover and define the shared problem so you can work as a team to learn from each other and reach resolution. This chapter provides steps to transform combative, you-against-me debates to constructive you-and-me dialogues. It shows you how you and those disagree can discover the shared issue. Finding the shared problem is your first step to reasonable political dialogue that seeks out mutually-satisfying solutions.

We are in this together, so we might as well talk like we are.

19. Bust the bully and stop playing victim

Dialogue is all about parity and balance. No one dominates and no one is subordinate in reasonable dialogue. It's a kind of balance you have to fight to obtain and maintain, because dominance and subordination is pervasive.

Domination can be subtle. The tools of the domination trade are personalization, absolute language, turning tables, changing the rules, labeling and name-calling, acting infallible, and other techniques to undermine the person they're talking to.

Learn the subtleties of domination techniques, and how to bust the bully and stop playing victim.

20. Twelve tips to untangle twisted logic

They call it political “spin” for a reason – it twists the facts and confuses the issues. They’ve mastered the art of spin in Washington, and spin has trickled into our personal political discussions.

Learn the most common conversational spin tactics and approaches and phrases you can use to set the spin straight with so much grace, people who are spinning you will thank you for the clarification.

(As an added benefit – you’ll be able to untwist your teenager’s spin.)

Start with attitude. 1) Stay calm and 2) Get over gotcha. Then, 3) Use your own language, 4) Address hidden agendas, 5) Expand false dichotomies, 6) Clarify abstractions, 7) Consider systems, 8) Check the facts 9) Reflect deflective thinking, and 10) Highlight agreement first, address disagreement second 11) Augment, don’t argue, and 12) and Be as firm as you need to be and no stronger.

21. Don’t get fooled again – logical fallacies

I call it Aggressions’ Law - erroneous arguments drown out accurate ones. Unprincipled diatribe drives out reason. She who is most ruthlessly committed wins. It overshadows reason and logic.

The best way to overcome Aggressions’ Law is to understand logical fallacies. Faulty logic, coupled with aggression, can immobilize the best of us. But it’s the ones you don’t see coming that get you. Once you start recognizing and identifying the fallacies, you’ll be returning reason to your dialogue like a pro.

There are hundreds of fallacies. This chapter covers the most common fallacies that sabotage reasonable political dialogue. They are, 1) Slippery slope, 2) Straw man, 3) Attack the messenger, 4) Bandwagon, 5) Appeal to emotion, 6) Begging the question, 7) Unwarranted assumptions, 8) One-sided arguments, 9) Shifting the burden of proof, and 10) Magical thinking.

Don’t let Aggressions Law spoil you logic. This chapter tells you how to be the Voice of Reason.

22. Negotiate ground rules for your political conversations

Most counselors, mediators and coaches provide “fighting rules” for their clients. It’s kind of like Robert’s Rules of Order or parliamentary procedure for interpersonal conversations. It keeps discussions productive, minimizes hostility and makes it safe to talk.

Guidelines can be as simple as warning each other when you're going off on a tangent. They can be as intense as repeating back everything the other person says in order to confirm listening.

This chapter provides sample ground rules that you can establish to keep your political conversations civil, informative and productive.

It sound contradictory, but rules can set you free.

23. Switzerland, Snopes and you

How do they do it? Switzerland managed to maintain neutrality through every single war in the 20th and (so far) the 21st century.

Well, if Switzerland can come across as neutral, so can you. And if the guys in a female trainer's gender training can feel fairly represented, you can come across as reasonably neutral with someone who holds a different political perspective. Neutrality is possible.

There are different kinds of neutrality. This chapter explores each and shows you how to be neutral without being neutered in your political dialogue – without embracing the fallacy of *false* objectivity. Learn how to define what you *really* stand for; separate from anyone else's definition, and apply the standard *you* value. That will make sure you avoid fighting "anyone else's wars" and use your own values as your political conversation guide.

Learn to simultaneously maintain your own vision and suspend it (yes, it's possible) as you consider and explore diverse political opinions.

24. SpeakStrong about these common political conversational infractions

Has anyone ever sent YOU a virulent political email filled with inaccuracies? Has anyone ever viciously and unfairly attacked an idea, individual or group that you support? Have you ever been the "victim" of a political diatribe by someone so sure he or she was right that there was no room for discussion? Did you ever stand by idly and watch the abuse proceed?

Me too. It's time to set the record straight and let people know that just because the topic gets political doesn't mean it's a free-for-all. Even when the topic turns political, we expect respect, accuracy, logic and reason. You need to let people know you do not endorse the dissemination of propaganda or hatred. Not only should you avoid being a victim of political communication transgressions, you should take the next step and become Truth Sleuth, Deception Detective, Fallacy Finder, Fact Fanatic, Accuracy Advocate, Concerned Citizen and Voice of Reason. In other words, raise

the bar on political dialogue overall. This chapter answers reader questions about how to do that.

25. Some boats need to be rocked

Political correctness can be very incorrect. There are some issues worth fighting for with a passion. Reasonable dialogue is one of those issues.

This chapter tells you what boats you need to rock, why and how. They include, the trivial correctness boat, the apathy boat, the futility boat, the unknowable boat, the misinformation boat, the immediate gratification boat, the “they’re all the same” boat, the verbal anarchy boat, the “it’s not my problem” boat (the one that’s docked next to the “apathy” boat), the “we can’t talk about that” boat, and the “I don’t want to rock the boat” boat.

Some boats need to be rocked, and chapter 25 tells you the 12 boats you need to rock.

26. Stop arguing and start communicating

This chapter explains how to become an Accuracy Advocate and a Voice of Reason for reasonable political dialogue. Suggestions include:

1. Speak up when show hosts use fallacies in their political arguments.
Call or email and request that they speak with accuracy.
2. Speak up when people send you inaccurate and inappropriate emails.
Send corrections and ask them to pass the corrections on to everyone they sent the original emails to.
3. Speak up when people bully or intimidate people into silence.
Insist they treat everyone with respect.
4. Speak up when dialogue moves away from the issues into personal attack.
Bring the focus back to the substantive issues.
5. Speak up when blog posts turn nasty.
Redirect the conversation away from mudslinging toward rational dialogue.
6. Suggest, request and insist that blog owners set standards for posts.
Let them know that you want substance, not flames.
7. Talk about the things that matter to you.
Make political dialogue a proper conversation for “polite company.”
8. Change the way you communicate with your congressional representatives.

Let them know what you want, and applaud them when they represent you the way you want them to. Meet them in person whenever you can.

9. Get involved with a political party.

If your party no longer represents you, get involved and advocate rational dialogue.

Appendix:

Glittering generalities and name-calling words

Since the political language in Washington influences us all, I include a list of some of the more influential applications of political persuasion and manipulation. You will recognize them.

Attacks / Counterattacks

On the other side of the political aisle is an example of counterattacks that may satisfy but are also likely to intensify and inflame. Learn what not to do – and discover a better approach than the automatic one.

SpeakStrong, Unite and Conquer Concur glossary

It's frustrating when the language doesn't match the ideas in my head. So I made up a lot of definitions throughout the book. If you get confused about my invented words, you can find their definitions here.

I also include terms that are widely used and little understood.

Communicating power as we speak

Logician Lee Beaumont created a brilliant chart about conversations, the terms that embrace them and the corresponding power stance. If you're ever confused about where dialogue ends and debate starts, this chart will make it clear.

Resources

Where do you go for facts and accurate information? This section provides you with a list of fact-checking and information sources you can count on.

Forward Book
Summary to a Friend