

Framing the Future

How Progressive Values Can
Win Elections and Influence People
by Bernie Horn

as Summarized by Bob Stachnik

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Horn is a Disciple of Lakoff

- “Frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality”
- “Facts bounce off frames”
- “The ideas are primary...The language evokes ... those ideas.”
- “What they (conservatives) have done right is to successfully frame issues from their perspective.”
- George Lakoff

Key Points of Agreement for Horn and Lakoff

- Democrats need to embrace their progressive roots with the same fervor with which Republicans embrace their conservative roots.
- This is the meaning of “values”.
- People know what Republicans stand for: “Low taxes, small government, strong defense, traditional values” (8 words)
- Democrats stand for ... what?
- Do we know? Can we state our worldview in 8 words?

Lakoff's Contribution

- A comprehensive theory that explains how progressives and conservatives can see the same facts and arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions
- A recipe for how progressives can reframe issues from a conservative to a liberal perspective

Lakoff's Importance

- Major figure in modern Cognitive Science
- Extremely influential in the Democratic Party
- Counterbalance to conservative framing guru Frank Luntz

The Trouble With Lakoff

- Lakoff takes a deep and comprehensive approach to understanding framing
- His work is very important, but ...
- “Easy for you, difficult for me”
- Señor Wences

A Telling Quote

- “ I don't want to be a scold, but some of you misuse the word 'framing' ...Others overstress its complexity, making framing into something that seems beyond the capability of grassroots activists. George Lakoff does that by suggesting that 'every word, like *elephant*, evokes a frame.’

Makes you afraid to open your mouth, doesn't it?”

- Bernie Horn

How Horn Differs from Lakoff

- He adds something missing from “Lakoff”: **Testing**
- He asks: What do polls show, not about “values”, but about electorate responses to specific language?
- Lakoff says Republicans win because of their think tanks
- But Horn says Republicans win because they spend a fortune on poll-tested language
- Lakoff says “Speak to bi-conceptuals ('persuadables') the way you speak to your base.”
- But Horn says “Remember Frank Luntz: ‘It's not what you say, it's what people hear.’”
- *Test to see what persuadables hear.*
- Horn says persuadables differ from conservative and progressive partisans
- Testing shows they
 - Are less interested in politics
 - Know less about current events
 - Interpret language differently from partisans

Americans Beliefs About Iraq (October, 2004)

Percent answering “True”:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| • Saddam had ties to al Qaeda: | 62% |
| • Saddam helped plan 9/11: | 41% |
| • Iraq had WMDs: | 38% |
| • Some 9/11 attackers were Iraqi: | 37% |

Horn's Biggest (and Most Debatable) Claim

- We must talk to persuadables using their language instead of ours
- How to state our values for persuadables?
- “The Progressive Deep Frame”:

Freedom, Opportunity, Security (+ Responsibility)

“Democratic Deep Frame”

- Horn argues that our best bet for winning over persuadables is to always couch our positions in terms of Freedom, Opportunity and Security. Bring every issue back to one of those three.

So What Do Democrats Stand For?

The Declaration of Independence?

Life = Security

Liberty = Freedom

Pursuit of Happiness = Opportunity

Bob's Opinion

- Horn makes much of the fact that “research” (i.e., polls) support the unique effectiveness of *Freedom, Opportunity, Security* but the actual data suggests that there is little statistical difference between it and other battle cries
- What really matters is that Democrats express positions in terms of their values
- Horn particularly shines when he offers specific, persuadable-tested, framing language

Language Coordination

- Lakoff and Horn, among others, stress the fact that conservative success has had a lot to do with the fact that they share a common language. They support one another with their shared narrative.
- Is it worth it to, if necessary, **memorize** this language?

- Yes. Conservatives created a language that favors their side in exactly this way.
- Eventually our language becomes “natural”, displaces their language, and becomes the new framework for understanding issues

Talking About Our Philosophy:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Compassion	We favor freedom, opportunity and security for all
Communalism	

Talking About Our Philosophy:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Individual responsibility	Mutual responsibility Common responsibility
Personal responsibility <i>(w.r.t. public policy)</i>	Community responsibility I'll take the responsibility

Talking About Ourselves:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Liberal	Progressive

Talking About Conservatives:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Conservative plan Conservative solution	Risky scheme Extreme proposal

Talking About Government:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Government	Community Society America We

Talking About Taxes:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Tax relief Tax simplification	Tax fairness Tax breaks or Tax loopholes
Death tax	Estate tax or Inheritance tax

Talking About Regulation:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Regulate	Make sure the rules are fair Act to enforce the rules Create a level playing field Act as a referee Act as a watchdog
Give rights or benefits Corporate greed	Don't deny rights or benefits Wall Street

Talking About Social Services:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Social services	Provide basic protections Provide basic minimums
Poor The poor	Low-income Families The vulnerable <i>(preferably “children”, “the</i>

	elderly” and “the disabled”)
Seniors Safety net	Elderly Basic necessities
Inexpensive Budget cuts Shred Dismantle	Smart investment Budgets should invest and rebuild
Free services	Sliding scale payments
Welfare	Assistance or Help
Illegal aliens	Undocumented workers
Personalization Personal accounts	Privatization Private accounts

Talking About The Economy:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Free markets	Fair markets

Talking About Terrorism / The War:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Freedom	Security or Safety

Talking About Global Trade:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Free trade	Fair trade

Talking About Crime:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Rights	Security or Safety

Talking About Health:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Universal health coverage Single payer Medicare for all	Quality, affordable health care
Canadian-style health care	American health care
Free market health care	Private health care schemes

Talking About Abortion:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Choice <i>(if it suggests consumer choice)</i>	Freedom from government interference

Talking About Education:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Choice	Equal opportunity

Talking About the Environment:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Climate change Exploring for energy Dependence on foreign oil	Global warming Drilling for oil Energy independence

Talking About Consumer Protection:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Tort reform Lawsuit abuse	Civil justice Equal justice

Talking About Religion:

Don't say ...	Say ...
Religious right	Religious political extremists