

# **THE LITTLE BLUE BOOK**

**THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THINKING  
AND TALKING DEMOCRATIC**

By George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling

George Lakoff says, “To get the language right, you have to understand the thought it conjures up”.

Language triggers **cascades**, a network of neurons that link many brain circuits. All the linked circuits must be active at once to produce a given understanding. In other words, the brain does not handle single ideas as separate entities. The understanding comes from long-term concepts that do not change if new ideas don't fit into one's well established concepts. For example:

### **Tax Relief Metaphor**

#### **Conservative Frame:**

Taxation is an affliction.

The person who takes it away is a hero.

The person who tries to stop the hero is a bad person.

#### **Progressive Frame:**

Talk positively about **revenue**, instead of taxes. One can speak of revenue depletion and revenue neglect, with respect to under taxing millionaires and billionaires. Or, use the word tax in a positive way, such as, “Your taxes at work.”

## Progressive Moral Mission

1. To protect all people equally
2. To empower all people equally

**Protection** includes defense against crime, disease, environmental degradation, social injustice, poverty, food insecurities, etc.

**Empowerment** includes public education, roads and bridges, public buildings, financial institutions, water and sewer systems, etc.

**Government** has the responsibility to fulfill this mission.

## Moral Values

For Progressives, taking care of each other means to have certain **obligations** such as public infrastructure, public schools, public access to water and safe food supply, public health, regulation of commerce, etc.

**The Private depends on the Public!** The more money one earns from Public support, the greater his/her responsibility should be to provide for its maintenance. The same with health care. Those who are healthy need to participate in a health care system for those who are less fortunate, not to mention that a healthy person could have an accident or contract a disease at any time.

Since the public services are available to the Private sectors of society, those in the Private sector's businesses should be looking after their customers, their workers, and their communities as well as the business owners and stockholders. After all, the wealthy would not be so wealthy if they did not have the Public to help them-their workers, good roads for transportation, energy grids, etc.

## Steps to Progressive Communication

1. Think about your moral values.
2. Find issues that embody them.
3. Come up with policies for those issues.
4. Successfully argue for them.

Example:

**Conservatives** may argue against same-sex marriage with two ideas: definition and sanctity.

**Progressives** can argue for same-sex marriage, using the above steps as follows:

1. All people should be treated equally.
2. Some same-sex couples want to be together.
3. These same-sex couples should be allowed to marry.
4. Ideally, marriage is the realization of love with a lifelong commitment. Love and commitment are sacred in America. Any couple, who accepts these two ideas for themselves, should be allowed to marry. The government does not have the right to tell you how to live your life. People should be treated equally.

Here is the structure of a **political cascade**:

**Moral values framing**  
**General frames exemplifying those values**  
**Specific frames using those values**  
**Specific issues**

Here is an example from the book:

### **Progressive case**

**Moral Values**: Democracy requires that citizens care about each other and take both personal and social responsibility to act on that care.

**General Frame**: Government should provide public resources to protect and empower everyone equally.

**Specific Frame**: Government should assure affordable health care for all, including medications.

**Specific Issue**: Government should require that health insurance plans and employers, who provide health care, include coverage of birth control pills.

## Conservative Case

**Moral Values**: Democracy guarantees liberty to all citizens to pursue their own interests freely, with limited commitment to the interests of others.

**General Frame**: privatization of public resources should be maximized since no one should be forced to pay for resources going to anyone else.

**Specific Frame**: Government should have no role in health care since no one should have to pay for anyone else's health care.

**Specific Issue**: Government should not require health insurance plans to cover or employers to pay for birth control pills.

Progressives tend to deal with issues.

Progressives need to start with moral values, at the top of the hierarchical structure, and work their way down. **Morality beats policy.**

President Obama missed an opportunity with the Affordable Care Act by not starting with his moral conviction. Here is how it happened:

Conservatives think of Healthcare as a product. It is not a product. It is not built in a factory. It is not transferred physically from seller to buyer. It cannot be crated or shipped.

The Public is the foundation of the Private. No one does it alone.

President Obama placed the Affordable Health Care Act in the context of a product. He used the commerce clause in the Constitution (Article 1, Section 8), which gives Congress the right to regulate commerce if it goes across state lines. If healthcare is considered a product, and not a right, this makes healthcare an economic matter, not a **moral** concern! Serious illness without healthcare takes away your liberty and threatens your life. Health care should never have been a market issue. It should have been a moral issue.

## Public and Private

For Progressives, protection and empowerment of all citizens belong to the **Public**. The Public also includes public schools, roads and bridges, public access to water and safe food supply, public health, regulation of commerce, etc.

The **Private** includes private property, private financial institutions, religious institutions, private media, etc.

The difference between Public and Private is that Private has no obligation to people in general.

**Privatization** is the transfer of some of the public responsibilities to the private sector. When those responsibilities are privatized and carried out for private profit, financial and other interests often overwhelm the public good.

Here is what to say:

- Government has a moral duty to protect and empower its people. Private corporations have no such duty to citizens, which is why maintaining a robust Public is absolutely necessary to ensure everyone's well-being, prosperity , and safety.
- Privatization can be predatory and downright immoral when, for the sake of profit, it removes or prevents the protection and empowerment of the public, such as turning education over to corporations. Privatization makes the life of citizens more expensive, since corporations work to maximize profit.
- “Smaller government” means making the public good secondary and abandoning the sacred moral missions of the government.