



Tucker's
Do's & Don'ts for

Talking Liberty



TUCKER'S DO'S & DON'TS for TALKING LIBERTY

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ALMOST EVERYONE KNOWS THAT THERE is something wrong with the world as it is. The liberty-minded person believes that he or she knows a major part of what is wrong. We recall the moment when we discovered this. The light flicked on. The shades came off and the world looked different from before. **Our lives changed.** How can we help others arrive at this point?

The short summary of what we believe: the astonishing rise of government power over the course of the last one hundred years has truncated freedoms, human rights, and prosperity along with all the fruits of the human spirit unleashed and unhampered. **Government is the main enemy**, but government hides under cover of social contract, social justice, democracy, religion, security, and a host of other changing veils.

All of this is clear to those steeped in the tradition of liberty-minded thought as it has gradually emerged over the centuries. But **it is obviously not clear to the vast majority of the human family**, who continue to live under the illusion that giving government more power will magically cure society's ills by infusing us with a greater reality of fairness, justice, morality — or whatever they claim.

How best to correct this error?

How best to share this knowledge?

How best to bring others along to the same understanding?

Here are ten rules - five **DON'Ts** and five DOs.

1. DON'T BE BELLIGERENT

Righteous anger at the state of the world is a feature of the libertarian mind. It was probably the reason for the initial interest in the ideology.

When a person makes the link between war, mass killing, lies, and government power, the result is overwhelming. It seems unimaginable that others do not see this. One burns with a passion for justice. One

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feels an intense desire to do something to fix the problem. Another example might be economics related . When a person discovers that the Fed is the reason for inflation, the business cycle, and the skyrocketing debt, the effect is shock and anger and the desire to make history right.

This is all completely understandable. The problem is to remember that others do not share in this anger because they have not been made aware

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of the cause and effect here. They do not share your understanding. All the dogmatism, belligerence, expressions of anger, and raised voices are not going to convince anyone of the case for liberty. Instead, quite the opposite, they just inspire others to fear your temper and tone.

The goal is to win hearts and minds.

A raised tone of voice, an increased volume, and a more insistent edge are not the same as a convincing argument. These approaches can seem to work only by causing others to back down in fear, but that is not the goal of persuasion. The goal is to win hearts and minds.

An aggressive voice is not going to persuade people of the case for peace. An unwillingness to listen to others is not going to convince people of the case for exchange and cooperation. An absence of interest in another's point of view is not going to bolster your credibility as an advocate of free speech and human rights. A posture of intolerance is not a good witness for the diversity and human flourishing we would see in a free society. The case for liberty needs to be made in a manner that practices what we preach.

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The better approach is to speak with reason and with the intention of actually bringing a person along through making sense. That doesn't mean being unprincipled. In fact, a reasoned approach enables you to speak about radical content with even more authority.

As Ludwig von Mises wrote in *Liberalism* (1929):
*rhetoical bombast, music and song re-
sound, banners wave, flowers and colors
serve as symbols, and the leaders seek to
attach their followers to their own per-
son. Liberalism has nothing to do with
all this. It has no party flower and no
party color, no party song and no party
idols, no symbols and no slogans. It has
the substance and the arguments. These
must lead it to victory.*

2. DON'T PRESUME HATRED OF LIBERTY

Many libertarians start with conversations, online or offline, with the presumption that the interlocutor is against liberty. That is not usually the case. The problem is usually of a different sort. It is that the person does not see the relationship between the law that he or she supports and the imposition on human liberty.

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A person who says “every person has a right to a decent education” may not actually mean “people should be robbed to support bad schools” or “all children should be forced into a prison-like building for 12 years.”

The person may not actually be against human liberty, only unable to see the relationship between certain principles and certain policies.

The job of the liberty-minded rhetorician is to illustrate the connection, and to show how impositions on liberty lead to bad results. For example, in the case of public school, people who think kids ought to be forced into school until they are 16 or 18 don't imagine that juvenile detention is a good solution, or that kids ought to be prohibited from having viable work experience, or that parents can't be good teachers at home. But that is the implication of the policies they support. What's missing here is the logical relationship between the policy he or she supports and the inevitable downsides of a system of coercion and compulsion.

Almost all non-libertarians underestimate the implications of putting the state in charge of anything. They speak of how "society" should do something, how "we as a people should" do something, how "the community" needs to be committed to something. The reason for this evasive language is to mask, even from themselves, the

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More state power means the use of more confiscatory power, more fines, more jails, and more violence. Indeed, in the end, violence is the only tool the state has, so every push for more intervention amounts to a call for a more violent society. This is even the case for gun-control laws: they mean using guns against people when their own peaceful choices conflict with the political priorities of the state.

