

Dirty Trick # 20

Evade Questions, Gracefully

Spin artists who face questions from an audience learn how to predict most of the hard questions they will face and how to evade them, with skill and grace. One way to evade a hard question is to answer it with a joke that deflects the question. Another is to give a truistic answer ("How long will the troops have to remain in country X?" Answer: "As long as it is necessary and not one day longer.") A third is to give an answer so long and detailed that you manage by the length of your answer to slide from one question (a hard one) to another question (an easy one). Manipulators do not directly answer questions when direct answers would get them into trouble or force them to accept a responsibility they want to avoid facing. They learn to use vagueness, jokes, diversions, and truisms to their advantage.

Dirty Trick # 21

Flatter Your Audience

"It's good to be talking to an audience of people with good old fashion common sense and real insights into our social problems." "An intelligent person such as you will not be taken in by..." People are always receptive to flattery. Sometimes, however, one has to be subtle or the audience may suspect you of manipulating them. Most politicians are highly proficient in the art of flattery. Their objective is to win over their audience. They want to lower the defenses of their audience, 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 can then come up with some excuse for not being forthcoming in the first place. Or, if closely questioned, they can qualify their position so that no one can prove them wrong. In other words, when pressed, they hedge. To be an effective manipulator, you must be an effective weasel. You must weasel out of your mistakes, cover up your errors, and guard what you say whenever possible.

Dirty Trick # 23

Ignore the Evidence¹¹

In order to avoid considering evidence that might cause them to change their position, manipulators often ignore evidence. Usually they ignore the evidence in order 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

¹¹ traditionally called Apriorism (invincible ignorance)

confronted with examples of atheists who have lived self-sacrificing, compassionate, lives, he would be uncomfortable in his view. He would probably find a way to put the subject out of his mind to avoid the implications of the evidence.

Dirty Trick # 24

Ignore the Main Point¹²

Manipulators know that if you can't win a point, you should divert your audience from it and focus on another point (a point not relevant to the original issue). Those skilled in this practice know how to do it so that their audience doesn't notice the shift.

Dirty Trick # 25

Attack Evidence (That Undermines Your Case)

When a manipulator cannot successfully dodge consideration of evidence that does not support his case, he often attacks that evidence. You can see this in the U.S. government's refusal to accept the fact that Iraq did not have a stockpile of weapons of mass destruction (before it waged war against Iraq). The government had no hard evidence to support its position that Iraq had the weapons, so it tried to manufacture the evidence through flagrant stretches of the imagination. No evidence could convince the government it was wrong (because it wasn't willing to consider the fact that it might be wrong). These dodges could also be covered under the fallacy of double standard.

Dirty Trick # 26

Insist Loudly on a Minor Point

Manipulators know that a good way to distract most people (if it looks like they are losing the argument) is to insist loudly on some minor point. Because most people think superficially, few will notice that the point is minor, especially if they are emotionally attached to it.

Thus, for example, people often miss big issues when the media focus loudly on small ones (as if they were big ones). The problem of malnutrition and starvation in the world is given little coverage in the media, except on special occasions (like during a drought or after a Hurricane). At the same time, the fact that a small country is refusing to do what our government wants it to do is treated as an issue of great significance (as if our government had a right to impose its will on other governments).

Dirty Trick # 27

Use the Hard-Cruel-World Argument (to justify doing what is usually considered unethical).

We often say that noble ends do not justify foul means, but do we believe it? When engaging in unethical practices (like assassinations, forced detentions, and torture) government spokespersons often use the "It's a hard cruel world" argument in defense.

¹² traditionally called "ignoratio elenchu"

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When individuals or countries gain a lot of power, they soon come to believe that they should be able to do pretty much what they want to do. They do this by convincing themselves that their ends are always noble and just, that the only negative things they do in the world are forced on them by evil others who do not share their noble values.

Manipulators, then, often win arguments by insisting that they are being forced to use the means they deeply wish they could avoid, but, alas, it is a hard cruel world.

For example, "We don't want war. We are forced into it." "We don't want unemployment, but free enterprise demands it." "If we give resources to people who haven't worked for them, they will become lazy and we will end up in a totalitarian communist state." "We don't want the CIA to engage in assassination, torture, disinformation, or dirty tricks of any kind, but, unfortunately, we are forced to use these tactics to defend freedom and democracy in the world."

Dirty Trick # 28

Make Sweeping Glittering Generalizations

Manipulators, con artists, spin masters, and politicians will use any generalizations that support their case and that their audience will accept, regardless of whether they have sufficient evidence to support those generalizations. They make positive generalizations that people will readily support, generalizations, for example, about "our" or "their" devotion to God, country, patriotism, family, and free enterprise. Remember that their generalizations are deliberately chosen to coincide with the thinking of their audience. Of course, these manipulators keep their generalizations vague so that they can weasel out of them if necessary.

