

PREFACE

America today is in danger. It faces the threat of domination by a radical, authoritarian right wing that refers to itself as “conservative,” as if it were preserving and promoting American values. In fact, it has been trampling on them.

American values are inherently progressive, but progressives have lost their way. As traditional Americans, that is, as progressive Americans, we are beginning to lose our identity, the very values that have made America a great and free country—a country where tolerance has led us to unity, where diversity has given us strength, where acting for the common good has brought our dreams to fruition, and where respect for human dignity has increased opportunity, released creativity, and generated wealth.

But progressives have so taken these values for granted that we no longer have the ability to articulate a progressive vision. We have lost hold of the terms of political debate, and even ceded the language of progressive ideals—like “freedom” and “liberty”—to redefinition by an extremist right wing. The radical right understands *its* values and knows *its* agenda. It has imposed *its* ideas and *its* language on America. It has dominated public debate, which has allowed it to seize power.

Progressive political leaders have been inhibited in creating

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long-term change by the short-term necessities of running for office and by the need to block disastrous legislation day after day without unified grassroots support. Progressive policy makers can do only so much in the present environment. It is up to the grassroots, outside the Beltway, to find its collective progressive voice, to call once more for the common good, and to form a chorus singing out America.

The Rockridge Institute is part of that chorus and is strongly committed to progressive American values and vision. This handbook is a reflection of our work and our commitment. Progressives feel in their gut what is right. Our job at Rockridge is to turn those feelings into language, to help find the frames that will make our truths visible to others, and to translate our overwhelming sense of what is right into effective arguments.

We perceived a need among grassroots progressives for a short, easy-to-read, systematic account of the progressive vision, for the principles that apply across issue areas, and for all the essentials of framing—a handbook that can be carried around in pocket or purse and accessed over the Internet. Here it is.

There is a lot we have tackled here. We wanted to learn why slogans and spin mostly don't work for progressives. We wanted to clarify the strict father/nurturant parent models, which have been widely misunderstood. We wanted to explain why voters don't respond to laundry lists of programs and policies. And we wanted to show why framing is necessary to serve the truth.

Along the way, we have introduced some new concepts. For instance, we present up-to-date research on *deep framing*—the moral values and political principles that cut across issues and that are required before any slogans or clever phrases can resonate with the public. We look at *argument frames*—the general overall structure of argument forms used by both liberals and conservatives. And we inquire as to why conservatives focus on direct causation while liberals see systemic, or complex, causation.

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Most important, we examine and reject the idea of an ideological “center.” It is not made up of “moderates,” nor is it defined by issues spread across a left-to-right spectrum. Instead, the “center” is made up of *biconceptuals*. The idea of biconceptualism is essential to understanding—and changing—American politics. We explain why progressives can and should talk to biconceptuals in the same way they talk to their base.

A cautionary note about this handbook: Advocacy groups running specific ad campaigns, candidates running for office, and policy makers all have short-term needs—they want language for the next ad, for tomorrow’s speech, and for the upcoming election campaign, and they want sound-bite responses to this morning’s charges by the other side. This handbook is not about quick-and-dirty, short-term fixes to immediate tactical problems. It is about long-term strategy, a strategy for returning America to its progressive ideals. It is about changing the way we do politics. It is about helping America get in touch with its progressive roots.

We hope this handbook begins a process of creating a language of a renewed liberalism. In its online version, it will form the basis of the Rockridge Progressive Manual Project, designed to extend this handbook, step-by-step, to all issue areas, and to do so interactively, with an ongoing dialogue, a national conversation, with grassroots progressives. This handbook is also the seed of the Rockridge Action Network, a network of activists—individuals and groups—who want to speak out on issues and place progressive ideas and values before the public. Contact us online at info@rockridgeinstitute.org.

All over America, progressives are finding their voices. We hope this handbook will help you find yours.

George Lakoff
Berkeley, California
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INTRODUCTION: WHY WE WRITE

Progressives have a long and storied history in the United States. It is a narrative driven by the liberal principles of freedom, equality, human dignity, tolerance, and the celebration of diversity, and by the conviction that our common wealth should be used for the common good. Our nation's greatest moments occurred when these principles prevailed. We write so that they may endure.

These principles belong to no person, place, or party. They belong to no race, class, or gender. They belong to no time, region, or country of origin. And they recognize no red state/blue state dichotomy. We write to remind ourselves of the progressive principles that have always lifted our nation to higher moral ground. And we reflect on our past in the hope that we can leave our children with a better future.

