

All The Rage

Painlessly Pilot People Away From Poisonous but Popular Propaganda

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When folks fall for hazardous propaganda or other dangerous deceptions, they can become angry if someone tries to help them.

It has often been said, "You should never drive a 'tank' of correction over a 'matchstick bridge' of relationship", and that's unquestionably true. But even if we endeavor to *gently* alert *close friends* to some of the falsehoods being peddled today, they can still become infuriated and close their minds to our advice. What's more, their hostile response discourages us from wanting to *supply* further advice.

Why do they get like this, and how can it be prevented?

WHY SUCH PEOPLE GET ANGRY

In this article, I want to highlight three reasons for their rage:

* If we are not careful, we can give our audience the impression that we are eating up their valuable time just to 'score points', or look clever, or start an argument for the sake of it. If they suspect our motivation falls into any such category, they are sure to become irritated. Similarly, whenever we seek to 'rescue' people, it is very easy for them to get the sense that we are looking down on them. If they imagine we see them as naïve, or foolish, or stupid, they are bound to become cross.

* If we are hasty or ham-fisted in our efforts to promote a position that runs counter to almost everything the other person has ever heard, they'll think we are trying to deceive them. This is hardly going to please them.

* Most importantly of all, people normally regard their current outlook as not just *reasonable*, but actually a vital key to putting the world to rights - if not the path to paradise itself. Hence it becomes a 'sacred cow' to them. When we come along and criticize that 'cow outlook' in any fundamental way, they assume we are trying to keep them - not to mention the rest of humanity - from being safe and secure. In these circumstances it is little wonder they get upset. And in many cases, they've been indoctrinated to suppose that the path *WE* espouse is actually the road to disaster or even destruction. If we lack subtlety in our attempts to guide them onto that path, we shouldn't be surprised if they fly off the handle.

AN OVERARCHING ANSWER

A simple solution for avoiding all such problems is this: *Put yourself in the shoes of your target audience and then behave towards them the way you would want them to behave towards you if you'd been brainwashed.*

Regardless of the type of relationship you enjoy with the individual you are trying to assist, and regardless of how many reasons they have for trusting you, every one of the following twelve tips has application. And please be assured that these tips aren't theoretical. I've learned them all the hard way over the last forty years.

In *certain* cultures it is the case that a small proportion of the advice below may not be valid. But, generally speaking, every sane person wants to be treated along the lines described.

NOTE: The following tips are designed for use in *conversations* - whether face-to-face, by email, telephone, or what-have-you. For readers who want instead to rescue people by writing a book/pamphlet/article, or by making a video or giving a speech, this is a much more involved matter and I'd need to write a much longer piece to cover it properly. But most, and arguably all, of the tips below are relevant in such scenarios. Note too that, while none of us can even *hope* to live up to *all* of the following tips, if you do your best you'll get impressive results from your efforts. And of course, every person you convert to the truth will then be able to start rescuing others.

THOSE TWELVE TIPS

So, let's pretend for a minute that the shoe is indeed on the other foot and someone is trying to encourage you to accept something you've long been taught was a lie - and a treacherous lie at that. What should they do if they want to win you over to their position?

1. They should treat you in a respectful way.

You'll be annoyed if they give you the feeling that they perceive you to be gullible or ignorant or 'asleep'. (People are seldom 'asleep'. Rather, they are very uninformed or monstrously *misinformed*.) Instead, you'll want them to show you respect. If you say anything erroneous during the discussion, they ought to be gracious in the way they react. And your pride will find the conversation markedly easier to cope with if, rather than bossily confronting you with assertions, the other person raises at least some of their points in the form of courteous questions (e.g. "What do you make of the insistence by the French authorities that none of the various CCTV cameras that were in a position to capture the final stages of Princess Diana's fatal car journey in the center of Paris were working?"). If they act in a respectful way, you'll be vastly more willing to listen to them.

2. They should unambiguously demonstrate that they have your best interests at heart.

In the manner in which they behave, they should make it obvious that they are *not* undertaking this debate with you for the purpose of belittling you, or for their own amusement, or for any other unfortunate reason. They ought to handle themselves in such a way as to persuade you that their intentions are above reproach. For instance, they should avoid using specialist terms, unless accompanying those terms with explanations. And they should urge you not to take their word for anything. They should instead advise you to check what they are saying and to investigate the issues for yourself.