Dirty Trick #29

Make Much of Any Inconsistencies in Your Opponent's Position

There is inconsistency in the best of us. Everyone sometimes fails to practice what he preaches. Everyone sometimes falls into a double standard. Manipulators exploit any inconsistencies they can find in their opponents' arguments. They are quick to make the charge of hypocrisy, even when they are guilty of flagrant, deep, and multiple forms of hypocrisy themselves, hypocrisy that bothers them not at all.

Dirty Trick # 30

Make Your Opponent Look Ridiculous ("Lost in the Laugh")

Manipulators look for ways to make their opponent, or his position, look ridiculous (and therefore funny). People like a good laugh and they especially like laughing at views that seem threatening to them. A good joke is almost always well received, for it relieves the audience of the responsibility to think seriously about what is making them uncomfortable. Manipulators measure their audience to make sure that their

Dirty Trick # 31

Oversimplify the Issue

Since most people are uncomfortable making sense of deep or subtle arguments, manipulators oversimplify the issue to their advantage. "I don't care what the statistics tell us about the so-called 'abuse' of prisoners, the real issue is whether or not we are going to be tough on crime. Save your sympathy for the victims of crime, not for the criminals." The fact being ignored is that the abuse of prisoners is itself a crime. Unfortunately, people with a certain (over-simple) mind-set do not care about criminal behavior that victimizes "criminals." After all (they think to themselves) the world divides into good guys and bad guys and sometimes the good guys have to do bad things to bad guys. They think the bad guys deserve bad treatment. By oversimplifying the issue, they don't have to deal with what is wrong in our treatment of prisoners.

Dirty Trick # 32

Raise Nothing But Objections

Your opponent is giving good reasons to accept an argument, but the fact is your mind is made up and nothing will change it (of course you don't want to admit that your mind is closed). Skilled manipulators respond with objection after objection after objection. As their opponents answer one objection, they move on to another. The unspoken mindset of the manipulator is "No matter what my opponent says (in giving me reasons), I will keep thinking of objections (the fact is that nothing whatsoever will convince me of the validity of his view)."

Dirty Trick # 33

Rewrite History (Have It Your Way)

The worst deeds and atrocities can disappear from historical accounts (or be made to appear minor) while fantasies and fabrications can be made to look like hard facts. This is what happens in what is sometimes called "patriotic history." The writing of a distorted form of history is justified by love of country and often defended by the charge of negativity ("You always want to focus on what is wrong with us! What about what is right about us?!"). The fact is that human memory is continually working to re-describe events of the past in such a way as to exonerate itself and condemn its detractors. Historical writing often follows suit, especially in the writing of textbooks for schools. So, in telling a story about the past, manipulators feel free to distort the past in whatever ways they believe they can get away with. As always, the skilled manipulator is ready with (self-justifying) excuses.

Dirty Trick # 34

Seek Your Victim

The manipulator seeks a victim. He covers his tracks with high ideals (for the victim). When manipulators manipulate, they manipulate that everyone is a victim. "you-do-it-to-me."

Dirty Trick # 35

Shift the Burden of Proof

When a manipulator shifts the burden of proof, the ground is shifted. Different manipulators use different methods. Educated people are just shift the burden of proof.

Dirty Trick # 36

Shift the Burden of Proof

The burden of proof is what he assumes. To prove his point, Manipulators develop skills. I have to prove it. In point of fact, I justify that international.

Support your argument. Show you to show your enterprise shift the burden of proof.

Dirty Trick # 37

Spin, Spin, Spin

In an attempt to "spin" the story.

deep or subtle arguments, don't care what the statistics are whether or not we are victims of crime, not for prisoners is itself a crime. do not care about criminal (themselves) the world and guys have to do bad treatment. By oversimplifying treatment of prisoners.

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Dirty Trick # 34

Seek Your Vested Interests

The manipulator attacks his opponent's motivation, but insists that his motives are pure. He covers his true motives (i.e. whatever is in his vested interest) by expressing high ideals (freedom, democracy, justice, the American way, which he in fact ignores). When manipulators are seeking their advantage, and their opponent calls them on it, manipulators either deny the charge (usually indignantly) or counter attack by saying that everyone has a right to protect his interests. If pressed further, they may use a "you-do-it-too" defense.

Dirty Trick # 35

Shift the Ground

When a manipulator senses he is losing the argument, he does not give in. He shifts the ground to something else! Sometimes he does this by going back and forth between different meanings of the same word. So if a person says of another that she isn't educated because she isn't insightful and has very little knowledge, the manipulator may just shift the ground, saying something like, "Of course she's educated! Look how many years of school she completed. If that's not being educated I don't know what is!"

Dirty Trick # 36

Shift the Burden of Proof

The burden of proof refers to which party in a dispute has the responsibility to prove. In a court, the prosecutor has the responsibility