

Dirty Trick #1

Accuse your opponent of doing what he/she is accusing you of (or worse).⁷ This trick is sometimes called "pointing to another wrong." When under attack and having trouble defending themselves, manipulators turn the tables. They accuse their opponent of doing what they are being accused of. "You say I don't love you! I think it is you who doesn't love me!"

Manipulators know this is a good way to put their opponents on the defensive. They may want to up the ante by accusing the opponent of doing something worse than what he/she is accusing them of: "How dare you accuse me of being messy? When was the last time you even took a shower?"

Dirty Trick #2

Accuse him/her of sliding down a slippery slope (that leads to disaster). The manipulator uses the slippery slope trick when a person implies that if someone does one thing (A), it inevitably will lead to a domino effect of negative things that, in the end, will result in something terrible: A is not so bad, but A leads to B, and B leads to C, and C is horrible!

Imagine a mother lecturing her teenage daughter: "Okay, maybe there's nothing wrong with a kiss, but remember where kissing leads and where that leads and where that leads. Before you know it, you'll be the mother of an unwanted baby! Your young life will be ruined forever!" Manipulators who use the slippery-slope argument conveniently forget that many people walk carefully on slippery ground and don't fall down.

Dirty Trick #3

Appeal to authority.⁸ Most people are in awe of those with power, celebrity, or status. In addition, people feel intense identification and loyalty to many sacred symbols (flags, religious images, sacred words, etc.). Although power, celebrity, and status rarely correlate in any way with knowledge and insight, people are mesmerized by them.

Demagogues who successfully manipulate people know that most people are readily tricked in this way, so they wrap themselves in the flag and associate themselves with power, celebrity, or status (in any way they can). This includes looking for scientists and other "knowledgeable" persons to support their views.

Cigarette companies once hired scientists who were (in effect) prepared to say that there was no *proof* that cigarettes caused lung cancer, although they knew (or should have known) that the proof was there. Cigarette companies also founded the American Tobacco Institute, a body of researchers supposedly seeking to discover the effects of smoking on health. In reality, the researchers were seeking to defend the interests of the tobacco industry under the guise of scientific authority.

⁷Traditionally called *Tu Quoque*—literally, "you also."

⁸Traditionally called *Argumentum ad Verecundiam*.

They deceived millions of people (and caused millions of deaths along the way). Naturally, they could do this only by deceiving themselves into thinking that they were simply being *scientifically careful*. And, of course, they made a lot of money in the process (which strongly influenced their ability to deceive themselves).

Dirty Trick #4

Appeal to experience. Skilled manipulators, con artists, and politicians often imply that they have “experience” to back them up, even when their experiences are limited or nonexistent. They know it is much harder for someone to deny what they say if they speak with the voice of experience. Of course, they sometimes will come up against an opponent who has more experience than they do. In that case, they attack their opponent’s experience—as not representative, as biased, as limited, as distorted, or as subjective.

Dirty Trick #5

Appeal to fear. Deep down, most people have a lot of fears—fear of death, disease, loss of love, loss of attractiveness, loss of youth, loss of income, loss of security, rejection by others. Unprincipled manipulators know that people tend to react primitively when any of these fears are activated. Thus, they represent themselves as having the ability to protect people against these threats (even when they can’t). You should distrust authorities who say that certain groups (or people) are inherently dangerous: “Remember, these people are threatening our freedom, our way of life, our homes, our property.” Politicians often use this strategy quite effectively to make sure people line up behind governmental authority and do what the government—that is, what politicians—want.

Dirty Trick #6

Appeal to pity (or sympathy). Manipulators know how to portray themselves (and their situation) in such a way as to make people feel sorry for them or at least to gain their sympathy, especially when they don’t want to take responsibility for something they have done.

Consider the student who, when confronted with the fact that she hasn’t done her homework, whines and says something like, “You don’t understand how hard my life is. I have so much to do. It’s very difficult for me to get my homework done. I’m not lucky like some students. Since my parents can’t afford to send me to college, I have to work thirty hours a week to pay my own way. When I come home from work, my roommate plays music until midnight so I can’t study. What am I supposed to do? Give me a break!”

Appeal to pity also can be used to defend someone the manipulator identifies with, as in, “Before you criticize the president, recognize that he has the hardest job in the world. He must stay up late at night, worrying about our well-being, trying to find a way to act in the welfare of all of us. The fate (and weight) of the free world rests heavy on his shoulders. How about some consideration for the

poor man!" Use of this ploy enables the manipulator to divert attention from the innocent people who are harmed by a presidential decision or policy.

Dirty Trick #7

Appeal to popular passions.⁹ Manipulators, and other masters of counterfeit, subterfuge, and ruse, are careful to present themselves as people who share the values and views of their audience, especially the "sacred" beliefs of the audience. Everyone has some prejudices, and most people feel hatred toward something or someone. Masters of spin stir up prejudices, hatred, and irrational fears. They imply that they agree with the audience. They act as if they share their views. They work to convince the audience that their opponent doesn't hold sacred the beliefs they hold sacred.

