

Tactics

A Game Plan for Discussing
Your Christian Convictions

(Koukl)

Summary

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**Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your
 Christian Convictions**
 Gregory Koukl

Note: This summary contains key ideas from the book not necessarily in the same order as the book presents them.

The Role of Ambassador

Thesis

- Even if you know the Bible well, you will not be a good ambassador for Christ if you use ineffective tactics.
- Our engagements should resemble diplomacy, not D-Day.

Three Basic Skills for the Ambassador

1. **CONTENT:** (Strategic) Know the central message of God's kingdom and be aware of the typical issues others will bring to discussions.
2. **METHOD:** (Tactical) Be comfortable using the tools of a diplomat to express yourself clearly and persuasively.
3. **MANNER:** (Operational) Embody the character of Christ as you interact with people. Be gracious and charitable. If you or the other

person gets angry, you have lost as an ambassador.

Principled Arguing

- Avoid quarreling about foolish speculations ([2Tim 2:14, 23](#)).
- Do confront and urge when necessary ([2Tim 4:1-2](#)). Do it in a fair, reasonable, and gracious way. Let the Spirit control your words and actions.

Leave a Stone in His Shoe

- Don't rush to reaping in every conversation. Sometimes the fruit is not ripe. Be faithful in planting, watering and weeding. God will reap.
- Make a goal to give each person something to consider that is difficult to ignore, like a stone in his shoe.

The Columbo Tactic

What Is It?

Rather than quarrel, ask **questions** that invite thoughtful dialogue.

Advantages of Columbo Tactic

- Sincere questions show that you are interested in what the person thinks.
- Questions can help you learn about the person and begin to build a relationship.
- Questions give you a way to make progress on a point without being pushy.
- Questions can help you guide the conversation.

Basics of Using Columbo

"What do you mean by that?"

Use variations of this question to gather information. Your tone should be mild and inquisitive. Make an effort to understand **WHAT** the person means. (Sometimes people have not thought through the issues.) Be patient. Use questions to help the person state his views specifically instead of in vague generalities.

"How did you come to that conclusion?"

Use this type of question to find out **WHY** the person believes what he believes. Opinions are not proofs. Whoever makes the claim is responsible for providing the proof. An assertion without evidence is not useful. When someone makes an assertion, ask yourself:

- Is it possible?
- Is it plausible (consistent with other factors)?
- Is it probable (more likely than other options)?

Don't Take the Bait

If a person tries to shift the burden of proof to you, don't take the bait. The person who makes an assertion is the one who should bear the burden.

When Overmatched

When overmatched, don't argue your case. Give the person credit for interesting ideas. Express interest in understanding the person's point of view. Then say, "Let me think about it."

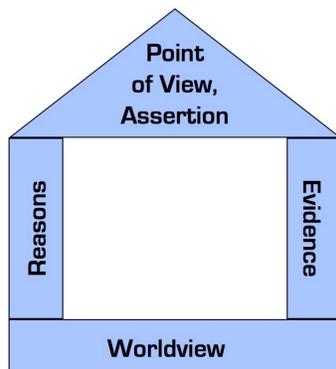
Lead the Way

If a person makes a claim that you wish to address, use questions to help the person see the potential flaws for himself. Example:

- Do you think people who commit moral crimes should be punished?
- Have you ever committed any moral crimes? [Generally, people answer yes to those questions because they tap into a deep intuition people share of guilt and deserved punishment. From there, you can lead into a discussion of God's provision for forgiveness.]

Exploiting Flaws

- Be on watch for circular reasoning.
- Look for assumptions people make without evidence (a priori).
- Ask questions to discover if the person's reasons or evidence are strong enough to hold up the roof of their point of view.
- If a person continues to change topics to dodge issues without giving reasons or evidence, say, "Before we move another issue, I'd be interested in understanding your reasoning on the current issue."