Our greatest patriots have been those who articulated and acted on these principles. They gave life to our Constitution through their courage and their convictions. Their legacy is our proudest common heritage. It humbles us. We write so we, too, may act on our deepest convictions.

The central protagonists in this story have been citizens. First and foremost, the revolutionaries, like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, who fought for the expansion of freedoms by

inciting a revolt and throwing off the yoke of British despotism. In their footsteps came the abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, who insisted that no democracy could respectfully call itself one so long as slavery—the nation’s “original sin”—endured. Following them were the suffragists, like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who expanded our understanding of equality and won for women the right to vote.

There are others. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks marched for tolerance and inspired the nation to celebrate diversity. Mother Jones, Cesar Chavez, and Sojourner Truth—while living in different times—championed the inalienable dignity of all human beings. John Muir and Rachel Carson gave voice to the natural world and to our commons. In the name of peace and a check on overreaching executive power, Daniel Ellsberg released the Pentagon Papers and hastened an end to the Vietnam War.

Great politicians deserve our praise for showing their vision and their courage in the face of adversity. Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves and saved our union. Theodore Roosevelt established a role for government to curb the unbridled excesses of the market and protect our natural wonders. Franklin Delano Roosevelt went a step further and permanently established government’s central role in using the common wealth for the common good by launching the New Deal. It was more than a set of programs—it was a movement imbued with the core progressive values of empathy and responsibility, with the idea that government should not only care about people but also act on that caring.

The beliefs, the convictions, the *values* that inspired these patriots can inspire us today. While the issues and challenges we face are different, the guiding principles remain.

If America were as these patriots envisioned it, there would be no reason for *Thinking Points*. Unfortunately, the nation has strayed far from its progressive values. Children remain impover-

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ished, without adequate food and health care, offending our commitment to basic human dignity. State-sanctioned discrimination against homosexuality pervades, mocking our commitment to diversity, tolerance, and equality before the law. Wide disparities persist between ethnic communities—in health, education, incarceration rates, and economic power—leaving the promise of the civil rights movement unfulfilled. A global climate crisis looms, the challenge to solve it still unmet. And we are stuck in a military quagmire in Iraq that has sapped our nation not only of its strength and its wealth but of its very moral fiber.

Above all, a dark cloud of authoritarianism looms over the nation, making it difficult to address any of these issues without major political change. Radical conservatives have taken over the reins of government and have been controlling the terms of political debate for many years. For real change to happen, progressive ideals must return to center stage in our national political discourse. This will be neither easy nor quick—it will take years of work. But we can prevail.

It is up to us—citizens—to articulate the progressive vision. Progressive political leaders cannot do it alone. For all of their intelligence and good intentions, they are subject to overwhelming short-term pressures. They will need the help of progressives throughout America. We must trumpet our values throughout the nation so that progressive political leaders will have the backing they need to speak out far more freely.

Fortunately, today, in the service of these ideals, we do not face a British army, as the revolutionaries did. We do not face lynch mobs, as the abolitionists and civil rights workers did. We do not face a Pinkerton army, as striking workers once did. We face ourselves. We must muster the political courage to voice—and to stand for—what we most deeply believe. This is why we write. We hope you will use *Thinking Points* to help return our country to its progressive ideals.

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WINNING AND LOSING

Richard Wirthlin, chief strategist for former president Ronald Reagan, made a discovery in 1980 that profoundly changed American politics. As a pollster, he was taught that people vote for candidates on the basis of the candidates' positions on issues. But his initial polls for Reagan revealed something fascinating: Voters who didn't agree with Reagan on the issues still wanted to vote for him. Mystified, Wirthlin studied the matter further. He discovered just what made people want to vote for Reagan.¹

Reagan talked about *values* rather than issues. Communicating values mattered more than specific policy positions. Reagan *connected* with people; he communicated well. Reagan also appeared *authentic*—he seemed to believe what he said. And because he talked about his values, connected with people, and appeared authentic, they felt they could *trust* him.

For these four reasons—values, connection, authenticity, and trust—voters *identified* with Reagan; they felt he was one of them. It was not because all of his values matched theirs exactly. It was not because he was from their socioeconomic class or subculture. It was because they believed in the integrity of his connection with them as well as the connection between his worldview and his actions.