The advocates of intervention don't usually begin with a hatred of liberty. They are just unwilling or unprepared to recognize the relationship between their own outlook and the uses of the state as a tool of power. In the end, we must choose between liberty and power. There is nothing in between.

3. DON'T PRESUME DIFFERENT GOALS

Non-libertarians have a gigantic language apparatus they employ to push against the idea of liberty. They speak of the need for "social justice," "equality," "sustainability," "solidarity," "community," "progress," and a hundred other wonderful-

sounding things that are really just covers for increasing government power.

It is very easy to presume that these people have completely different social goals than those of liberty advocates. That is usually not the case. More often than not — there are exceptions — the people who speak this way do not have different goals. There are some people who actually do favor poverty and human suffering, but that is not very common. Most people share the goal of prosperity, peace, a clean environment, and widespread wealth — whatever words or phrases they use.

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There is no point in getting hung up on words. Words are arbitrary sounds designed to facilitate conversation. Their meaning changes over time. Especially in our times, different sectors of society use different vocabulary to describe the same thing. If you can change your vocabulary and introduce someone to a cause, it is worth the effort. There is no reason to get hung up on word choices.

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4. DON'T PRESUME IGNORANCE

Many opponents of the free society and free markets are among the most educated people on the planet. You need only look at the faculty at top-level universities to see that, despite all their brilliance and reading and education, many fail to understand even the basics of economic forces like supply and demand. They are not ignorant. A basic economic education is lacking in some of the world's smartest people, and a failure to integrate economic lessons into a larger worldview is the most common error among the academic elite.

What is often lacking is not education but the precise knowledge that turns out to be extremely important in forming a worldview. As Thomas Sowell has written, many of the world's smartest people are guilty of unconstrained visions of what is possible. They see pockets of wealth alongside poverty and easily jump to the conclusion that spreading out the wealth would create fairness. That unconstrained vision of society is possible in a world without scarcity,



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and the world of ideas is indeed a world without scarcity. Intellectuals deal mainly in the world of ideas, which is why they are so tempted by the dream of a world of unlimited possibilities.

Where they get tripped up is in theorizing about the physical world, the world in which resources

and time constrain possibilities. Here there can be no such thing as socialism, no such thing as creating wealth by taking it away from others. Here is where we must have private property, freely floating prices, exchange, contract, trade among all peoples, capital accumulation, and safety in ownership. All of these are essentials. Peter Boettke has written that almost all errors in economics come down to the failure to understand scarcity. True enough!

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Non-intellectuals, in my experience, are more open to the ideas of liberty. They only need an appeal to daily experience. How many people really know that laundry has been totally destroyed by state regulation, that our clothes are dirtier thanks to government intervention? How many people understand how regulations

have so seriously cartelized the business sector and reduced our options and made it so difficult for people to go into business? That there is a relationship between a large US military presence in the world and a welfare state that controls the civilian population at home, that the welfare-warfare state is one entity? That the Federal Reserve is the main reason behind the runup in federal debt and a main reason for all the corruption that people loathe?

We have so much to learn even from those who do not share our worldview.

There is no reason to attempt to convince anyone of the full case for liberty in one exchange. It is a mistake to presume someone else knows nothing and we know all things, because it is absolutely untrue. We have so much to learn even from those who do not share our worldview.

But if you presume another person's ignorance, you will not gain that knowledge or understanding.

If the market teaches us anything, it is that we are all ignorant of the vast majority of human knowledge. The goal is not necessarily to convince everyone you meet of the case for liberty. Rather, take the opportunity, when presented, to learn from people who know more about subjects that

you don't. I recall sitting next to a man in the airplane who specialized in making bags for potato chips. It was an absolutely fascinating conversation to learn all about the history, technology, and marketing of these bags. It is a rare opportunity to discover a sector of life that is mostly closed to us. Sometimes it is just good to be selfish in conversation, extracting as much information as possible as a way of making our own worldview more hands-on and realistic.

5. DON'T REGARD ANYONE AS AN ENEMY

In democracy, government specializes in dividing people into warring tribes and devolves all meaningful conversation into sectarian squabbles. This is what elections are all about. Each politician finds his or her demographic and attempts to whip them up into a frenzy against others. It's always the same: men vs. women, blacks vs. whites, natives vs. immigrants, rich vs. poor, able

vs. disabled, religious vs. secular, and so on without limit.

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What is the effect of this constant prattle? It causes us to think of each other as enemies. If you really believe that it is super-critical to the

future of civilization that Joe and not Tom is elected, you naturally believe that anyone who supports Tom is the enemy. And you know based on demographics — or you have a pretty good idea — who is supporting whom. This creates the tendency for all of us to divide up the population around us into friends and foes.

It is no wonder that society continues to have troubles with racism, sexism, nativism, and classism.