- Your objective is to point out weaknesses in a view in a way that is not pushy or condescending. Be clever, but innocent (**Mat 10:16**).
- Try an indirect approach with a phrase such as "Have you considered...?"
- Use a soft challenge that is genial.
 - ▶ "Would you be willing to look at another angle?"
 - ▶ "May I suggest an alternative?"

Being a Better Columbo

To be a better Columbo, be ready (**1Pet 3:15**).

Anticipate	Try to anticipate the questions people will ask or assertions they will make. Prepare a set of Columbo questions to address those.
Reflect	After each encounter, reflect on how you could have been a better ambassador. Do you need to shore up your knowledge, your methods of interaction, or your manner?
Practice	Run through some scenarios in your head. If possible, role play with someone.

Defending Against the Columbo Ambush

You may meet someone who uses the Columbo tactic to trap, manipulate, or embarrass you. What can you do? Once you recognize what they are doing, try a cordial decline such as: "My sense is that you want to explain your point of view by questioning me. I want to be sure I understand your view. Would you mind stating it directly so I can give your view the attention it deserves?"

Some people ask questions that are challenges in disguise, such as, "What gives you the right to...?" How can you respond to get the conversation back on track? Try to get the person to directly state his view with, "I'm confused What do you mean by that?"

Views that Self-Destruct

Law of Non-Contradiction

When statements fail to meet their own criteria of validity, they are self-refuting. Your objective is to gently help people see the flaw in those statements. Often, asking questions is the best tactic

Examples

- There is no truth. (Is that a true statement?)
- You can't know anything for sure. (Are you sure about that?)
- Never take anyone's advice on that issue. (Should I take your advice?)
- People should never impose their values on others. (Are those your values? Are you trying to impose them on me?) (**Rom 2:1**)
- It's wrong for anyone to criticize another's views (Are you criticizing my views?)

The difficulty is that contradictions are often embedded in larger ideas which make them difficult to recognize (**Col 2:8**). Listen carefully.

Some world-views are self-refuting.

- The Hindu view that the world is an illusion contradicts the idea that anyone would know they are a player in the illusion.
- Theistic evolution suggests that God used evolution to design the world. This is contradictory because creation has a purpose and evolution is accidental.
- The claim that only science gives reliable truth is self-refuting. There is no scientific evidence to

prove that science is the only way to know truth. The claim is not a fact of science. It is a philosophical assertion.

- The notion that all religions are equally true (pluralism) is self-refuting. Some religions claim to be the only true religion. They can't all be the only true religion.

Objections at Odds

Sometimes people state objections that are at odds with one another.

Examples:

- Heaven would be a poor place without Ghandi in it. The reasoning here is that Ghandi was a good person. Good people go to heaven; therefore, he should go to heaven. The problem is that the Hindu view is that there is no clear distinction between good or bad.
- Someone complains when people treat others like beasts then states that humans are simply evolved beasts.

There is no way to account for a transcendent standard of objective good without the existence of a transcendent moral rule maker. The question is not whether an atheist can be moral but whether he can make sense of morality in a universe without God.

Taking the Roof Off

Reductio Ad Absurdum

Sometimes when you press an idea to its logical consequences, the result is absurd. Most people enjoy living in a world filled with morality, meaning, and order; however, many of these people deny that God exists. How can you help them begin to see the flaw in their thinking?

Roof Removal, Step by Step

1. By asking questions, find out what the person is claiming as an assertion, principle, or moral rule.
2. Think through what the assertion, principle, or moral rule implies. Are there inconsistencies or things that appear wrong when you follow them to their natural conclusions.

3. If you find a problem, point it out using questions that encourage the person to consider the implication of their ideas.

Example:

Natural Tendency

- **Claim:** Any “natural” tendency or behavior is morally acceptable.
- **Taking the Roof Off:** If (torture, murder, human trafficking...) comes naturally for someone, does that make it morally acceptable?
- **Therefore:** Just because an impulse is natural for someone doesn’t mean it is morally acceptable.

Steamroller

Why do people ignore good arguments (points of view buttressed with sound reasons)?

