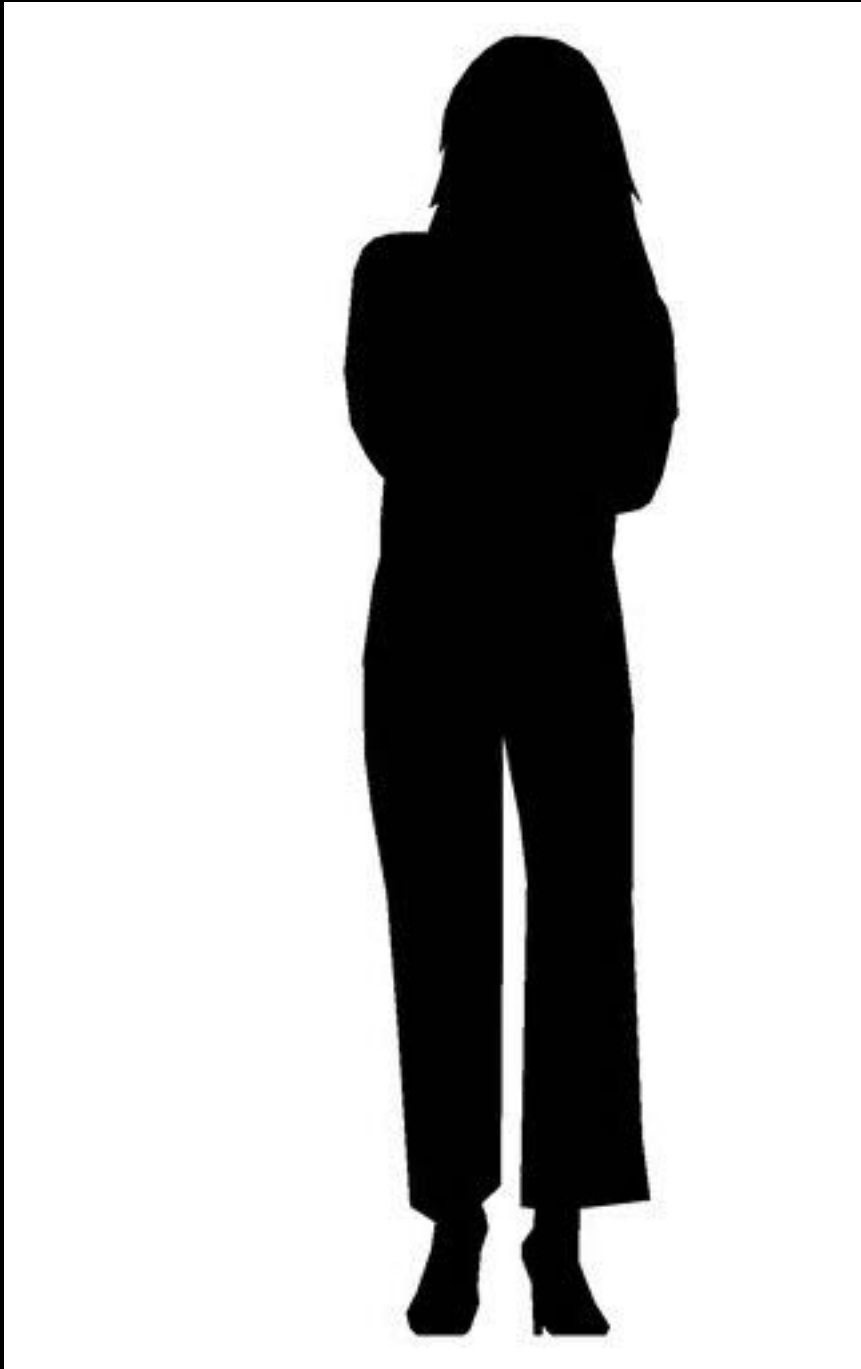


How To Have Better Political Conversations

Lessons from a Voice Teacher

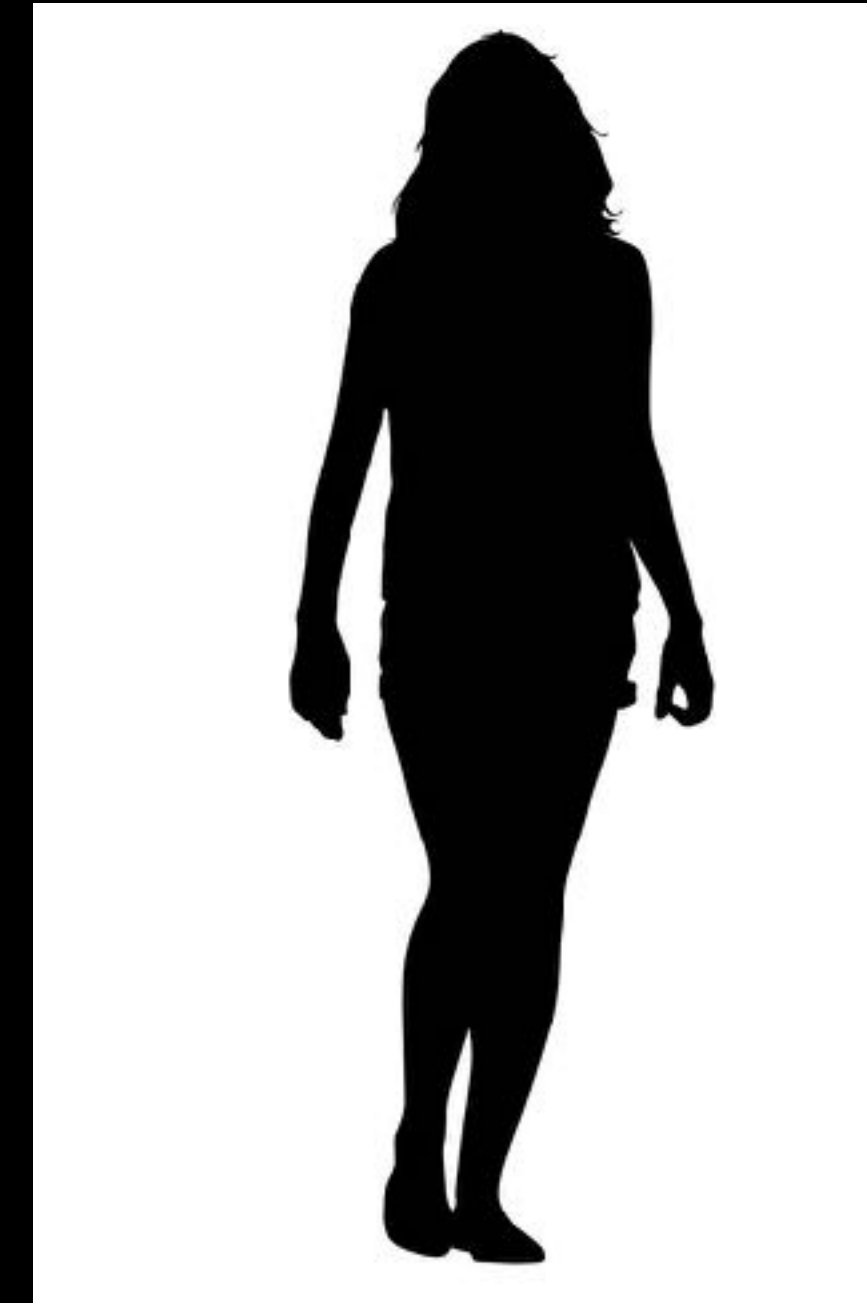
Elizabeth Davies





Voice Teacher

Agents of change



Political Activist

What do voice lessons and political conversations have in common?

When they go badly, it's often for reasons related to shame.

Shame management skills are crucial for anyone who seeks to influence others to change.

The First Voice Lesson I Ever Gave



What I should have said:

“Beautiful! I’m so glad you joined the chorus! Your voice is just a joy to listen to.

You and I have similar singing backgrounds. How about if I give you a couple of tips that helped me make the transition from traditional choral singing to the barbershop style?”

What I should have said:

“Beautiful! I’m so glad you joined the chorus! Your voice is just a joy to listen to.

You and I have similar singing backgrounds. How about if I give you a couple of tips that helped me make the transition from traditional choral singing to the barbershop style?”

What I actually said:

“Well, your voice is very choral-sounding.”

I had useful information to share.

I had good intentions.

I wanted to be helpful.

I had useful information to share.

I had good intentions.

I wanted to be helpful.

What went wrong?

I neglected the singer's emotional needs.

Rob Mance

Conductor and Voice Teacher

“It does not matter what you know, what you do, or what you say, if you can’t teach it in a way that your student will respond to.”



Trying to change people without managing their shame is a recipe for frustration and failure. When people feel defensive or embarrassed, they become hard to teach. The unskilled teacher may believe that the student is incapable of change.