This is a major cause of social tension in a democratic society. Democracy purports to bring us all together to govern ourselves. Actually it only ends in dividing us into feuding clans, out to steal or keep from being stolen from. One person's liberty comes at the expense of another. One person's vision is only realized so long as others' visions

are not. It is no wonder that society continues to have troubles with racism, sexism, nativism, and classism.

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That we can't live together except by crushing each other is a major illusion of democracy. It is an artificial reality,

one created by the state itself. So long as we buy into it, we are going along with a corrupt imposition. We are giving in. The best way to fight back is to not be manipulated into this situation. We should seek to make friends, not entrench ene-

Every human being is a friend of liberty.

mies. Every human being is a friend of liberty somewhere deep inside his or her heart. It is just a matter of finding that spot and tapping into it.

There is no religion, no race, no income group that cannot benefit on net from liberty. For that reason, there is no person who should not be on Team Liberty. That's why it is best to approach the art of persuasion, and life itself, with the assumption that we are surrounded by friends. In this way, we avoid the trap that the state sets for us. Remember that the enemy is the state, not your fellow human beings.

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6. DO INSPIRE

Libertarians are very good at making sense.

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mas that might be perfectly valid but do not hit the sweet spot to change minds. I've heard countless arguments over political points in which the libertarian wins the point on logic but loses in the area of common

sense. This is why so many people find libertarianism to be somewhat scary, a form of fanaticism that would take away the comfort and stability of life itself.

Consider the point about privatizing streets. Liberty-minded thinkers favor this, but most people can't imagine it. You can assert the point again and again and conjure up images of every street having a toll. Or you can simply point out that hundreds of large corporations today use private streets in their own factory grounds, streets that are built by private interests and are nonetheless available to everyone. In addition, there is no necessary reason to believe that privatized streets would not be as open access as a search engine like Google or a video chat program like Skype. Producers have every interest in including users, not excluding them.

Insofar as it is possible, it is best to use examples of the private provision of

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goods and services that really exist in our world. One of the best cases is the whole of the Internet, which is the greatest experiment in anarchism that exists today. Trust relationships between merchants and consumers, user ratings, protections against identity theft, and consumer protection have all formed without recourse to government bureaucracies. Yet people continue to believe that government agencies are essential to our lives when they experience the beauties of anarchy every day.

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Actually, government contributes very little to the lives of average people. People realize this once they think about it. Our lives are great when we make them so, not because a bureaucrat has somehow intervened to improve our lot. The myth that government is somehow supporting or sustaining civilization is an embedded part of our civic culture, but it is a myth easily refuted by

daily experience. Monitoring what we do day-to-day, we discover that it is actually private enterprise that we depend on for all the comforts and excitements of life.

Humanity is bursting with creativity, energy, the desire to get along, the impulse to fix problems, and the passion to value others and be valued ourselves.

This is an inspiring realization. The notion that government is necessary is a very negative commentary on the capacity of people to manage their own affairs. Once you see the anarchy all around us, you realize that humanity is bursting

with creativity, energy, the desire to get along, the impulse to fix problems, and the passion to value others and be valued ourselves. Government has only one power in the end, and that is the power to stall and thwart this constructive process with force. If by doing so it prohibits peaceful behavior, it normally diminishes the quality of life for all of us.

Liberty is an inspiring message. We should always avail ourselves to this to make our case.

7. DO LOOK FOR LOVE OF LIBERTY

This is something of an art. When you are talking with someone about the subject of liberty, he or she will often say a long series of things that are just wrong from your point of view. One ap-

The point is not to look for error — there's never a problem in finding those — but to look for points of agreement.

proach you can use is to sit patiently and listen as long as possible, refraining from commentary. At some point, the person will say something that makes sense — a

rightist might speak of the need for gun rights or a leftist might talk about civil liberties — and this is the time to speak up. If you can find a point of agreement on some point about human liberty, you have the basis for a real conversation.

The point is not to look for error — there's never a problem in finding those — but to look for points of agreement. As you pursue these lines, you will bump into a point of disagreement, but instead of arguing — which is often just pointless — you have the basis for a serious discussion of the merit of a free society.

The secret here is to do this not as a strategy but as a sincere attempt to praise the good in another's way of thinking. There are very few people alive in the world today who do not believe in liberty in some part of their lives. Find that point and you can disarm a critic and have the basis for at least getting a hearing for your point of view.

8. DO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR BELIEFS

One thing that Internet culture has taught us: the weaker the argument, the stronger the rhetoric that backs it. Often times, insults, ad hominem, put-downs, and smears are just covers for a lack of confidence in a position. If you know a subject very well, there is no reason to resort to this way of thinking and arguing. You can respect another's point of view and still make your points.

The case for liberty does not need loud, boisterous, belligerent arguments. If you have confidence in your beliefs, you can welcome any comers and face down any objection. If you find yourself getting flustered and angry in the course of a discussion, you might ask if the real problem is not the other person but rather your own lack of knowledge. It might be time to hit the books.

