

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNIQUES FOR THE GUN CONTROL DEBATE

by Jeff Klopotic

July 20, 1991

FORWARD

It was one of those magazines that someone left at the range to share with other shooters who were waiting their turn on the line.

I picked it up and began thumbing through it, looking for whatever its pages could contain on a subject near and dear to my heart, firearms activism. Spying a title about a public debate, I eagerly soaked up the facts, Neal Knox and Harlon Carter debated Police Chief Joseph McNamara at GAMECOIN in Austin TX. Most notably: "Based on the points covered and statistics used, our side clearly won." I was hooked!

Okay things are now turning around! When did this happen? Turning to the cover, I saw "American Rifleman, Feb. 1977".

I couldn't get that last statement out of my mind, "...Based on the points....". It seems that all the facts and statistics point to the conclusion that gun control doesn't work, yet in 1990, pro-gun advocates are still losing. Why?

Thus began my quest for debate skills, communications techniques, and any other information that could be used to turn the tide in our favor. My conclusion is that the issue of primary concern is gun control, and that we rely on one communications technique far too much, and that technique is not suitable for use with the general public.

It is my hope that the following information can be of help for the cause.

Jeff Klopotic

INTRODUCTION

As a pro-gun activist, you will engage in discussions with various people who have different opinions on the issue of gun control. Your purpose is to sway them to your point of view.

In any discussion, there are three groups of people. The first is that group that agrees with your position, the second are those that are neutral, the third are those that are against you. If successful in your presentation, the best you can realistically expect is to sway those who were previously neutral to your side, and those against you to be neutral. The purpose of this paper is to help you to influence your audience to the latter scenario.

A typical discussion will last about seven to ten minutes. In that time you have to make an impact on those present to sway them toward your point of view. This could be a discussion with a co-worker, or a discussion with your elected official's staffer, or your elected official, or the editor of your newspaper.

In order to sway them to your point of view, you need to use the proper communications techniques.

POSITIVE POWER AND INFLUENCE

According to the text, Positive Power and Influence (1), there are four major ways to get someone to come to our point of view. The four techniques are 1) Persuasion, 2) Bridging, 3) Assertiveness, 4) Vision.

1) Persuasion is the technique of the technically able, one who is versed in numbers and facts. The method of using persuasion is to use a statement of the sort--"Take a look at these facts, and you'll agree that we should avoid gun control". Persuasion takes time, typically longer than the seven to ten minutes that a conversation lasts because the person whom you are addressing must accept you as an authority on the subject of which you speak. Unless that happens, your statements are typically ignored. The time you need to establish yourself as an authority robs you of the time you need to try to put your point across.

Most gunowners are technical type people. They enjoy machinery, can probably tell you how their gun operates in exquisite detail, know something about its capabilities, how far it can shoot, how much energy the bullet has, etc. And people who own military or older firearms take pride in knowing a bit of the history about the gun, about where it was used, dates, battles, etc.

Furthermore, people that are technically inclined (gunowners included) can often determine to their satisfaction as to whether or not the person talking to them is indeed an authority on the subject they are discussing in relatively short time. Thus gun people (like

most engineers) use persuasion to a fault. They often employ it in situations where they probably shouldn't. Gun control debates/discussions are a good example.

The trouble with this technique is that most of the population are not technically inclined. From some other source, somewhat of 75% of the population are not technically literate. Thus persuasion, the communications technique of choice of most gun owners, is of little or no use in public discussions.

2) Bridging is the technique wherein you try to draw out your opponents fears and concerns to try to determine middle ground upon which you can open discussion. This technique is used in negotiations a great deal. In politics, this is called compromise--and to most enthusiastic pro-2nd Amendment types, this is a dirty word.

Bridging also takes a great deal of time. It takes time for each side to get to feel at ease with each other sufficient to be able to discuss what it is that they are concerned with most. As before, this amount of time is not available in a typical discussion of seven to ten minutes. Thus bridging is also not an acceptable way of trying to get your point across.

3) Assertiveness. A typical statement used in an Assertiveness technique is "Either you do this or else I'll do that...!" This is what the anti-gunners have been using against us for years, and many of us truly didn't know what was happening. The anti-gunners have been using the moral high ground by saying "Guns are responsible for crime, and if you believe people should own a gun, you are morally responsible for crime!" in other words, "Either give up your gun, or I'll brand you a social outcast!"

