



Quick Start Playbook on Engaging Conservatives

Build a Foundational Premise

1. **Personal relationships** are the most powerful means we have to diffuse disgust towards a group of people.
2. We're not divided because some are good or evil, but because our minds are designed for groupish righteousness.
3. Our goals cannot be achieved without **proportional involvement** of segments of society, including Conservatives.
4. We must be intentional with our approach, language, and tactics. It may not be comfortable, but it is critical.

Understand Conservatives Concerns

- By definition Conservatives want things that are familiar, safe and dependable. They value borders, boundaries and traditions. They are less likely to be interested in new, different and possibly uncomfortable experiences of a conversation across differences with strangers.
- Conservatives often assume that any "diverse" conversation aimed at "bridging divides" is a liberal thing. They prefer their families and faith communities to deal with problems instead of government or a shared civic space.
- Many conservatives are wary of "dialogue." They suspect "conversations" with liberals are a thinly veiled attempt to enlighten, educate, change their minds, and convince them why they're wrong. Consider trying to bring together tennis players and weightlifters when the effort is led by tennis coaches working on tennis courts.
- The **number one issue is trust**. Is there a hidden agenda? Can conservatives trust the experience won't be liberal-dominated? Do Conservatives get to help frame the questions and tone?
- Conservatives work from the assumption that more liberal people see them as evil, stupid, and unenlightened. They deal with fear and anger that is directed at them. **Conservatives want to be heard and understood** as having a reasonable point of view and respected **for being authentically who they are**.

Cultivate a Welcoming Heart

- We must develop goodwill, graciousness, appreciation and empathy toward Conservatives as **people before positions**. If we don't embody that mindset, it will be obvious and we will fail. **We cannot fake it**.
- **Assume that Conservatives want good** things for the country and that both liberal and conservative policies are manifestations of deeply conflicting but equally heartfelt visions of a good society.
- Believe in your soul that **without deeply engaged Conservatives, your effort will lack critical insights** required to solve problems. There are a lot of threats to this country and neither side is capable of seeing them all. Conservatives can often perceive dangers, risks and challenges that liberals can't.
- Step out of the moral matrix and embrace empathy-- this is the essential move needed to cultivate moral humility -- to **get yourself out of a mindset of self-righteousness** with those you disagree with.
- **True bridge building can not be built on the belief that if you create respectful conversation that ultimately those intransigent Conservatives will come around to a more liberal point of view**.
- Take a continuous meter reading on whether the environment you are creating welcomes conservatives. **Process everything through their eyes**.

Know What Motivates Conservatives

- Liberals understand moral good around what is caring, harmful and fair. Conservatives add the **values of loyalty, authority, and sanctity** to their definition of moral good. Preserving those institutions and traditions is their most sacred value.
- For a healthy state of political life **we need both a party of order/stability and a party of progress/reform.**
- Conservative caring is different from liberals'. It is not universalist; it is more **local and blended with loyalty.**
- The left generally believes that human nature is good: bring people together, knock down the walls and all will be well. The right generally believes people can be greedy, sexual, selfish, and in **need of regulation, accountability and restrictions.**
- Conservatives tend to **favor economics and religion** as explanatory models of human conduct,
- Liberals tend to be more heart-led, while conservatives tend to be more head-led.

Use Widely Resonant Language

- Word choices can send wrong signals and shut down a relationship before it ever begins. Conservatives can immediately sense liberalism in how you speak.
- **Don't use liberal trigger words with Conservatives when talking about our work** - [Civility](#), [Civil discourse](#), [Dialogue](#), [Diversity](#), [Inclusive/Inclusion](#), [Transpartisan](#), [Safe spaces](#), [Change](#), [Together](#), [Unity](#), [Cooperation](#), [Community](#), [Awareness](#), [Tolerance](#), [Identity](#), [Kindness](#).
- **Instead discuss how to "Mend the frayed fabric of America,"** focus on [american greatness](#), [what made this country great](#), [what can make us strong](#), [the wisdom of the founders](#), also [hinting at competition with other nations](#). Use strong words appealing to higher moral virtues: [patriotism](#), [love of country](#), [the flag](#), [family values](#), [personal responsibility](#), [free speech](#).
- **Don't use liberal trigger words when discussing issues with Conservatives** - [social justice](#), [race](#), [privilege](#), [white privilege](#), [white supremacy](#), [marginalized](#), [institutional racism](#), [resources](#), [sustainability](#), [climate change](#), [women's health](#).
- **Instead use their terms** - [American exceptionalism](#), [fiscal responsibility](#), [religious liberty](#), [self-sufficiency](#), [self-reliance](#), [self-discipline](#), [dependency](#), [competition](#), [military power](#).
- Make a case for change and **engagement based on Conservative's interests** (head/logic driven), not liberal's (heart/emotion).
- A strong argument for conservatives participation is that listening first to understand will make them a more effective advocate for their own position.
- **Avoid condescension** - a style that seeks to educate those in need of it.

Intentionally Reach Out to Conservatives

- **Include a minimum of two people who disagree on politics** with an authentic ongoing relationship - a truth-telling conservative partner will give you important feedback that you will never imagine otherwise.
- **Build an expanding bipartisan network** incrementally. Grow an intermediate-sized ideologically and demographically diverse group to help create the social "glue" that will ensure you draw from different tribes.
- Having an elected Republican leader's public support will get Conservatives to turn out.
- **Partner with an ideologically diverse church** congregation or a politically diverse group of churches. Churches are institutions that have more street cred for Conservatives than the average town hall does. Many Conservatives are motivated by their faith and Faith Partners naturally speak to hearts, not heads.
- **Suggest that Conservatives come in groups**, to alleviate fear of being alone or ganged up upon.

- **Keep a conservative bench.** You're more likely to lose conservatives along the way. Take the time to get feedback from conservatives you've lost.
- **Don't ask or expect people to change their views.** Most conservatives simply won't sign up for such a project. So, don't imply that participants are likely or expected to "change and grow."
- Make Conservatives feel that they don't need to betray themselves to fit in or participate.
- **Change who's in control.** This reform is by far the most important. At every level, from who pays, who plans and designs, who attends, who evaluates and publicizes.

Give Conservatives a Positive Experience

- Create conditions that make people from feuding tribes want to like each other.
- When you engage a Conservative, start by **recognizing and appreciating their contribution.**
- Don't bring up morality until you've found a few points of commonality or established trust.
- **Don't attempt to change someone's mind** and stay out of combat mode.
- **Keep teaching and coaching to a minimum.** While it's important to establish basic conversational guardrails to ensure civility, it's also important to **let people speak freely**, doing as little policing as possible.
- Even if you do everything right, it's still likely your engagement will lean left. But, it is critical that you stay highly aware of the imbalance – it will affect every decision you make toward keeping conservatives comfortable and lead to increasing success attracting conservatives into your project over time.