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- “Just move your lips from now on.”
- “Maybe you’re tone deaf.”
- “If you’re so fragile that you can’t take criticism, I don’t see how you’re going to improve.”

Unskilled activists on social media:

- “She should already know better than that. There’s no excuse.”
- “He’ll never change.”
- “They’re so stupid.”
- “Only a nazi/ racist/ sociopath would talk like that.”
- “They’re brainwashed.”

Cage Match Conversation

Zero-sum game

- Exploit the other's weaknesses
- Show off your skills
- Gain fans in the audience
- Destroy the opponent (make them look stupid)



Cage Match Conversation

Zero-sum game

- Sarcasm
- Icy politeness (aka “civility”)
- Name-calling (“racist,” “snowflake”)
- No vulnerability
- No authentic warmth



Cage Match Conversation

Zero-sum game

- Pro: May gain fans in the audience
- Pro: May feel righteous
- Con: Opponent feels humiliated, angry
- Con: Opponent leaves the argument unchanged, or even more polarized





Loretta Ross



Daryl Davis

Loretta Ross

Calling Out vs. Calling In

“A call in is actually a callout done with love and respect. Because you’re really seeking to hold people accountable for the potential harm that they cause, but you’re not going to lose sight of the fact that you’re talking to another human being. And so you extend a hand of active love and active listening to help them stop and maybe think about what they said. . . .

I mean, there’s a whole bunch of things you could do other than [say], ‘You should not say these things! You’re using the wrong word. You’re trash folk. You’re a racist!’”





Progressive colleagues who share an “insider” lexicon



Conservative family members whose values can be appealed to



Cynical politicians who manipulate people’s fears in order to maintain power

Daryl Davis

Persuaded Klansmen to leave the KKK

“If you have an adversary, you don’t have to respect what they’re saying, but respect their right to say it. And have that conversation.

We spend too much time talking about each other, at each other, past each other, and not enough time talking with each other.”



Our intuitions about what makes people change are often wrong.

- If someone hasn't learned to carry a tune by the time they reach adulthood, they'll never learn.

Our intuitions about what makes people change are often wrong.

- If someone hasn't learned to carry a tune by the time they reach adulthood, they'll never learn.
- Anyone can improve their singing with practice, especially with a skilled teacher.

Our intuitions about what makes people change are often wrong.

- Once people get solidified in their political views, there's no point in trying to change them. They don't listen.

Our intuitions about what makes people change are often wrong.

- Once people get solidified in their political views, there's no point in trying to change them. They don't listen.
- People will often respond positively to an appeal to shared values, especially by those with whom they already have a strong relationship, if they are approached with respect, curiosity, and warmth.