Issues are real, as are the facts of the matter. But issues are

also symbolic of values and of trustworthiness. Effective campaigns must communicate the candidates' values and use issues symbolically—as indicative of their moral values and their trustworthiness.

Recall Reagan's mythical Cadillac-driving "welfare queen." For Reagan, she represented more than just a case of welfare abuse. She came to symbolize all that was wrong with the government's approach to dealing with poverty, especially a wide array of government "handouts"—programs he thought rewarded laziness, removed the incentive to be disciplined, and promoted immorality.

Whatever we may think of Reagan, this has been a winning formula for conservatives for the past quarter century. Progressives need to learn from it. Politics is about values; it is about communication; it is about voters trusting a candidate to do what is right; it is about believing in, and identifying with, a candidate's worldview. And it is about symbolism.

Issues are secondary—not irrelevant or unimportant, but secondary. A position on issues should follow from one's values, and the choice of issues and policies should symbolize those values.

One misunderstanding, common among progressive circles, is that the Reagan and George W. Bush elections were about "personality" rather than anything substantive. Nothing is more substantive than a candidate's moral worldview—and whether he or she authentically abides by it.

Wirthlin's discovery happened to be about a presidential candidate, but it applies much more broadly. It should be taken to heart by all progressives: Concentrate on values and principles. Be authentic; stand up for what you really believe. Empathize and connect with the people you are talking to, on the basis of identity—their identity and yours.

This book is not about winning and losing elections. It is about winning and losing hearts and minds. This can happen

only by helping people discover who they truly are in their heart of hearts.

It is about values and how to communicate them. It is about what a progressive vision is, about what fundamental progressive moral values and principles are, and about how one can articulate them and argue persuasively in favor of them. The secret is effective communication—the use of words and language in the service of our deepest convictions.

Progressives have not only failed to understand Wirthlin's discovery, they have also not understood recent advances in cognitive science, so they continue to fall into a number of traps. These are traps of our own making, however, and we can get out of them without having to change anything about our values.

This is cause for optimism. The purpose of this handbook is to lay out the anatomy of progressive values, ideas, and arguments to free us from traps we have fallen into.

TWELVE TRAPS TO AVOID

1. The Issue Trap. We hear it said all the time: Progressives won't unite behind any set of ideas. We all have different ideas and care about different issues. The truth is that progressives *do* agree at the level of *values* and that there is a real basis for progressive unity. Progressive values cut across issues. So do principles and forms of argument. Conservatives argue conservatism, no matter what the issue. Progressives should argue progressivism. We need to get out of *issue silos* that isolate arguments and keep us from the values and principles that define an overall progressive vision.

2. The Poll Trap. Many progressives slavishly follow polls. The job of leaders is to lead, not follow. Besides, contrary to popular belief, polls in themselves do not present accurate empirical

evidence. Polls are only as accurate as the framing of their questions, which is often inadequate. Real leaders don't use polls to find out what positions to take; they lead people to new positions.

3. The Laundry List Trap. Progressives tend to believe that people vote on the basis of lists of programs and policies. In fact, people vote based on values, connection, authenticity, trust, and identity.

4. The Rationalism Trap. There is a commonplace—and false—theory that reason is completely conscious, literal (applies directly to the objective world), logical, universal, and unemotional. Cognitive science has shown that every one of these assumptions is false. These assumptions lead progressives into other traps: assuming that hard facts will persuade voters, that voters are “rational” and vote in their self-interest and on the issues, and that negating a frame is an effective way to argue against it.

5. The No-Framing-Necessary Trap. Progressives often argue that “truth doesn't need to be framed” and that the “facts speak for themselves.” People use frames—deep-seated mental structures about how the world works—to understand facts. Frames are in our brains and define our common sense. It is impossible to think or communicate without activating frames, and so which frame is activated is of crucial importance. Truths need to be framed appropriately to be seen as truths. Facts need a context.

6. The Policies-Are-Values Trap. Progressives regularly mistake policies with values, which are ethical ideas like empathy, responsibility, fairness, freedom, justice, and so on. Policies are not themselves values, though they are, or should be, *based on* values. Thus, Social Security and universal health insurance are not values; they are policies meant to reflect and codify the values of human dignity, the common good, fairness, and equality.