Assertiveness does not need factual evidence to back it up. An example from one of the early leaders in the gun control movement, Sen. Joseph Tydings, in a discussion proposing national registration of all firearms(2):

"Returning briefly to the efficacy of firearms registration, there is no doubt that such a program would be of immeasurable value to the police in solving gun crimes."

Note that he does not say, "Based on a study by...", nor does he use any facts. The above statement is a pure assertion.

Assertiveness has the benefit of being able to be employed with little time required. A strategically thought out statement can be all that is necessary to get your point across. A

series of such statements can equip a person with a veritable arsenal of statements in which to

deliver your point. Assertiveness gives the speaker an air of authority to many people that listen, and puts the receiver on the defensive--a plus in any debate. (who's been on the defensive in all this mess?)

4) Vision. This is technique that is used by more successful leaders. A typical usage of a vision statement is of the sort "Imagine what it would be like if we only did this....!" Using a slow sweeping motion with your hand is good technique to put the image of "painting a vision" in your audience's mind.

This technique is more refined than assertiveness, and gives the speaker an air of nobility--something that can win admirers in your audience, and make it difficult for your opponent to attack you without his/her losing some points with other listeners. Plus, Vision statements are usually lacking in solid facts or details, thus making it difficult for your opponent to attack. Something like, "Remember what it was like a few years ago, when we could walk at night and not fear for our lives? Well, we didn't have gun control then either. Just imagine, we could try getting rid of the gun control laws we have now, and maybe we could walk the streets, unafraid, once again!"

Being an engineer, I looked at the facts provided by this course, and came to the conclusion that gun owners are technical people, and rely too heavily on persuasion and bridging. They do not use enough assertiveness and/or vision. Thus, I derived my contention regarding gun control.

DEVELOPMENT OF CONTENTION

I have tried other arguments. Arguing from a strictly constitutional point of view does not work in the public forum much these days. Indeed, the gun control advocates will publicly proclaim that they do not argue with the constitutional right to own a firearm--only with the "easy access" to firearms, or that the public does not "need" a certain type of firearm such as Saturday Night Special or "Assault Weapon".

Here is a typical example as stated by Sen. Tydings(2):

"The Congress, if it chooses, has the constitutional authority to outlaw entirely private ownership of guns, **ALTHOUGH I WOULD OPPOSE THIS** (emphasis added).

Trying to debate the individual arguments put forth by the gun control advocates point by point is futile. Their individual arguments have already claimed the moral high ground and are devastating to all except the most eloquent speakers. How do you argue against trying to prevent accidental childhood deaths? How do you argue against the reasonableness of allowing the police time to do background checks? Quick, you only have 15 seconds!

Plus, whenever you engage in argument on an individual point, the other points are ignored, and their main point, namely the need for more gun control, still stands.

Thus I have concluded that the only way to win is to use an attack that allows us to utilize the most basic evidence available--common media news, and to go for the heart of the anti-gunners argument.

Therefore I state the contention-- Gun control does not work. Gun control only causes higher crime rates. If you make gun control go away, crime rates will drop.

(This is a good test to see if one is a technical thinker--you at first feel reluctant to use such a statement).

APPLICATION OF CONTENTION

In studying the issue, you have found that most numbers out there support the contention. However, rather than go on rambling about this study and that study, you can simply state the above contention, and maybe sprinkle a fact or two such as how Washington D.C. has the highest crime rate in the country, and how it also has the toughest gun laws. Whereas localities near to D.C. which have more lax gun laws also have lower crime rates.

My experience has been that when asked "Why does gun control not work?", the simple answer, "Because politicians and bureaucrats get lazy", seems to work rather well. It surprises me as to how many people accept it, as evidenced by the lack of further discussion of the point in some of my easier debates.

Important note: You should start your discussion with the contention - the assertiveness will put them on the defensive, plus, later on in the discussion, you will get the chance to repeat the contention.

This will work to your advantage. Keep the discussion general, to the topic of gun control. Don't let yourself get sidetracked to one of the individual points for very long.