Liberal post

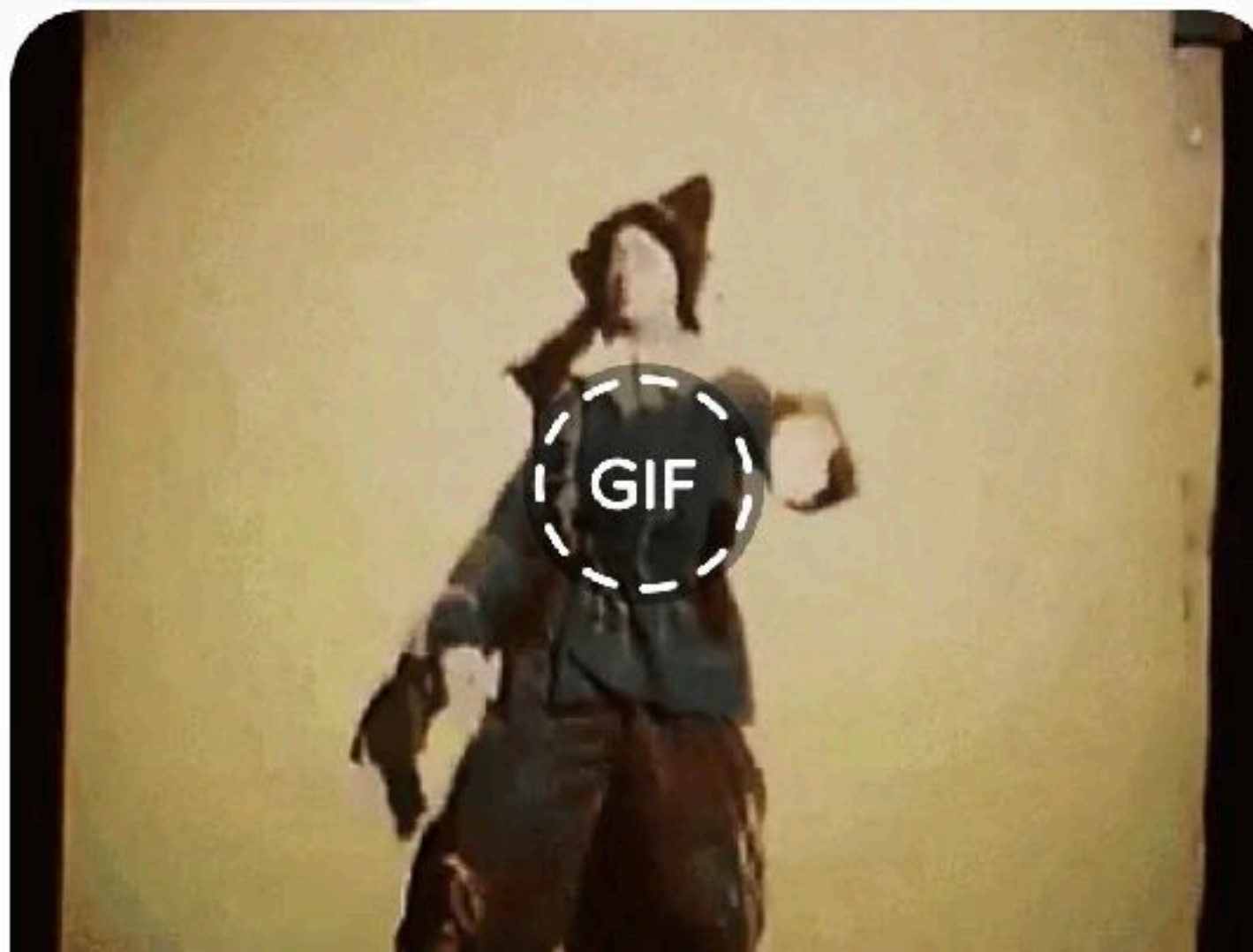
Conservative
response by Harry



Liberal responses
to Harry



James [redacted]
Harry [redacted]