1. Emotional reasons: annoying experiences with Christians, abusive churches, loved ones who have died without Christ, disapproving family, fear of retribution (physical, financial...)
2. Prejudice: cultural influences, bias
3. Pigheadedness: deep seated rebellion against God ([John 3:19](#))

Occasionally, you will meet a person who is controlling and verbally abusive. A notable trait of steam rollers is that they frequently interrupt. They aren’t interested in conversation. Their aim is to intimidate. What can you do to keep from getting flattened by a steamroller?

1. Stop him: Make a genial request for courtesy.
 - ▶ “I’m not quite finished.”
 - ▶ “Let me respond to your statement. When I’m finished, you can make your next point.”
 - ▶ “That’s a good question which deserves a decent answer. It will take me several minutes to do that. Is that okay with you?”

Talk calmly. Avoid any hint of irritation, but don’t go on to the steamroller’s long list of points until

he gives you an opportunity to address the first one.

2. Shame him: If the steamroller continues to interrupt, calmly point this out.
3. Leave him: If the steamroller won’t allow you to be part of the conversation, leave ([Mat 7:6](#)). Save your energy for people who are interested in a sincere conversation. Don’t take verbal abuse personally. It’s not about you. It’s about Christ.

Rhodes Scholar

Informed = Know WHAT a person believes
Educated = Know WHY a person holds a view

Even experts can be wrong. Always ask why a person has a certain view.

- The expert should be able to point to evidence to support his view. The evidence is more important than the letters behind a person's name.
- Be aware of the person's worldview. Starting with predetermined conclusions is cheating. It eliminates certain answers before analysis begins.

Just the Facts

- Be aware that many challenges to Christianity are based on bad information.
- Know the facts.

Two-Step Process

1. What is the claim? Be clear on it.
2. Is the claim factually accurate? Check out the facts for yourself.

Examples:

- Claim: Religion has caused more deaths than anything else in history. Fact: Under institutional atheism (Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev), over 66 million were killed.
- Claim: The U.S. founding fathers were not Christians. Fact: Of the members of the

Constitutional Convention, 51 of 55 were Christians of the sort that we would describe as evangelical.

- Claim: In the first three centuries, warring between Christians and pagans threatened to tear apart Rome. Fact: Jesus' followers had no armies and they considered it a privilege to die for Christ.
- Claim: For political reasons, the Council of Nicaea fabricated the idea of Jesus being the Son of God. Fact: No one at Nicaea considered Jesus to be a mere mortal.
- Claim: The Bible says we shouldn't judge one another. Fact: The Bible says we should not be hypocrites when we judge one another ([Mat 7:1-5](#)).

More Sweat, Less Blood

The more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in battle.

1. Be ready for opportunities.
2. Keep what you say simple and centered on salvation.
3. Avoid religious language.
4. Focus on the truth of Christianity.
5. Give reasons for your claims.
6. Stay calm.
7. Let the person leave when he likes. Don't force the conversation.
8. Don't let him leave empty-handed. Offer a website address, a way to contact you, or another way to get answers to his questions.

Find other believers who will meet with you regularly to study topics that prepare them as ambassadors for Christ.

Don't avoid those who disagree with you. Don't be discouraged when others get the best of you. Know and speak the truth. Leave the rest in God's hands.

Go out and give 'em Heaven!

Ambassador's Creed

I will be:

- **Ready:** I'll stay alert to opportunities to represent Christ.
- **Patient:** I will listen, then gently engage those who disagree.
- **Reasonable:** I will present facts and evidence to support my claims.
- **Tactical:** I will use techniques that fit the situation and help me present the truth in an understandable and compelling way.
- **Clear:** I will choose words that make sense to my audience.
- **Fair:** When others express contrary views along with facts and evidence to support them, I will acknowledge their merit.
- **Honest:** I will be careful with the facts. I will speak the truth candidly.
- **Humble:** I will remember that I am fallible. I won't press points beyond the evidence I have.
- **Pleasant:** I will act with grace and kindness.
- **Dependent:** I will lean on God and let the Holy Spirit direct my words and actions.