7. The Centrist Trap. There is a common belief that there is

an ideological “center”—a large group of voters either with a consistent ideology of their own or lined up left to right on the issues or forming a “mainstream,” all with the same positions on issues. In fact, the so-called center is actually made up of *biconceptuals*, people who are conservative in some aspects of life and progressive in others. Voters who self-identify as “conservative” often have significant progressive values in important areas of life. We should address these “partial progressive” biconceptuals through their progressive identities, which are often systematic and extensive.

A common mistaken ideology has convinced many progressives that they must “move to the right” to get more votes. In reality, this is counterproductive. By moving to the right, progressives actually help activate the right’s values and give up on their own. In the process, they also alienate their base.

8. The “Misunderestimating” Trap. Too many progressives think that people who vote conservative are just stupid, especially those who vote against their economic self-interest. Progressives believe that we only have to tell them the real economic facts, and they will change the way they vote. The reality is that those who vote conservative have their reasons, and we had better understand them. Conservative populism is *cultural*—not economic—in nature. Conservative populists see themselves as oppressed by elitist liberals who look down their noses at them, when they are just ordinary, moral, right-thinking folks. They see liberals as trying to impose an immoral “political correctness” on them, and they are angry about it.

Progressives also paint conservative leaders as incompetent and not very smart, based on a misunderstanding of the conservative agenda. This results from looking at conservative goals through progressive values. Looking at conservative goals through conservative values yields insight and shows just how effective conservatives really are.²

9. The Reactive Trap. For the most part, we have been let-

ting conservatives frame the debate. Conservatives are taking the initiative on policy making and getting their ideas out to the public. When progressives *react*, we echo the conservative frames and values, so our message is not heard or, even worse, reinforces their ideas. Progressives need a collection of *proactive* policies and communication techniques to get our own values out on our own terms. “War rooms” and “truth squads” must *change* frames, not reinforce conservative frames. But even then, they are not nearly enough. Progressive leaders, *outside of any party*, must come together in an ongoing, long-term, organized national campaign that honestly conveys progressive values to the public—day after day, week after week, year after year, no matter what the specific issues of the day are.

10. The Spin Trap. Some progressives believe that winning elections or getting public support is a matter of clever spin and catchy slogans—what we call “surface framing.” Surface framing is meaningless without deep framing—our deepest moral convictions and political principles. Framing, used honestly at both the deep and surface levels, is needed to make the truth visible and our values clear.

Spin, on the other hand, is the dishonest use of surface linguistic frames to hide the truth. And progressive values and principles—the deep frames—must be in place before slogans can have an effect; slogans alone accomplish nothing. Conservative slogans work because they have been communicating their deep frames for decades.

11. The Policyspeak Trap. Progressives consistently use legislative jargon and bureaucratic solutions, like “Medicare prescription drug benefits,” to speak to the public about their positions. Instead, progressives should speak in terms of the common concerns of voters—for instance, how a policy will let you send your daughter to college, or how it will let you launch your own business.

12. The Blame Game Trap. It is convenient to blame our

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problems on the media and on conservative lies. Yes, conservative leaders have regularly lied and used Orwellian language to distort the truth, and yes, the media have been lax, repeating the conservatives' frames. But we have little control over that. We can control only how *we* communicate. Simply correcting a lie with the truth is not enough. We must reframe from our moral perspective so that the truth can be understood. This reframing is needed to get our deep frames into public discourse. If enough people around the country honestly, effectively, and regularly express a progressive vision, the media will be much more likely to adopt *our* frames.

Looking at these traps, we might think we have dug ourselves in too deep. At Rockridge, we don't think so. Why are we optimistic? Because there is a clear path out of all these traps: understanding the anatomy of the progressive vision and understanding the anatomy of the electorate.

Once we grasp that, helping American voters find their progressive hearts will be a little easier.

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BICONCEPTUALISM

Understanding whom we are talking to—and whom we want to talk to—is crucial before progressives begin to articulate what it is they have to say and how best to say it. This is true for progressive candidates as well as activists and activist groups. The real challenge in this area is twofold: First, we want to activate our base while reaching swing voters at the same time; second, we want to do so without having to lie, distort, mislead, or pretend to be something we aren't.

The pressure to dissemble comes from certain commonplace myths about swing voters and the “center.” So for starters, let's put to rest the notion of the political or ideological “center”—it doesn't exist. Instead, what we have are biconceptuals—of many kinds.

