

Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions – Gregory Koukl<sup>1</sup>

All quotations are from the book and page numbers are included in parenthesis.

“Gregory Koukl holds MA degrees in both apologetics and philosophy... is founder and president of Stand to Reason (str.org) and serves as adjunct professor of Christian apologetics at Biola University” (Back cover). His stated purpose for the book is to teach the reader how to use a method he calls “the Ambassador Model” (20). He defines this model as based “more on friendly curiosity – a kind of relaxed diplomacy – than on confrontation” (20).

Koukl mentions three basic skills needed to represent Christ properly: (24-25)

1. A basic knowledge of the task.
2. Wisdom, or an artful method.
3. Character, an attractive manner.

Koukl defines “Tactics” as “‘the art of arranging,’ focus on the immediate situation at hand... they offer techniques of maneuvering in what otherwise might be difficult conversations” (26). He acknowledges, “Facts and sound reason are on our side” (28), and that the use of tactics is “to gain a footing, to maneuver, and to expose another person’s bad thinking so you can guide him to truth” (29).

*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.* (Colossians 4:6)

*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* (Proverbs 15:1)

*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.* (Proverbs 25:11)

We might think of these “Tactics” as our part of sharing the gospel. Koukl writes, “Our job is to communicate the gospel as clearly, graciously, and persuasively as possible. God’s job is to take it from there” (36-37). He also notes that our goal can be a modest one. He states, “...aim to put a stone in someone’s shoe. Try to give the person something to think about. Be content to plant a seed that might later flourish under God’s sovereign care” (41).

Six “Tactics” for helping us converse in a persuasive manner with those who do not know Christ.

### 1. The “Columbo” tactic.

The “Columbo tactic” is based on the TV show where the brilliant, quirky Columbo used questions to solve the crime. Koukl writes, “The key to the Columbo tactic is to go on the offensive in an inoffensive way by using carefully selected questions to productively advance the conversation. Simply put, never make a statement, at least at first, when a question will do the job” (47). Questions like, “What do you mean by that?” (49) and “How did you come to that conclusion?” (61) help you to clarify and put the burden of proof back on the other person.

### 2. The “Suicide” tactic.

The “Suicide tactic” is used to point out self-contradictory concepts such as, “There is no truth.” (Is this statement true?), or “There are no absolutes.” (Is this an absolute?) (108). Koukl gives numerous examples of such concepts and how to properly respond. He summarizes, “When I use any form of the Suicide tactic, I have a specific goal in mind. I want to show the person that there is a fatal inconsistency in his beliefs” (140).

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009).

### 3. The “Taking the Roof Off” tactic.

“Taking the Roof Off” is the tactic of adopting a viewpoint for the sake of argument. Koukl notes that some views, “If taken seriously...lead to counterintuitive or even absurd results” (155). He continues, “...mankind has erected a self-deception – or a ‘roof’ – to shield himself from the logical implications of his beliefs. With our tactic, we try to remove that roof to deprive him of his false sense of security, then show him the truth” (156).

### 4. The “Steamroller” tactic.

The “Steamroller tactic” is a method of dealing with people who “overpower you with strong personalities and interrupt constantly” (166). Koukl suggests three steps for dealing with Steamrollers:

- Step one, stop the interruption graciously but firmly, then negotiate an agreement.
- Step two, shame him by making a very direct request for courtesy.
- Step three, leave. Never match a steamroller’s incivility with rudeness. Instead, let him have the last word, then calmly walk away (166).

### 5. The “Rhodes Scholar” tactic.

The “Rhodes Scholar” tactic “...gives a tool to use when someone invokes scholarly opinion against our view. It protects us from a common error called the ‘fallacy of expert witness’” (175). Koukl writes, “The key to Rhodes Scholar is getting past the *opinion* of a scholar and probing the *reasons* for his opinions... Always ask for an accounting” (175).

### 6. The “Just the Facts, Ma’am” tactic.

“Just the Facts, Ma’am” helps us be aware “...that many challenges to Christianity are based on bad information. These objections can be overcome by a simple appeal to the facts” (176).

Koukl closes the book by challenging readers to prepare properly. He quotes the motto of the U.S. Marine corps: “*Semper Fi...* Always faithful” (188). He also quotes a marine training maxim, “The more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in battle” (188).

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

2 Timothy 2:15

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17