

HOW TO WIN ANY ARGUMENT

A Lighthearted View of a Dead-Serious Issue

by Johanna Siegmann

BIRTH OF AN ARGUMENT

There you are at the sink/table/bench press/mall, happily washing/eating/pumping iron/ shopping, and enjoying a chatty conversation with a friend/lover/parent/other when suddenly the birds stop singing, the wind dies down, electricity crackles. Someone has thrown down a verbal gauntlet and the bantering begins to acquire the taste and feel of a Mideast armed conflict.

If this sounds familiar, you've entered the Argument Zone.

Do you dread arguments because they're glorified pummeling sessions? Or do you revel in them because you're able to quell dissenting opinions by flexing your verbs? (Arguments, by the way, are simply discussions on steroids.) To find out if you're the one taking a friendly discussion into The Argument Zone, it's time for you to take the Arguer Profile Test.

STEP 1

Identifying the arguer type. Although we have all used all these techniques at one time or another, we usually fall into one of these categories:

The Filibusterer

This individual has mastered the art of speaking for what appears to be endless periods of time at high decibel levels without inhaling, thereby effectively blocking any verbal input from the opposing party.

Counter-Tactic:

Patience. At some point the Filibusterer is going to HAVE to inhale. Unless, of course, (s)he is a life form not requiring oxygen, in which case fleetness of foot is a much more appropriate tactic. Always give the Filibusterer a false sense of victory by waiting 2 seconds after the lips stop moving before asking "is it my turn now?".

The Statistician

With seemingly unlimited access to every conceivable type of trivia, the Statistician overwhelms with data, information, statistics, and facts. Statisticians are not necessarily that well read – although that helps – but more importantly they are great bluffers (see Gambler, below). They have the enviable ability to say everything with the sort of authority that conveys authenticity. It is important to note that for every fact you think you have, they have 10 that prove the opposite.

Counter-Tactic

The Statistician's Achilles tendon is predictability. They tend to be very informed about topics they determine to be revisited with a certain degree of consistency. They also tend to quote (if in fact they do quote) from regular elitist sources, such as The Economist. What they don't want you to know is that most of the articles they quote as absolutely irrefutable will also –very conveniently – provide you with the equally convincing counter argument. Now you know. **Note:** The ability to read *and understand* the articles in elitist sources is a prerequisite.

The Gambler

The Gambler's battle cry always begins with "how much do you want to bet..." or a variation thereof. Their gift is not bluffing (see Statistician, above), but bravado. They rarely dare a bet they're not absolutely sure of, but hey, there are no absolutes. Which is why once they've placed a bet on the table their biggest fear is that you will accept it.

Counter-Tactic

Unless you are absolutely certain of your position (and can back it up with published statistics, or have an unlimited bankroll), never accept the bet – unless you can use it as a tax write-off. The fistful of money being waved before your eyes is designed to scare you off, not goad you on. Transforming a monetary bet into a latte-based transaction will effectively neutralize the Gambler's position.

The Evasionist*

This arguing style involves physical techniques and gyrations, consisting primarily of pivoting deftly on the heels and instinctively knowing the shortest route to the farthest point from the opponent. When asked what's wrong, the Evasionist will unwaveringly reply "nothing".

Counter-Tactic

Those tempted to throw themselves in the path of a retreating evasionist should do so at their own peril. Chasing is also a counter-technique that is highly discouraged – for reasons akin to chasing an angry bear into its cave. If you have regular encounters with this type of arguer it is imperative that you are always in possession of the car keys.

The Stonewaller*

Nothing penetrates – or escapes – the stony façade of this kind of arguer. A Stonewaller will remain silent and virtually motionless for the entire argument, regardless of its duration. The physical state of a Stonewaller closely approximates that of catatonia except for the flared nostrils and fixed, piercing glare.

Counter-Tactic

None. You might as well be talking to a wall. Stonewallers will thaw (and blink) only once the sound of speech is terminated.

**** Both the evasionist and the stonewaller styles are avoidance techniques rather than arguing styles. If you are or know one of these styles, get a referee.***

STEP 2

What fuels each Arguer type:

Filibusterers – are threatened by others' point of view, which might be more intelligent or entertaining than their own. Their positions tend to be highly indefensible – emotional vs. logical – which is why they cannot permit any sort of scrutiny.

Statisticians – insecure about their own beliefs, they tend to call in the cavalry of numbers to back up their positions. If you can master the counter-tactic, statisticians can become fervent supporters of your point of view.

Gamblers – feel empowered by money, even if they doesn't have any. They are not necessarily concerned with being right, but with making their opponent doubt their own position.

Evasionists – choose leaving over defending a position that generally involves deceit, insincerity, or fabrication.

Stonewaller – the logical outcome of hearing the same argument over, and over, and over, and over...

BONUS SECTION

Identifying your or your opponent's style is only half the battle. Learning and effectively using the counter-tactics will also help you avoid the first aid kit. Even so, if you are determined to win at any cost, here are some clues that will help you determine who's ahead.

Sure Signs That You are Losing an Argument

In the event you have met your argumentative match embodied in one of the above styles, and that flush faced, prickly-skinned feeling welling up inside you is not enough to let know you (or your opponent) are losing, here are 4 more clues:

Pitching – the process by which the pitch of common speech begins to rise to a level which threatens the hearing of quadrupeds.

Barking – responses that are reduced to short bursts of sound such as “Yes you are!” and “No, I’m not!”.

Martyring – the glazing of the eyes occurring concurrently with behavior commonly classified as “the silent treatment”. A technique often used by Stonewallers.

Platitudism – closely related to Martyring, the platitudist expresses the verbal equivalent of throwing the hands up by using expressions such as “of course you’re right”, and “yes, dear”.

It is important to note that Martyring and Platitudism can both also be effectively used to win.

Armed with this information you will be able to safely and effectively defend yourself against any type of arguer. Of course, you will also be able to avoid just about any argument, in which case everyone is a winner.