When it comes to progressive and conservative worldviews, we are all biconceptuals. You may live by progressive values in most areas of your life, but if you see Rambo movies and understand them, you have a passive conservative worldview allowing you to make sense of them. Or you may be a conservative, but if you appreciated *The Cosby Show*, you were using a passive progressive worldview. Movies and television aside, what we are really interested in are active biconceptuals—people who use one moral system in one area and the other moral system in another area of their political thinking.

Biconceptualism makes sense from the perspective of the brain and the mechanism of neural computation. The progressive and conservative worldviews are mutually exclusive. But in a human brain, both can exist side by side, each neurally inhibiting the other and structuring different areas of experience.¹ It is hardly unnatural—or unusual—to be fiscally conservative and socially progressive, or to support a liberal domestic policy and a conservative foreign policy, or to have a conservative view of the market and a progressive view of civil liberties.

Political biconceptuals are commonplace, and they include those who identify themselves as having a single ideology. Biconceptuals are not to be confused with “moderates.” There is no moderate worldview, and very few people are genuine moderates. True moderates look for linear scales and take positions in the middle of those scales. How much should we pay to improve schools? A lot? A little? “A moderate amount” is what a true “moderate” would say. Such folks may exist, but moderation is not a political ideology. Nor is the use of two strongly opposed ideologies in different arenas a matter of “moderation.” It is biconceptualism.

PARTIAL CONSERVATIVES

Consider Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, who describes himself as a moderate. In fact, little about him is moderate. He doesn't typically stake out middle-of-the-road positions on particular issues. Instead, his politics include both liberal and conservative positions, but on different issues. This makes him a biconceptual. His progressive worldview appears in his staunch support of environmental protection, abortion rights, and workers' rights.² His conservative worldview emerges in areas like his support of faith-based initiatives, school vouchers, and most notably, the current policy on Iraq.³ Because he tends to adopt progressive positions more often than conservative ones, we refer to him as a "partial conservative."

Many liberals are biconceptual. The "cold war liberals" were divided between a progressive domestic policy and a conservative foreign policy based on using force—or the threat of it—to further the nation's military, economic, and political strength. Other Democrats may be economic progressives and social conservatives, or vice versa. Unions, for instance, have genuinely progressive goals but are often organized and run in a strict way. "Militant" progressives commonly have strict means and nurturant ends, while courtly, gentlemanly and ladylike conservatives may have nurturant means and strict ends. Such a split between means and ends is not unusual.

PARTIAL PROGRESSIVES

Similarly, within the wide range of those who tend toward a conservative worldview, many are "partial progressives." If we want to communicate with these conservatives, we'd better recognize that they may live by the progressive moral system in extremely important areas of their lives.

In fact, their progressive values may be their defining characteristics, who they most essentially are—even if they do not see themselves as progressives or liberals. Let's look at five of the more common types of "partially progressive conservatives" and see how their values match up with those of self-defined progressives.

Lovers of the land. A lot of conservatives may be hunters and fishermen (who want to fish in unpolluted waters so they can eat their catch); they may be cyclists, hikers, and campers who love to take their families to the national parks; they may be farmers or ranchers who are viscerally connected to their land; or they may be devout Christians who take seriously their biblical obligation to be stewards of the earth. They might never call themselves "environmentalists" or toss around words like "sustainability" or "biodiversity," but they share many of the same values—values that are ultimately progressive.

Communitarians. There are conservatives who believe in progressive communities. Across the nation, for instance, self-styled conservatives often live in communities—rural towns or suburban neighborhoods—where leaders care about people and act responsibly, where everyone looks out for one another, cares about one another, helps others in need, provides community service, and emphasizes progressive empathy and social responsibility instead of conservative strictness and individualism. They may thus

be conservative in their national voting patterns and yet progressive in their communities.

People of faith. A sizable chunk of Americans who are conservative in certain parts of their lives are also progressive in their religion. For instance, religious Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, are progressives at heart if they believe they should live their lives according to the teachings of Christ—help the poor, feed the hungry, cure the sick, forgive the sinner, turn the other cheek. They will most likely see God as nurturant and loving, not strict and punitive. Even evangelicals (like former president Jimmy Carter) are often progressive.

Socially conscious employers. Many conservative entrepreneurs run their companies as progressive businesses—whether they see it that way or not. They treat their employees well, pay living wages and offer decent benefits, would not dream of harming the environment or their customers, and believe other businesses should also practice a morality that extends beyond just maximizing profit and following the letter of the law.

