3.12: Con side Case Alternatives

To accomplish the two, overall con-side strategies the con side can select one of the following alternatives.

**Straight Refutation**

In straight refutation, the con-side directly refutes, point-by-point, the arguments brought up by the pro-side. In using this approach, the con-side argues for keeping the status quo in place. The status quo is the current fact, value or policy that is being challenged by the pro-side. The con-side argues against any of the pro-side case approaches by:

- Refuting the problem and/or solution
- Denying all advantages from a change in the status quo
- Arguing against the alternative(s) being presented

If the pro-side stated that there were two reasons why we need to test welfare recipients for drugs:

- Many recipients of welfare are using drugs.
- Testing will find out who the drug users are.

The con-side using straight refutation would say, “The people promoting the claim state that many recipients or welfare are using drugs, but I argue that there are not that many recipients of welfare that are using drugs.” and “They also say that their tests will find out who the drug users are, but I will argue that the testing that is proposed will not give us an accurate picture of who is actually using drugs. The con-side will still need to use evidence to prove their contentions or else they are just assertions and not real arguments.

**Defense of the status quo with just minor repairs**

This approach is that the status quo is generally doing an effective job. If there is a problem, it can be dealt with by
making a minor change or repair in the status quo. There is no need to make a major change or an overhaul of the system like the claim suggests.

An example of minor repairs occurs when, a couple needs a larger house to accommodate their growing family. Instead of purchasing a new home, they adopt the minor repair approach and add-on to their existing home. Another example is when people avoid the cost of buying a new car by getting their old one repaired.

How to Win An Argument Every Time

Forbes Magazine, April 23, 2015


When someone takes an opposing view on a topic you care deeply about, the natural human response is “defense.” Our brains are hard-wired to assess for threats, but when we let feelings of being threatened hijack our behavior, things never end well. In a crucial conversation, getting defensive is a surefire path to failure.

How to beat this? Get curious.

A great way to inoculate yourself against defensiveness is to develop a healthy doubt about your own certainty. Then, enter the conversation with intense curiosity about the other person’s world. Give yourself a detective’s task of discovering why a reasonable, rational and decent person would think the way he or she does. As former Secretary of State Dean Rusk said, “The best way to persuade others is with your ears, by listening.” When others feel deeply understood, they become far more open to hearing you.

Counter proposal

In this approach, the con-side admits that the overall goals of the pro-side’s case are good, but the way the pro-side had offered to reach them is not a good approach. In this alternative, the con-side presents what they feel is a better alternative. The con side admits that the pro-side has shown a weakness in the present system, which cannot be denied or refuted. The con side, however, does not agree with the way the pro side wants to remedy the weakness, and offers a better plan of attack.

You and that special someone have been living together for a period of time and are having trouble with the relationship. You suggest that it would be best if you broke off the relationship. The other person agrees that the relationship has problems, but suggests a trial separation would be a better solution. Since both of you agree that the status quo has problems, the argument comes down to which alternative will ultimately gain target audience approval.

Hopefully, after this chapter your confidence is growing and you are more willing to “Clash” with those making arguments with which you disagree.

In the next few chapters we will be looking closely at parts of the Toulmin Model. There is an entire chapter on the Claim, Backing (Evidence), and use of Warrants (Reasoning).

“I don’t mind arguing with myself. It’s when I lose that it bothers me.”
-- Richard Powers

“Anytime four New Yorkers get into a cab together without arguing, a bank robbery has just taken place.”

-- Johnny Carson