



Connections Lab Workshops

Workshop Prep

Before you come to the workshop we suggest you read the pages below and watch this interview with George Lakoff: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC-aS_QyHU

Visit the [Connections Lab Website](#) before and after the Workshop for more information and resources. **You might also like to read this short piece before you attend:** [Framing 101](#) The basics, by George Lakoff.

What are Frames?

Ideas are Physical

Concepts physically grow in our brains. The more a concept is used, the stronger it gets. The stronger it gets, the more likely it is to be used again –and the more resistant it is to change.
-Antonia Scatton

Frames understand things and how they work.

You have frames for

- Which way to turn a screw to drive it in.
- What a bluejay is and a more general frame of what a bird is.
- More abstractly: what the notion of “common good” is.

Brains are literally wired and rewired through experience.

As we experience the world we make associations. If the associations are repeated, the neural pathways between them get stronger (and competing or disused pathways grow weaker). New information is processed through the filter of these existing “frames”. In the world of ideas, families, education, churches and political ideologies forge strong frames that can be almost impossible to dislodge.

Frames depend on who you are.

Everyone's experiences are different, so their frames are different. Just because something is crystal clear to you doesn't mean it will be understood in the same way by others.



Repetition strengthens frames

If frames are repeated, the neural pathways between them get stronger. Repeating your message strengthens it. Conversely mentioning your opponent's -even to refute it- strengthens it.

Frames are remarkably resistant to change:

As we grow, the pathways in our network of understanding -like pathways in a forest- become easier to access and harder to ignore. In fact, the brain is hardwired to resist change -imagine Eric Clapton trying to un-learn how to play guitar! This makes sense from an evolutionary standpoint, but in the world of ideas strong frames can be almost impossible to dislodge. Resistance to change can be so strong that if a fact does not fit the frame, the fact loses. Though people can reason, it is very hard work and the evidence shows they most often don't. (And that means you and me too!)

What is Framing?

In political communication it is the process of creating a message that evokes our core values and our worldview and strengthens these in our listener's brains. We want to widen the pathways to our worldview while making sure we do not widen the pathways to our opposition's.

So What's a Message?

At its most basic level a message is simply anything you say. All words will light up frames in our listener's brains. The question is, will you light up our frames, or our opponent's? An effective message strengthens neural connections to our values and our worldview. However if what you say is not well framed, it will be ineffective, distract from the issue at hand or even reinforce your opponent's argument!

Worldviews: Who are we, Who are they?

We've seen that we think in frames. Frames are not isolated; they connect with one another to form more complex understanding. In the political world sets of moral value frames determine our worldview.

All politics is moral.

Moral frames are the primary determiner of how we think and feel about issues. It should be no surprise that the right and left have different, often competing sets of values that help them navigate the political landscape. In both cases, the worldviews grounded in those sets of values are internally consistent—the values reinforce each other in a coherent and systematic way.

Though some people hew closely to one or the other worldview, most apply a mixture of both -they are *bi-conceptual*.



In American politics the metaphor of the Nation as Family is useful in understanding our dueling worldviews (and why parties promote the policy positions they do). Ideal families, like political ideologies, are governed by moral principles.

Conservative -the “Strict Father” Family

The dominant model for most of history, where the world changed very slowly and there was no science to explain the world, conservatism is characterized by self reliance and hard work, in-group loyalty, resistance to change, and a desire for order and certainty. Being resistant to change conserves the order and hierarchies inherent in the Strict Father system. (From Lakoff):

- The father is the ultimate authority. The mother supports the father.
- The world is dangerous and competitive. If you work hard, you are rewarded with wealth.
- There are winners and losers. It is morally good to win.
- There is absolute right and wrong.
- Children must learn personal responsibility and obedience. Children are guided through reward and punishment.
- When children grow to adults, they must make their way on their own.

There is an inherent moral hierarchy:

“God above Man, Man above Nature, The Disciplined (Strong) above the Undisciplined (Weak), The Rich above the Poor, Employers above Employees, Adults above Children, Western culture above other cultures, America above other countries. The hierarchy extends to: Men above Women, Whites above Nonwhites, Christians above non-Christians, Straights above Gays.”
-George Lakoff

Strict Father worldview applied to politics:

With self discipline and hard work anyone can succeed. Wealth is proof of self reliance and hard work therefore morally good -those who don't have (or desire) wealth have not chosen to do the things that bring success -i.e. They are lazy freeloaders.

You are responsible for yourself. There are no social causes of personal failure. Helping those who fail is wrong because theirs is a moral failure. Help deprives them of a valuable lesson (and makes them dependent on government).

The free market is inherently moral because it creates wealth and rewards hard work and individual discipline. Interference by government is therefore immoral.

Wealth is a measure of morality, therefore the wealthy deserve authority because they are, by definition, morally better.

In short: “Every man for himself”



Progressive -The Nurturant Family

Liberalism is centered in nurturance. It embodies empathy for the wellbeing of family, community, nation and world. It accepts uncertainty and change and embraces science. Liberals see the ability to question the status quo in the face of a rapidly changing world as an asset.

- Both parents nurture children, giving them love and helping them become fulfilled.
- One must nurture oneself to be fulfilled and therefore better able to parent.
- Parents teach empathy for others, responsibility for oneself, one's community and the world.
- Questioning authority is an opportunity to learn.
- Obedience comes from respect, not fear of punishment.

Nurturant Family applied to politics:

It is moral to work for the common good -immoral to work against it.

As citizens we have the power, through our government, to protect and empower ourselves. We can, among other things, provide free public education for all children, build roads to move goods, keep everyone healthy and build national parks.

Expansion of freedom and opportunity to everyone is morally good. Interference with this mission is immoral.

Liberals believe an unregulated free market is not inherently benevolent and is sometimes predatory; we have the power to protect ourselves with sensible constraints on the market.

In short: We all do better when we all do better.

Your Presenters

George Greene

George has long been a proponent of strategic messaging through psychology. Active in many campaigns he's also served on his state party executive committee and been a Congressional District Chair. George also co-founded Small Business Minnesota. He has a BS in Education from U-Wisconsin Whitewater, did graduate work in learning theory at U-Nevada Reno where he was a research assistant teaching sign language to chimpanzees. George was a pioneer in interactive educational media production, and worked for decades in television and broadcast systems. You can find George's work on framing, campaigning and field organizing at [The Pocket Progressive](#).

[The Pocket Progressive](#)

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Julie Ethan

Julie serves candidates, campaigns and social impact causes looking to improve their message, including content writing for websites, literature and social media promotion. She also helps groups repair and restore themselves to optimal functioning with a clear and strategic mission, and a map to achieve their goals and objectives. We're all dealing with a divisive climate in public discourse and that's why it's critical to frame our message to the public in a way that finds common values and wide appeal. Julie has a BA in Organizational Leadership and an MA in Peace and Justice Studies from the Univ. of San Diego class of 2013.

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