Civil libertarians. Some of the most ardent civil libertarians in America identify themselves as conservatives or simply as libertarians. They believe in the Bill of Rights and especially the Fourth Amendment. They want their privacy protected and don't want the government spying on them or interfering with personal moral decisions or with their sex lives. They want free speech and freedom of association and want the government to stay out of religion and religion to stay out of government. They want constraints on the powers of the police and want strong protections from the courts. On issues of personal freedom, they abide by progressive morality.

Understanding this opens up a powerful way for progressives to communicate with swing voters on the basis of real shared values.

THE MYTHICAL CENTER

This critical understanding of biconceptuals has been obscured for many years by an obsession with the proverbial ideological “center,” occupied by the people whose votes are needed by progressives and conservatives in order to win. Myths of the center come in a number of forms, which lead to counterproductive political strategies.

The four predominant myths of the center—the Label myth, the Linear myth, the Moderate myth, and the Mainstream myth—all assume that people vote on the basis of a candidate's positions on the issues. On the other hand, the biconceptual theory assumes that people vote according to the Wirthlin theory (see Chapter 1): on the basis of values, connection, authenticity, trust, and identity with issues used symbolically to reflect values.

The Label myth is the most vacuous. It asks voters to ascribe one of three labels to themselves: liberal, moderate, conservative. There is no content to these labels; they are empirically empty. There is no singular or definable “moderate” ideology or worldview, no consistency to what “moderates” believe. It is just a label of self-identification. Centrist Democrats William Galston and Elaine Kamarck adopt this theory in a widely publicized report, “The Politics of Polarization.”⁴ They use the self-identification percentages from 2004—liberal, 21 percent; moderate, 45 percent;

conservative, 34 percent—and assume that those who self-identified as “liberal” have a progressive ideology and those who saw themselves as “conservative” have a conservative ideology. This, they argue, means that if thoroughgoing liberals remain true to their values, they will fail to persuade any but the staunch liberals. Instead, progressives must move to the “center” on issues to attract more “moderates,” since they need a large majority of them to win.

On the surface, this may seem reasonable. But there is a significant problem with their methodology, a problem that psychologists have been dealing with for decades: There is a difference between self-identified labels and personal cognition. For example, there was no real change in sexual orientation that correlated with a rise in the number of people who self-identify as “gay” or “lesbian.” Instead, there was a change in attitude about that label.

Similarly, in recent years, conservatives have negatively branded the word “liberal,” and that is what is reflected in the 2004 poll, not the actual beliefs of Americans. The opposite is probably the case with the “moderate” label. “Moderates” are viewed as reasonable, unbiased, temperate, and balanced—all positive connotations, which may explain why people choose that label over the others. One remedy to this pitfall is careful investigation of voters’ worldview and values and not just their self-identifying labels. Such an empirical approach to voter cognition is rarely taken in progressive polling, though there are certain exceptions.

The “center,” according to the Linear myth, is based on a curious metaphor. It conceives of citizens as lined up left to right, with some on the extreme ends and others in between, with their locations determined by their positions on individual issues. This myth lurks behind the idea of the “center” and fosters the belief that progressives must move toward the right and abandon—or hide—their progressive ideology if they are to succeed. The theory is that moving rightward leaves more voters to the left of the candidate, making the candidate appear more, well, “moderate.” This runs contrary to the biconceptual view that it is best to communicate and appeal to swing voters by activating their partial progressive identities with a progressive vision and appropriate progressive language.

The strategic—and ethical—problems that the Linear myth causes are extremely significant. “Moving to the right” means becoming inauthentic, and voters can smell a lack of authenticity. It means offending your base. It means lending credence to conservative issues and values. Remember, conservatives did not become successful by “moving to the left.” They became successful by activating the conservative worldview—speaking the language of the base and inhibiting the liberal worldview by sneeringly attacking liberals.

The Moderate myth sounds good until you think about it. It says that people who act with moderation in their lives—people who are reasonable, unbiased, temperate, coolheaded, and balanced, people who don’t want to go too far one way or the other—have a political worldview structured by moderation, a choice of a midpoint on various scales. But as soon as you take this seriously, it becomes clear that there is no such political worldview—no coherent and consistent account of politics in which all possible issues are points on linear scales and moderates are in the middle on all scales. First, many cases are yes-or-no matters. No scales. Take some examples: Should there be a

death penalty? You can't kill someone only a little, or in moderation. Should abortion be legal? What does it mean to speak of someone having an abortion in moderation? Assisted suicide? What does moderation mean? Three strikes? Is it moderation to go for five strikes? Drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge? Even "moderate" drilling is drilling. There is no in-between. People who self-identify as "moderates" appear not to be in-betweeners, but rather biconceptuals—conservative in some issue areas and progressive in others.

