

The Left Hand of God Talking Points

1. How we work and live are intricately connected. The values of the workplace and capitalist marketplace infiltrate beyond the work world into people's personal lives—their relationships, marriages, etc.
2. The capitalist workplace is based on the view that the world is competitive and everyone is trying to get ahead of everyone else and if you don't play the game you will be left behind. This message is reinforced on television, in movies, magazines, books, schools, etc.
3. Everyone recognizes that the work world is governed by money and power. The sole purpose of a business is to make money and one's worth to the business is measured by whether one can make money for the business. The purpose of a business is to maximize money regardless of the effects on others or the planet.
3. To survive and "succeed" in this environment, everyone realizes they have to be out for him or herself and thus tries to get an advantage whenever s/he can. This means you cannot trust anyone because they are all going to do what they have to in order to get ahead and make it.
4. This is disconcerting and scary in a society that doesn't have any safety net or way to ensure peoples' basic needs are adequately met. And yet people feel resigned to this reality because it's "just the way it is." They don't believe things can change.
5. People really want their lives to be about serving some higher purpose.
6. People do not like the bottom-line orientation of the work world; how people all seem to be out for themselves; the harsh hierarchy of winners and losers, with power, money, and dominance as the name of the game. They have dreams of a life motivated by ideals and purpose beyond just making money—a life of meaning, but have been forced to foreclose on those dreams. The process has left them feeling deadened inside.
7. While people yearn for a different kind of world—one of kindness and generosity—they suppress those yearnings because they believe that's just not the way the world works.
8. The capitalist marketplace tries to convince us that the way the world works is a political and economic question. But in reality the question of how the world works is basically a theological question. And these issues of workplace values are basically questions of meaning. In a massive research project, Rabbi Michael Lerner and his team learned that it was these questions of theology and meaning that were at the heart of people's discontent. And it was these questions that were also at the heart of their politics. He wrote a book about this, published in 2006 called *The Left Hand of God*.
9. There are two visions for how the world works (in theological terms, this is two understandings of God). For as long as anyone can remember, these two visions have competed in our individual hearts, our cultures, our sacred texts, and in the interpretations of those texts.
10. Let's call these two worldviews the worldview of fear and the worldview of love. In the worldview of fear, the following values and beliefs dominant: resources are scarce, you have to give to get, you have to look out for yourself, you have to take and get what you can because otherwise you will not get your needs met, your value and worth as individual is based on whether you help

others (individuals, corporations, etc.) gain money and power. The universe is there for us to exploit to meet our needs. In this worldview of fear, it is a struggle of all vs. all and to be successful you better participate to win. Others are seen as objects, not subjects—an I/It relationship.

11. In the worldview of love, the following values and beliefs dominant: that there is enough, we are enough, there are sufficient resources to meet everyone's needs, it is important to care for others and the planet, an understanding that our well-being is intrinsically tied to the well-being of others and the planet, a belief that people have value and worth simply because of who they are and not what they can give to us. In this worldview, you give simply to contribute without an expectation of a return on your giving. In the worldview of love, you see others as subjects—an I/Thou relationship—as fundamentally valuable regardless of what they can do for you. And you respond to the universe with awe, wonder and radical amazement, rather than as something to merely serve your material wants.

Why people vote against their economic interests

Politicians, the Left and the media tell us that people vote against their economic interests because they are either stupid, homophobic, racist, sexist, Islamophobic, etc. But in fact, people have needs beyond their economic needs and these needs actually supersede their economic needs. They have needs for lives of meaning and purpose, belonging and connection, love, and trust. They vote based on their moral values.

The Right identifies and speaks to these needs. They talk about the breakdown and crisis in families and in our country. The Left doesn't. The Right says that the cause of the family crisis is based on the ethos of selfishness in our society – which is also true. The Right argues that selfishness in our society arises from “special interest groups” – women, LGBTQ, Blacks, Muslims, etc. – groups who are trying to rectify past harms against them. They pit the needs and desires of these groups against the needs and desires of working class people by claiming that if Blacks, women, LGBTQ folks, etc. get more rights and more access, than you (average White folk) will lose the little that you have.

This sleight of hand by the Right resulted in people being able to shift their own sense of their “not being enough” and self-blame (about their lack of success) onto someone else (i.e., the “Other”), thereby giving people a sense of community and a way to understand what they were feeling without having to blame themselves. By identifying it as a social problem rather than an individual problem, it relieved people from the cycle of self-blame that the capitalist ethos of meritocracy (if you aren't succeeding it is because you have done something wrong) by blaming some “other.” Self-blaming results in increased stress in family life and thus undermines family life. This move by the Right gave it an incredible amount of power and loyalty both because it alleviated people's self-blaming tendencies and because through churches, etc. people had a sense of belonging, mattering, community, being valued, etc.

In fact, people have multiple needs—in addition to their needs for economic stability, they also have needs for spirituality, meaning, belonging. They are searching for something in life that has more meaning than the values of the marketplace (i.e., money and power). And the Right validates these needs, speaks to them, and provides community that often meets these needs.

We need to recognize that the choices made by people voting against their economic interests are grounded in real needs and to separate their strategies (supporting Right wing candidates and discriminatory legislation) from their needs and speak to their needs. We need to help them understand that it is not the Left, or the “other” that is undermining their family or the cause of the selfishness in our society but rather the competitive marketplace. To do this successfully, we need to speak to their needs for meaning, purpose, value, belonging and the like and to explicitly talk about how the values of the capitalist marketplace are what are driving selfishness and greed in our

society. We need to learn to open our own hearts to them and to be empathic and understanding of the pain driving their strategies.