Rather, brush it off, and say something like--"this is just one facet of gun control, and as before, gun control is the problem," and take the discussion back to gun control.

The Constitution may be brought up, but I would advise against the firearms advocate from introducing it. If it does come up, chances are the other side will want to bring up all sorts of out-of-context quotes from various Supreme Court cases. We all know that the right to keep and bear arms is an individual right. In this case you can state that "The Constitution says that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. Gun control is an infringement. Therefore, gun control is unconstitutional". By saying this, you are attacking all the various forms of gun control, not just one.

If you want to get aggressive, you can attack an antagonist with the assertion, "You are for gun control, you are part of the problem!" Or, to be truly aggressive, "How many people must die before you will agree that gun control doesn't work!" Or, "If you are truly afraid of firearms, you should realize that this fear is irrational. Have you sought counseling for your problem?"

The contention is short as a soundbite, and can be verified with everyday sources. It addresses the main concern of nearly everybody who is fearful of firearms--namely crime. It is aggressive and defiant, and puts our antagonists on the defensive, which is where they should be.

By using a combination of assertiveness and vision, I believe it is possible to put the anti-gunners on the defensive--and for us to win.

EXPERIENCES

I have tried my arguments against a newly graduated law student who recently passed his bar exam. I started out my discussion with the above contention. Later on in the discussion which ensued, he told of how he was afraid to be in New York City because of proliferation of firearms and the rampant crime rate that affects the city. I then noted how New York City had strict gun control laws, and he agreed. When I restated "Gun Control does not work..." did that ever drive the point home!

His point was that he thought that the Brady Bill was okay, and was reasonable. When I reiterated that New York City has a waiting period that can be as long as six to nine months, and Washington D.C., which has banned possession of handguns, effectively giving them an unlimited waiting period, I then stated--" Let me get this straight, you want to take a gun control law that has failed miserably in nearly all applications on a

local level, and now you want to pass it nationally. By what train of logic do come to your conclusion? Please explain it to me, for I cannot grasp your reasoning!"

He couldn't answer me. He had no reason. I had the audience in my pocket and delivered the really nasty one--"I've said before that gun control doesn't work. How many people must die before YOU will acknowledge that gun control doesn't work?" He didn't answer this one either, and tried to say words to the effect that people are dying because of guns and that he should be saying something like this to me, and I went back to the fact that we've tried gun control as a

solution, and crime is only getting worse, and once again repeated--"Gun control does not work "(a third time--this time it was more of a chant that took on a power of its own).

To anyone else listening, I believe the point was successfully driven home prior to this. It made his reluctance to accept it (or his inability to rebut it) look quite foolish. How many times does

someone have to repeat something before the other needs to acquiesce? Twice? Three times?

Most importantly, I was using HIS evidence against him. In a debate, this wins a great deal of people over to your side because, I think, people in general respect one-up-manship. His fear of violence in NYC was his reason for more gun control. My point was that gun control causes crime--and he couldn't argue his way out of the simple facts that NYC has tougher gun control laws, and higher crime rates.

He changed the subject to something else, which I interpreted to be that I made him neutral on the subject--thus I concluded that I had won.

I always kept the topic as "gun control". I never let it get off to a tangent on particulars for very long. In the end, gun control was the topic being discussed, and hopefully quite vilified. I used assertiveness with the statement "gun control doesn't work...", a little persuasion with the facts about New York City and Washington, D.C.--and a bit of the vision statement when I said "...How many people must die...". No compromise was attempted whatsoever--he either accepted my arguments or he was made part of the problem. His inability to refute my contention only made him look bad in the end.

It was interesting to see the tables turned.

It worked so well, I've got to try it again.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the debate going on now should center on "Gun Control" in general, not in any particular point chosen by our adversaries. Constitutionality is not an issue--our adversaries publicly agree we should be able to own a gun. The technique we have relied on for far too long is persuasion, and we have to change to being more assertive in our approach. I have tried this technique and it works far better than any other I've tried to date. Thus I have to say that I believe it is better to leave our opponents arguments alone, go on the offensive, and work on vilifying THEM.