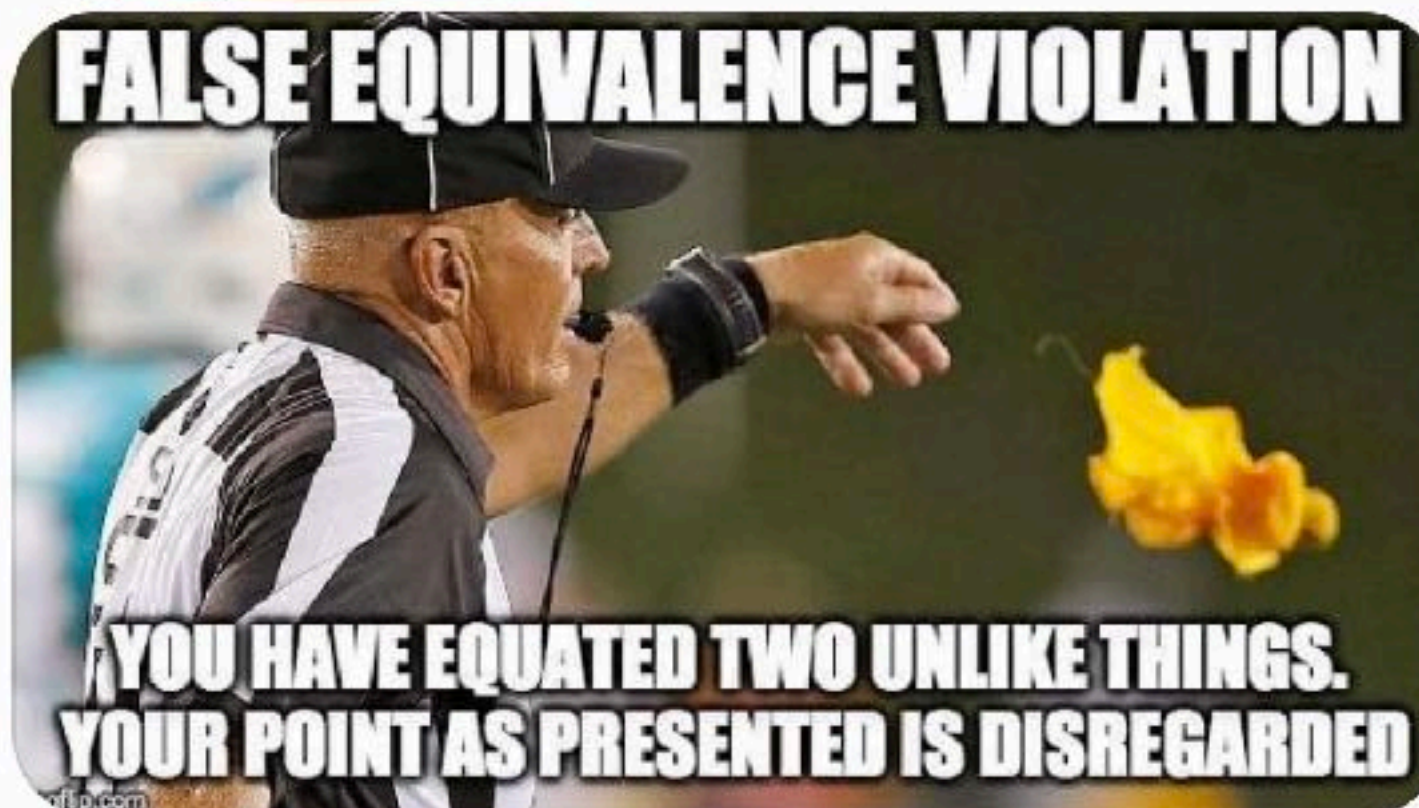
TENOR

19w Like Reply

4 



James [redacted]



19w Like Reply

4 



Elizabeth Davies

I think Harry's response is reasonable (and I am as pro-choice as they come). The problem with the original post is that it attempts to reduce the morality of abortion to a strictly religious concern, in the way that whether or not to wear a yarmulke is strictly a religious concern.

But I think it's fair to say that most people, religious or not, place at least some value on human life, all the way down to fertilized embryos that are one-tenth of a millimeter in size.

At the same time, I think that very few people, whether religious or not, value microscopic embryos to the same extent that they value a newborn baby or child.

Given the choice of whether to save a hundred fertilized embryos in petri dishes from being thrown into a furnace, or to save one three year old child from being thrown into a furnace, I think virtually everyone would choose to save the three year old. In fact, we would probably go so far as to think that only a deranged person would choose the petri dishes over the three year old.

So even if we agreed with the statement that "life begins at conception," in practice we would not treat all lives as equally valuable.

We also generally agree that adults have the right to their own bodily autonomy. I have no right to enslave you, or to take your blood or your kidney without your permission, even to save someone's life.

And so, what the abortion debate requires us to do is to weigh competing values:

Should we place a higher value on microscopic human life than we place on a woman's right to bodily autonomy? I say there's plenty of room for reasonable disagreement here, and so the owner of the body (the woman) should get to make the moral decision herself.

And to what extent does the justification for stripping a woman of her autonomy increase as the fetus gets bigger? I think most of us, religious or not, share the moral intuition that the closer the baby gets to being born, the more its value as a human life starts to seem on a par with the life of the three-year-old. Third trimester seems a pretty reasonable cutoff to me.

Like · Reply · 20w





Harry [redacted]

[Elizabeth Davies](#) You're wonderful. I think my reasoning would track very closely with yours, although I might draw the line at an earlier point. But thank you so much for your explanation.

18w

Love

Reply

1 



Nick [redacted]

This. I love positive discussion. It's amazing

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 20w



3

How to change someone's mind in a political conversation

- Restate their position in the most generous, genuinely respectful way, as though you were their defense attorney, giving them the benefit of a good intention.
- Go out of your way to emphasize points of agreement.
- Build a bridge from where they are now to where you are. Talk in a vulnerable way about how you arrived at your position.
- Be humble. Fake it if you have to, but fake it convincingly.

How to change someone's mind in a political conversation

- Fight fire with gentleness and generosity until they are persuaded to put down their guns.
- Express gratitude for their willingness to talk.
- Prioritize relationship-building over winning the debate. Be genuinely interested in making a positive connection.
- Teach them how to treat you by the way you treat them.
- When you run out of patience, take a break until you have more patience.

“We have two options as human beings. We have a choice between conversation and war. That’s it.”
—Sam Harris



Here's to better conversations for a more harmonious society!