This strategy has many possible variations. One has been called the "Just Plain Folks Fallacy," in which the manipulator says or implies something like this:

"It's good to be back in my home (city/state/country) and with people I can really trust. It's great to be with people who face things squarely, who use their common sense to get things done, people who don't believe in highfalutin' ways of thinking and action."

Dirty Trick #8

Appeal to tradition or faith ("the tried and true"). Closely related to Dirty Trick #7, this strategy emphasizes what seems to have passed the test of time. People are often enslaved by the social customs and norms of their culture as well as by traditional beliefs. What is traditional seems right: "This is the way we have always done things."

Manipulators imply that they hold firm to what their audience is familiar and comfortable with. They imply that their opponent will destroy these traditions and faith. They don't worry about whether these traditions harm innocent people (like the cruel customs and laws against Blacks before the civil rights movement). They create the appearance of being independent in their views although the views they reach "independently" just happen to coincide with those of the crowd. They know that people are usually suspicious of those who go against present social norms and established traditions. They know enough to avoid openly opposing the social customs to which people are unconsciously (and slavishly) bound.

Dirty Trick #9

Assume a posture of righteousness. People begin with the deep-seated belief that they (their nation, their religion, their motivation) is especially pure and ethical. We sometimes bungle things, but we are always pure of heart: "We hold the highest ideals of any country. Of course, we make mistakes and sometimes commit follies. But our intentions are good. Unlike others in the world, we are innocent of guile. We are good-hearted."

⁹Traditionally called *Argumentum ad Populum*.

National and international news (designed for national consumption) is always written with this premise in the background. We may blunder, but we always intend to do the right thing. Manipulators take advantage of this questionable premise by speaking and writing with such assumptions in the background. This posture is related to the fallacy of begging the question and leads to question-begging epithets. (See "Beg the Question," Dirty Trick #11.)

Dirty Trick #10

Attack the person (and not the argument).¹⁰ When the **opponent** makes reasonable arguments, manipulators ignore those arguments **and** instead find a way to attack the reasoner personally. Name-calling (even **mudslinging**) often works (depending on how you do it). Spin artists know what a **given** audience will reject and insinuate that their opponent supports those **terrible things**. For example, the opponent might be labeled a communist or an atheist. Or it might be said of her that she supports terrorism or is soft on crime.

This strategy is sometimes called "poisoning the well." It leads to the audience dismissing an opponent in a sweeping way—no matter what the opponent says in his defense. Of course, spin artists know the importance of reading the audience correctly to make sure they don't go too far. They **realize that** the more subtle they can be, the more effective their manipulation will be.

13.7 Think for Yourself

INTERNALIZING THE FIRST 10 DIRTY TRICKS

Close your book and try to make a list of the first 10 dirty tricks we've covered. Try to write a paragraph about each of them. Then reread the pages that cover them and evaluate what you have written. Have you accurately stated what the various fallacies are? Have you exemplified them well?

Dirty Trick #11

Beg the question.¹¹ One easy way to "prove" a point is to assume it in the first place. Consider this example:

"Well, what form of government do you want, a government by liberal do-gooders ready to spend your hard-earned dollars or a government led by business minds that understand how to live within a tight budget and generate jobs that put people to work?"

¹⁰Traditionally called *Argumentum ad hominem*.

¹¹Traditionally called *Petitio principii*.

This statement includes the following assumptions that should not be taken for granted:

- That a liberal government would spend money unwisely
- That business people know how to live within a tight budget and generate jobs that put people to work.

One variation on this fallacy has been called “question-begging epithets”—using words or phrases that prejudge an issue by the way the issue is put. For example: “Shall we defend freedom and democracy or cave in to terrorism and tyranny?” By putting the question in this way, we avoid having to talk about uncomfortable questions such as: “But are we really advancing human freedom? Are we really spreading democracy (or just extending our power, our control, our dominance, our access to foreign markets)?” Pay close attention to the words people use when they are articulating the “facts” with respect to an issue. They often choose words that presuppose the correctness of their position on an issue.

Dirty Trick #12

Call for perfection (demand impossible conditions). The opponent wants the manipulator to agree to X, and the manipulator realizes he can't argue against X without losing credit in the eyes of the audience. Fine—agree to X, but only under the following conditions: “Yes, we do want a democracy, but only when we can have a *true democracy*, and that means this and that, and that will have to be changed before we consider it.”

By making a maneuver of this kind, the manipulator diverts those who hear it so they do not discover that the manipulator has no intention whatsoever of allowing X to take place. This is similar to Dirty Trick #32 (“Raise nothing but objections”).