Last, the Mainstream myth assumes that there is a real center of public opinion as determined by polls on particular issues. David Sirota, a progressive commentator, illustrates this myth:

On the Iraq war, for instance, polls show a majority of Americans want a timetable for drawing down troops. On economic policy, most Americans support stronger government regulations to protect citizens. On trade, polls show the public is widely suspicious of free-trade deals that have destabilized the middle class. And on health care, surveys show that about two-thirds of those asked want a government-guaranteed universal health-insurance system—even if it means tax increases.⁵

Sirota, turning a centrist mode of thought back on the centrists, argues that the real mainstream center is made up of people with these beliefs and that progressives can win if they follow these polls and take the same positions as the mainstream voters. However, as with the challenge of finding a family who has 2.3 children, if you look across enough issues, you may not actually find a person who holds every single view that the majority of Americans hold. This is because there is no ideology—no worldview—connecting the different positions reflected in the polls; it's just a list of issue positions, a product of number crunching. As previously illustrated, a great many voters do not resemble this mythical mainstream but are, instead, biconceptuals.

SPEAKING TO SWING VOTERS

Political reality is far more complicated than any of these myths allow. The biconceptual "center" actually includes partial conservatives, partial progressives, and undecideds (biconceptuals in nonpolitical areas of life but with no fixed moral views governing their politics). Conservatives have understood the "center" in this way, and they understand that biconceptuals have both worldviews. By using conservative language, and repeating it over and over, they activate the deeper conservative value system, not only in their base but in partial conservatives as well. They also use antiliberal language, repeating it over and over to inhibit progressive values. Conservatives who use this strategy do not have to give up their values or their authenticity. All they have to do is talk to the center the same way they talk to their base.

Progressives can do the same. They can talk to the center the same way they talk to their base, and activate progressive values and frames in biconceptual swing voters. This keeps the progressive base and activates the progressive values of not just conservatives who are partial progressives but also biconceptuals who are undecided. In short, they can effectively go after the voters in the middle without giving up their progressive values.

One other thing worth mentioning is that political operatives have also relied on the idea of single-issue voters—people who vote exclusively on a politician’s stance on one issue. This does not counter the idea that people vote based on values and not issues. Instead, what we find is that the single issue in question is almost always symbolic of broader cultural and political values. Examples include progressive Catholics voting for anti-abortion conservatives and progressive Jews seeing the Iraq war as being pro-Israel and voting for conservative Republicans on the war issue. On the other hand, “moral issue” voters tend to support abortion or gay marriage because they support a strict father worldview.

Trying to court these single-issue voters by taking a position you don’t believe will most likely backfire, because that issue will activate a larger system of values you do not have. And this leads us to the overarching topic of authenticity.

AUTHENTICITY

The moral of these myths is simple: Be authentic and stick to what you really believe. Changing to a position you do not believe not only lacks integrity, it’s a flawed and ineffective political strategy. There are, of course, progressives who are truly biconceptual and are partial conservatives. Here, too, honesty—and authenticity—is the best policy. If you believe that the conservative perspective is more appropriate to some issue area, argue your case, but do so using the linguistic frames that best represent your larger values and worldview.

The prevalence of biconceptuality among voters requires us to consider the role of pragmatism in issue politics. There are two kinds of political pragmatists. Both are willing to compromise, but for different reasons.

The authentic pragmatist realizes you can’t get everything you think is right, but you can get much or most of it through negotiation. The authentic pragmatist sticks to his or her values and works to satisfy them maximally. The inauthentic pragmatist, on the other hand, is willing to depart from his or her true values for the sake of political gain.

There is all the difference in the world between the two as political leaders, though they may vote the same way. The authentic pragmatist is maintaining a consistent moral vision, while the inauthentic pragmatist is surrendering his or her moral vision.

As Wirthlin discovered, authenticity matters in politics. When you surrender authenticity, you surrender your values, and you surrender trust.

When your values are not currently popular, being authentic means having courage. Being courageous does not mean being unwise, or offending one’s constituents. This handbook is intended to help make the courageous successful by helping them understand framing.