

Talking about <your issue here>

(backed by research, but hey, what does science know?)

“Frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality – and sometimes to create what we take to be reality. They structure our ideas and concepts, they shape the way we reason ... For the most part, our use of frames is unconscious and automatic.”

George Lakoff, Professor of Cognitive Science at University of California, Berkley.

PROGRESSIVE VS. CONSERVATIVE FRAMING

The conservative worldview is a Strict Father model: there’s a natural order to things. Children respect and obey their parents, which builds character. This involves learning self-discipline and self-reliance. Once children mature they are on their own, having earned independence.

The progressive worldview is a Nurturant Parent model: raising a family is a collaborative, nurturing process. Good behaviour comes from respect, not from fear of punishment. Good communication, space for discussion and clear decision-making are all key.

Few people have a complete conservative or progressive worldview, most have both of these frames active in one way or another, in how they work, play or relate to various issues. Persuasive communicating requires activating the relevant worldview in people.

FRAMING BASICS:

1. Lead with values, not facts. Facts are persuasion neutral. Sorry lawyers: it’s true.
2. Don’t just negate your opponent’s language. That’s super dumb. i.e. if I told you to not picture an elephant, you’re probably just pictured an elephant.
3. Use language (verbs, metaphors, etc.) that convey your world view. Don’t talk about crime as a monster if you want the solution to be based on a preventative health model.
4. Use active, positive language wherever possible. Problems and solutions have subjects, name them. Our rights are being abused = the government is denying us our rights.
5. Your message must activate your base (to be messengers), persuade the persuadable (activate their values) and antagonise your opposition (then you know it works).

NARRATIVE 101:

Basically, a narrative is a story where someone (a protagonist) is trying to achieve something. Then something or someone (an antagonist) gets between them and what they want. This causes conflict. Through a series of trials, and often with the help of a friend or magic object, the protagonist eventually either achieves their goal (happy face) or doesn’t (sad face).

For example, a young family wants to be part of their community and enjoy their time together. But then their landlord sends them an eviction notice (oh no!). With the help of their local community legal centre, the family is able to overturn the eviction and stay in their home.

FRAMING COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES:

- Stop talking about clients, disadvantaged/vulnerable/poor people, etc. Those labels aren't what people are; they're things they are experiencing – hopefully short term.
- Talk about people going through hard times, experiencing discrimination, facing social, cultural and economic disadvantage, etc.
- Avoid acronyms, jargon, shorthand, etc. It's exclusionary. Every time we say 'CLC' instead of 'community legal centre', we waste an opportunity to reinforce our values.
- Don't frame yourself as the 'hero' in someone else's story. Your role is to help people *navigate* tough times / *get back on track* / *overcome* temporary obstacles.

FRAMING HUMAN RIGHTS:

- We currently talk about human rights as though they are individual objects (can be taken away) or negotiated agreements. Both are antithetical human rights as inherent. Stop.
- Start talking about human rights as relational, the rights of individuals IN society; the need to balance the rights to freedom and freedom of expression.
- Talk about human rights as actions: they are the choices that we make everyday. We understand and exercise our rights.
- Talk about human rights as a golden rule: as respect for others and how we treat other people. Human rights are an expression of love for those around us.

FRAMING ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER JUSTICE:

- Use the **life as journey** frame for individual's stories. *helping people turn their lives around... programs to prevent people being entrenched... things that impact over the course of your life...*
- Use the **society as nurturing community** frame more broadly. That means listening. Collaborating. Working in partnership towards common goals.
- Be aware of the oppositional frames: the 'just move on and get over it' and 'they don't deserve it' frames. Be solution oriented and point towards shared community outcomes.
- Offer explanations / causes for problems (e.g. the system sucks + lack of support services = incarceration); when we don't, people fill in the gaps (i.e. it's *their* fault).
- In the United States, race and class are inseparable, and conservatives cannot win economic arguments without 'race-baiting'.

FRAMING POLITICS:

- Make the system or the law the problem, not an individual politician – especially if you want them to change their mind about something!
- People typically agree that corporations and big business have too much power and that people and communities have too little: frame responsible government as a facilitator of power from vested interests back to communities where it belongs.
- People are disillusioned with politics, lacking trust and faith in politicians. Try frames that challenge politicians to be better: *show leadership* / *standing up for people*, etc.

Experiment! See what works! Let us know what you find!