3. They should display humility and openness to correction.

They ought to 'own up' to some of their own shortcomings and past errors. (Thus, if they can't answer a given point you make, they should be careful not to respond with silence alone. Instead, they should freely acknowledge you've made a good point that they can't, as things stand, contradict.) They ought also to patiently 'hear you out'. If, for example, you choose to defend your existing outlook, they should not interject unless it's needful or unless they want to offer an uplifting comment in support of something you've said. Either way, their interruption should be as brief as sensibly possible unless you've given them permission to cut in. (If they 'hear you out', it'll oblige *you* to hear *them* out and to take notice of any evidence they produce. A further advantage to them from hearing you out is that they may learn some things *themselves* - including extra ways to help rescue you. If they find you to be sound on a certain issue, they may well be able to utilize that fact to correct you more easily on related ones.) The other person should consistently act in a humble and self-effacing way. So, when you are sound in your stance on a particular point, they should willingly admit this. And they should never so much as *hint* to you that they are dismissive of your beliefs.

4. They shouldn't ask you to immediately adopt insights it took them a long time to accept.

Like an oyster as it slowly forms a pearl, they may have required *YEARS* to develop their outlook. Crucially, they may also have struggled (mentally) for weeks or *months* before they finally felt able to 'come to terms' with a given aspect of their current worldview. If they then ask you - someone who has probably had *none* of this preparation - to suddenly swallow their resulting pearls of wisdom, they should not be overly shocked if you do not respond well. This principle is summed up by the old adage, 'Cast not your pearls before swine'. (The original proverb from which this saying derives is: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, *lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*" The italicized part of that quote is a vivid picture of the rage to which we made reference at the start of this document.) Rather, the other person ought to begin by raising some of the *least* controversial and *least* deniable flaws in your worldview. A sensible rule of thumb is that they should never require you to be more open to correction than they are.

5. They shouldn't expect you to ditch your entire outlook overnight.

Unless there is some great urgency, they should not rush to 'up-end' your *whole* paradigm. Nor should they expose you to too many new concepts in one sitting. It will simply be too much for your system to take. They should

follow the well-known maxim, "Slowly, slowly, catchee monkey". (One can liken your situation to standing on a pillar made up of beliefs you genuinely consider to be hard facts. Part of the reason for your faith in this edifice is that its supporting 'facts' seem to be relatively consistent with each other. A second reason you trust it is because of the other people who seem to trust it. If someone were to simply 'mosey up' out of the blue and insist your pillar consists wholly of lies, half-truths, and misconceptions, without first taking the shine off your pillar by pointing out, one by one, at least a handful of the weaknesses in it, and without constructing at least the *rudiments* of a *new* pillar in front of you so that you can be confident there exists an alternative structure considerably stronger than your current one, they'd be bonkers to expect you to jump off your pillar any time soon.)

6. They should avoid causing you unnecessary embarrassment.

Instead of challenging you *face-to-face* with their criticisms, they should try to direct you to material (e.g. a book or video) that you can study in private - and at your own pace. This will massively reduce the risk of you becoming embarrassed in front of them - with the inevitable potential such humiliation has for causing a flare up. (When appropriate, they should indicate that the real reason they are asking you to review the material in question is not so much to *correct* you as to obtain your advice on whether the material holds water or not.) And if you should ever come out with a groundless assertion, it would cause you far fewer blushes if, instead of the other person barking "Prove it!", they were either to back off - giving you the necessary space to recognize the foolishness of your remark for yourself - or they were to reply with something akin to, "I must admit I was not aware of that. In case anyone asks me to prove what you've just told me, can you suggest a source I can go to for evidence in support?". In the same sort of vein, if someone criticizes you to your face, it is normally much easier on your ego if there are *no other folks present*. And, returning to our 'pillar' analogy from Tip #5, if anyone *mocks* your pillar, you are justified in feeling embarrassed - especially if you've ever promoted your pillar to anyone else.

7. They should know what they are talking about.

It would be preferable if the other person were conversant enough with the subject at hand to be able to provide at least *some* sort of an answer to any objections you might logically respond with. If they cannot provide you with a decent answer off the top of their head, and if they cannot direct you to a person, book, video or website that can, they should explicitly undertake to dig up the answer for you. (Ideally, they should be knowledgeable enough on the topic in question to *pre-empt* all criticisms you might otherwise have come out with to anything they are intending to say to you.) Put bluntly, the

more familiar they are with the topic the better. That way, they stand a far better chance of knowing which issues they can safely raise early on, and which ones are so central, or so *cherished*, that they'll need to be set aside for later. If the other person is *not* well-versed in the topic, they should act as if they regard the two of you as being on the same journey of discovery together, and that they see their discussion with you as being just as much an opportunity for them to learn from you as it is the other way around.