Bibliography

- (1) Positive Power and Influence Program, Situation Management Systems Inc., Plymouth Massachusetts, 1981
- (2) "Americans and the Gun", Sen. Joseph Tydings, Playboy, vol.16 no. 3, March 1969

Example of presentation with the message that gun control does not work:

Gun Control Does Not Work to Reduce Crime-

Local Failures:

New York City passed Sullivan Law in 1912, and has added to it over the years, making it one of the toughest local laws in the country.

It generally takes 9 months to go through its licensing process and if approved, one can own a firearm. New York City's crime problem is legendary. Clearly, gun control for crime control is not working here.

In 1976, Washington D.C. passed a ban on the possession on the ownership of handguns. Washington D.C. has been called the murder capital of the country for two years straight (1990, 1991 according to CBS News). Once again, gun control isn't working to reduce crime.

State Level Failures:

According to a study by the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms, a correlation can be drawn between state gun control laws and higher crime rates. This is based on states with a waiting period, and/or state ID or licensing systems. While this does not establish a cause-effect relationship, it does raise a question as to the efficacy of gun control as crime control.

California has passed a number of gun control laws since 1989, acknowledged by the San Jose Mercury News as the toughest in the country. Since then, East Palo Alto, Oakland, Stockton, and even normally sanguine San Jose have reported record homicide rates.

Closer scrutiny to the timing of passage of gun control laws and increase in crime rates could lead one to conclude that in some ways, gun control contributes to an increase in crime.

National Level Failure?:

Most Alarming--in light of this, Congress is attempting to pass laws of similar nature on a national level. It is only a matter of conjecture as to what will happen should any of the legislation pending in Congress pass. But I do not believe that anything positive will come of it.

Positive aspects of Firearms Ownership:

An interesting note--in localities where firearms ownership or proficiency has been encouraged, the crime has been shown to drop-- significantly.

1966- Orlando, Florida: in response to a rash of rapes, police trained approximately 2500 people how to shoot. Rape rate dropped 86% in the next year.

1982- Kennesaw, Georgia passed a law making it mandatory for everyone to own a firearm except those morally opposed. Since 1982, Kennesaw has experienced no murders by firearm, no accidental shootings, and home burglaries dropped 80%--and the town's population has doubled.

1990- Portland, Oregon had its concealed carry law overturned by a state pre-emption law, thus allowing anyone who was legally able to acquire a concealed carry permit. In the first seven months of 1990 over 2000 permits were issued, and the homicide rate dropped 33%.

Based on the above cases, and studying the legislation pending, it is imperative you to vote against the following legislation:

Number Author Title/Subject

H.R.19 Hughes "The Restricted Weapons Act of 1991"

H.R.436/S.51 Weiss/Moynihan Ammunition Bans

H.R.2457 Unknown Local signoff for Federal Firearms License

H.R.3104 Stark "Assault Weapons Act of 1991"

The following are sections of Title X, the "Crime Package"

Section 1013 Multiple gun sales registration

Section 1021 Semi-automatic firearms provisions

Section 1031 Prohibited Gun Clips and Magazines

The following report is based on crime statistics for 1990 as reported to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee. This is the committee chaired by Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del) plagiarist and avowed gun control proponent.

A State by State Analysis of 1990 Homicide Rates

(Compiled by the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms)

ANTI-GUN STATES **	% increase in Homicide	NON ANTI-GUN STATES	% increase in Homicide
Alabama	10	Colorado	0
California	9	Delaware	0
Hawaii	-33	Florida	2

Illinois	10	Idaho	50
Indiana	10	Kentucky	5
Kansas	0	Montana	-20
Maryland	-5	Nevada	-19
Massachusetts	22	New Hampshire	-67
Michigan	9	North Dakota	-67
Minnesota	0	Oregon	-34
Missouri	11	South Carolina	6
New York	19	Texas	4
North Carolina	10	Washington	19
Ohio	0	Wyoming	0
Pennsylvania	9		
Rhode Island	0		
Tennessee	0		
Wisconsin	8		
	Average % increase in homicide		Average % increase in homicide
	6.4		-8.64

* 17 states are not included due to lack of data. The Senate Report also excluded these 17 states.

** Anti-states are defined as those that have waiting period and/or licensing laws.