

The Simplest, Most Effective Tactic

Each of us as Christian ambassadors face two daunting challenges when trying to make a difference for Christ. First, how do we initiate conversations about spiritual things in a way that doesn't seem awkward. Second, how do we keep ourselves from getting trapped or overwhelmed by others more aggressive than we are?

In this talk, Greg will teach a two-step game plan that allows you to maneuver with confidence in any situation, no matter how little you know, and no matter how aggressive, powerful, or educated your opposition is. "Columbo," derived from a popular American television character, is the simplest tactic imaginable to help you stop a challenger in his tracks, turn the tables, and then get him thinking. And it can be done in a gracious and winsome way.

If you're tired of finding yourself flat-footed and intimidated in conversations about what you believe, if you want to increase your confidence and your skill in discussions, no matter who you're talking to, this talk is for you.

Greg Koukl is the founder and President of Stand to Reason, an organization that trains Christians to think more clearly about their faith and to make an even-handed, incisive, yet gracious defense for classical Christianity and classical Christian values in the public square. He received his Masters in Philosophy of Religion and Ethics at Talbot School of Theology, graduating with high honors, and his Masters in Christian Apologetics from Simon Greenleaf University. He is an adjunct professor in Christian apologetics at Biola University. He is the author of *Tactics—A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* with Francis J. Beckwith, and *Precious Unborn Human Persons*. He has hosted his own radio talk show for over 20 years advocating clear-thinking Christianity and defending the Christian worldview.

I. The Tactic in Brief

A. The key to the Columbo tactic: The Christian goes on the offensive in a disarming way with carefully selected questions to productively advance the conversation.

B. Simple guideline: If you hit a roadblock when witnessing, ask a good question.

C. The simplest, most effective question you can ask in most circumstances is some variation of "How do you know?" or "Why should I believe what you believe?"

1. "What makes you think that's the right way to see it?"

2. “I’m curious. Why would you say a thing like that?”

3. “Why should I trust that your organization [Mormon Church/Joseph Smith, Watchtower, etc.] speaks for God?”

D. This is a good tactic to use where you work.

II. Columbo: Three uses, three questions

A. First application of Columbo: to gain information

1. Key question: “What do you mean by that?” (or some variation)

2. A further advantage of Columbo: staying out of the “hot seat”

B. Second application of Columbo: To reverse the burden of proof.

1. Rule: the one who makes the claim bears the burden.

2. Key question: “Now, how did you come to that conclusion?”

Alternates: “Why do you say that?” or “What are your reasons for saying that?”

3. Beware of the professor’s ploy: The professor makes a claim. When challenged, he turns the burden of proof back on the questioner.

C. Third application of Columbo: to indirectly exploit a weakness or a flaw in someone’s views.

1. One of the purposes of Columbo is to use your questions to subtly and indirectly dismantle the other person’s viewpoint.

2. Key question: “Have you ever considered...” and then finish the sentence in a way appropriate to the issue.

III. Improving Your Columbo Skill

A. Think of questions in advance.

B. After each encounter, take a few moments for self-assessment.