8. They should be able to back up their claims.

They should never expect you to take onboard any position of theirs before they've supplied you with adequate evidence in support of it. If you request evidence, and they don't have it to hand, they should always offer to send it to you - or, as a minimum, send you the details of how it can be obtained. They ought also to avoid making firm statements they cannot substantiate. The more categorical an assertion, the stronger the evidence they ought to have up their sleeve for it. If they cannot corroborate something when you ask them to, they are going to lose credibility in your eyes. And if they come out with an unequivocal contention that you are actually able to prove *false*, their reputation may be damaged irreparably.

9. They should make their position appear plausible to you in terms of your current worldview.

If they claim something to be true, and if you question that claim because it doesn't fit your present understanding of how the world works, they should be able to provide you with a credible-sounding explanation (i.e. a rationale that seems at least *vaguely* compatible with your existing paradigm). If, for example, they tell you that the CIA assassinated President Kennedy, and if you respond by asking them why the mainstream media appears to be so reticent to agree with them on that, they ought to be able to furnish you with *some* type of an excuse that does NOT require you to believe in a colossal conspiracy from the get-go. (Conspiracists have a terrible habit of failing to see how unspeakably difficult it is for the majority of people today to believe in a big conspiracy. People find the concept indigestible not only because it is terrifying in its own right, but also because it would mean they have been totally suckered for decades, *and* because they can't *begin* to imagine how such a big conspiracy could ever have come into being - *nor why so few of the supposed conspirators 'blab'.*) If anyone wants to convince you of a big conspiracy, they should offer a much gentler 'slope' - e.g. by starting with a small conspiracy and building from there.

10. They should stay self-controlled and warm-hearted at all times.

If they know their subject, they won't feel threatened by any arguments or

evidence you might throw at them. And, if they love the truth, they will want *you* to know the truth - which, in turn, means they should remain unerringly reasonable and personable, and should always treat you in a gracious way, so as to encourage you to respect them and attach weight to their remarks. They should keep in mind the observation that, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar". (If, however, they behave as if they *don't* love the truth, it'll inevitably convey to you that they *don't* in fact love the truth, which will only increase your suspicion that they *haven't found* the truth.)

11. They should give you as few reasons as possible to reject them.

Their mission is to disarm you, not arm you unnecessarily with pretexts for ignoring them. So, for instance, they ought to avoid making non-essential utterances that might offend you. It would be ridiculous to risk ruining their rescue effort over some peripheral remark. And if they can't figure out how to present a given point in a way you'll find easy to manage, and if there is some reason why they can't delay raising it, they should do what they can to prepare you for it - e.g. by asking, "Can I be completely honest?" before 'spilling their guts'. They should also express their position in a high-quality way. If, for example, they are replying to you textually - by email, say - they should polish their wording until they can find nothing else to improve. After all, if they don't appear to care much about their output, how can they ask *YOU* to care much about it? (In a perfect world, their lifestyle too would give the minimum amount of ammunition to their opponents. Many people today seem frighteningly ready to dismiss incontrovertible facts and unassailable arguments merely because they don't respect the person proffering them.)

12. They should defuse things whenever you show signs of irritation.

If you're discussing matters with them face-to-face, and you start fidgeting or exhibiting bodily discomfort or you produce illogical responses to things they say, these are indicators that you are getting rather 'ticked-off' and are heading for an eruption. Similarly, if you are conversing over the phone or textually, and you concoct any seriously silly replies, this too is a clue that you are losing your rag. The other person should be watching out for such signs and, if any occur, they should immediately take steps to soothe you (e.g. by humbly asking you for your thoughts - or by making a joke at their own expense; changing the subject; and then giving you a good amount of time to cool off before they return to the problematic topic).

CONCLUSION

If you and I desire to find a way to keep friends from getting enraged when

we attempt to bring them the truth, we just need to re-read those twelve tips and swap 'they' and 'you', 'their' and 'your', and so on. Those tips will look like hard work, but if we love the truth (which we should) we'll be willing to do our best for the sake of deceived souls. (Whatever the final result, we'll also have the satisfaction of knowing we 'went the extra mile' and gave the other person a first-class chance to unearth the truth.)

In closing, if you ever have trouble remembering those twelve tips, simply follow the underlying rule we saw at the beginning - i.e. put yourself in the shoes of your target audience and treat them the way you would want them to treat you if you were in their boat. And, if you ever identify more than one justifiable way to respond to something they've said or done, it's invariably best to pick the option that will do the most to increase their admiration and appreciation for you. Put in a nutshell: Our goal is not to win the *argument*. Our goal is to win the *person*.

If this article has blessed you, I'd love to hear about it. I can be reached via:
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