Nothing persuades others like a calm and cool demeanor in the face of vigorous criticism. But the best way to achieve that is to become a genuine expert with a deep and impenetrable conviction in what you believe.

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9. DO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR INTERLOCUTOR

Earlier I wrote about the tendency of different political tribes to use completely different language. It is sometimes good to completely mix this up.

Why not call yourself a liberal?

Why not call yourself a progressive, for example? After all, nothing is for progress as much as human liberty. Indeed it is the only real source of progress. Why not call yourself a liberal? In the 18th century, liberalism meant a belief in human rights, commerce, peace, and no government intervention. It's true that we have mostly lost that term, but it still pertains historically, and there is nothing wrong with reclaiming it.

Why not call yourself a progressive?

It is a waste of time to argue about terminology.

Discussions that go places focus on concepts and ideas, not terminology.

It is a waste of time to argue about terminology. Discussions that go places focus on concepts and ideas, not terminology. It is best, then, to adopt the language of others if that is possible. Consider the term “sustainability,” for example. It is mostly used as an attack on economic development and commercial freedom. But there is an element of free-market thought that is perfectly compatible with the idea of sustainability. Loose credit creates unsustainable bubbles. In fact, it is the main source of creating unsustainable institutions. This is true of many, if not

most, government programs. Subsidies and protectionism create unsustainable results. This kind of language is just as much ours as theirs.

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Probably as much as 95 percent of political argument today centers on debates about who should be ruling us, and the terms under which this rule takes place. Neither amounts to much because both miss the point. A world of liberty is a world without rulers lording it over the human population with swords, bullets, and tanks. It is a world without rulers that we seek, so it makes no sense to get distracted by arguments over which rulers should be in charge.

10. DO SUGGEST GREAT LITERATURE

A major reason to know the literature well is to have ready references that fit with the outlook of another person. An engineering major will need to read different books from a literature major. A literature major might be persuaded by Russell Roberts's wonderful novel *The Invisible Heart*. An engineering major might enjoy Nassim Taleb's *Antifragile*. As great and essential as the old treatises are — Mises's *Human Action* or Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty* — they are not the only way to discover the ideas of liberty.

Beginners who need an economics education can always benefit from Hazlitt's *Economics in One Lesson*, but it is not the only book. Robert Murphy's *Lessons for the Young Economist* is a great book, as is Faus-tino Balvé's *Essentials of Economics*.

To absorb the full truth about liberty takes time.

But the literature of liberty is, at this point, very well developed. We have commentary on popular culture, philosophy, history, law, economics, foreign relations and war, as well as the history of art and even computer code. The lessons of human liberty are applicable to every aspect of life. Never leave a conversation without making an excellent suggestion of a book to provide a follow-up. It could also be an article online — or a membership to [Liberty.me](https://liberty.me).

Speaking from a personal point of view, I will often be reading a book of any sort — fiction or nonfiction or history or something — and be unable to suppress talking to others about it. The enthusiasm you show for what you are currently learning can be infectious to those around you.

Liberty is a gigantic subject. “Conversion” doesn’t happen in a day — it is a process. There is no reason to strive for instant victories. To absorb the

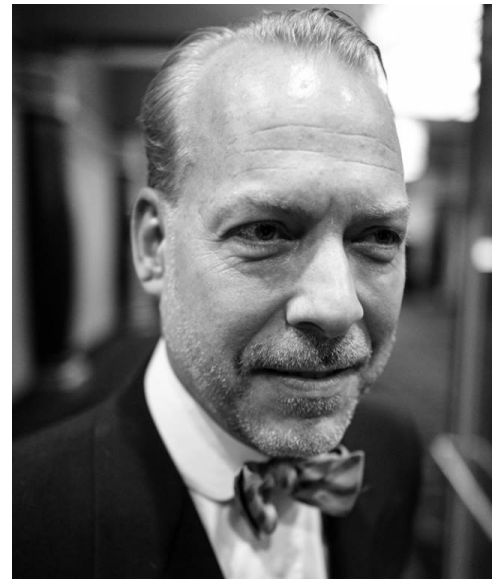
full truth about liberty takes time for it to be meaningful and penetrating. Moreover, there is no reason to seek victory over the full picture; achieving small victories is all that is necessary. It is a reflection of the confidence you have in your worldview that you don't need to seek "conversions" so much as marginal steps toward enlightenment.

CONCLUSION

We were born free, but at one point or another we all became, in some form or another, supporters of the state. You were once one of those people who needed convincing. Imagine that you are speaking to yourself, before you saw the light. How would you want to be convinced? Be understanding and compassionate, but also patient and persistent. The future of freedom and liberty depends on our ability to convey the immeasurable benefit of freedom.

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