Dirty Trick #13

Create a false dilemma (the great either/or). A true dilemma occurs when we are forced to choose between two equally unsatisfactory alternatives. A false dilemma occurs when we are persuaded that we have only two equally unsatisfactory choices, when we really have more than two possibilities available to us. Consider the following claim: “Either we are going to lose the war on terrorism or we will have to give up some of our traditional freedoms and rights.”

People are often ready to accept a false dilemma because few feel comfortable with complexity and nuanced distinctions. We tend to like sweeping absolutes. We want clear and simple choices. So those who are skilled in manipulating people face others with false dilemmas (one alternative of which is the one the manipulator wants them to choose and the other alternative clearly unacceptable).

Manipulators present arguments in *black or white* form. For example: “You are either for us or against us. You support either democracy and freedom or terrorism and tyranny.” They realize that only a small minority of people will respond to

such a false dilemma with the observation: "But these are not our only choices. In between the extremes of A and Z are options B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K..."

Dirty Trick #14

Devise analogies (and metaphors) that support your view (even if they are misleading or "false"). An analogy or a metaphor is a comparison that is not literally true. Consider: "Don't you think it is about time for us to *slap down* those judges who are *soft* on crime?" Here, the two phrases in italics are used metaphorically. They are not intended literally. These metaphors are attractive to many people whose information about the criminal justice system comes principally from "cops and robbers" television shows and sensationalized stories in the mass media.

To win arguments, then, manipulators use comparisons that make them look good and their opponent look bad: "You're treating me like my father used to treat me! He was so unfair, and so are you." Or: "The way you're treating me is like kicking a horse when it's down. Can't you see I've had a hard day?!"

The analogies and metaphors that work depend in part on the prejudices and beliefs of the audience. This requires understanding the worldview of the audience as well as the root metaphors underlying it. For example, if manipulators are trying to influence someone with a religious worldview, they are more likely to be successful using religious metaphors and analogies. The skilled manipulator knows that when talking to a fundamentalist Christian, it is a mistake to choose metaphors from the Koran.

Dirty Trick #15

Question your opponent's conclusions. Manipulators want to lead the audience to accept their conclusions. They want the audience to reject the conclusions or interpretations of their opponents. If they remember the Latin phrase "non sequitur" (which means, literally, "It does not follow"), they can accuse their opponents of being illogical and call into question the opponents' reasoning. As soon as an opponent asserts a conclusion, the manipulator might say:

"Wait a minute. *That doesn't follow!* Your conclusion doesn't follow from your premises. First you said "X," and now you're saying "Y." How did you get from X to Y? How can you justify such a leap? What you say isn't logical. You haven't proven Y, only X."

Through this strategy, manipulators can obscure any legitimate points the opponent makes. At the same time, they themselves seem to be logical and dispassionate.

Dirty Trick #16

Create misgivings: Where there's smoke, there's fire. The manipulator knows that once serious charges are made against a person, it may be difficult, if not impossible, for the accused to clear away the suspicion that there must have been something to the charge. Lingering suspicions may destroy the chance for people to

Most politicians are highly proficient in the art of flattery. Their objective is to win over their audiences. Politicians want to lower the defenses of their audiences, to minimize any tendency they might have to think critically about what is said.

Dirty Trick #22

Hedge what you say. Manipulators often hide behind words, refusing to commit themselves or give direct answers. This allows them to retreat if necessary. If caught leaving out important information, they then can come up with some excuse for not being forthcoming in the first place. Or, if questioned closely, they can qualify their position so no one can prove them wrong. When pressed, they hedge. Effective manipulators must be effective weasels. They must weasel out of their mistakes, cover up their errors, and guard what they say whenever possible.

Dirty Trick #23

Ignore the evidence.¹² To avoid considering evidence that might require them to change their position, manipulators often ignore evidence. Usually, they ignore the evidence to avoid having to consider it in their own minds because it threatens their belief system or vested interests. Imagine a close-minded Christian questioning whether it is possible for an atheist to live an ethical life (lacking the guidance of the Bible). If such a person were confronted with examples of atheists who have lived self-sacrificing, compassionate lives, she would be uncomfortable in her view. She probably would find a way to put the subject out of her mind to avoid the implications of the evidence.

#23

Dirty Trick #24

Ignore the main point.¹³ Manipulators know that if they can't win a point, they should divert their audience from that point and focus on another point—a point not relevant to the original issue. Those skilled in doing this know how to do it so their audience doesn't notice the shift.

Dirty Trick #25

Attack evidence (that undermines your case). When manipulators cannot successfully dodge consideration of evidence that does not support their case, they often attack that evidence. You can see this in the U.S. government's refusal to accept that Iraq did not have a stockpile of weapons of mass destruction before the United States waged war against Iraq. The government had no hard evidence

¹²Traditionally called Apiorism (invincible ignorance).

¹³Traditionally called *Ignoratio elenchi*.