

Flip-Floppers

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If there's one thing I hate, it's flip-flopping, and flip-flopping flip-floppers. Nothing is more bothersome than a politician or a person who changes his or her mind. When it comes to an issue, people need to make up their minds and stick to their first opinion. Now a days the stakes are far too high to rethink a problem. Everyone knows that rethinking a solution just proves that you are wrong. And if a person is wrong once, that person must always be wrong. /irony.

So, why is the charge of flip-flopping so ubiquitous? Why does it seem to be lobbed at most every politician by most every other politician? Why do people consider it a dirty word that they would rather not have associated with themselves? Certainly consistency, courage and convictions are important aspects of a public persona, but so are intelligence, open mindedness and humility. To strive not to be a flip-flopper is to strive against all of the latter.

In common speech there are far worse terms for those lacking intelligence, open mindedness and humility than for those lacking consistency, courage and convictions. Moron, cave-man, idiot, a**hole, d*ck head, piece of sh*t, bastard, donkey, and on and on, seem far worse to me than coward, weak willed, inconsistent, flip-flopper, p*sy, incontinent and etc, after all, prudence is the one unimpeachable virtue. Most people I know would rather be smart, right and cowardly than brave, unyielding and stupid, rather open-minded and seeking the right answer than following the wrong path with blinders on.

However, this does not seem to be the case in politics. It is so easy to demonstrate inconsistency but difficult to demonstrate whether a person thinks, especially in sound bite news. In addition, most of the terms I provided for the lack of an active mind, while being powerful terms, are also considered rude and not befitting public discourse. Despite the lack of tack and the pervasiveness of shameless attacks based on half-truths or lies, calling someone a f*ucking retard, or, more family friendly, a mindless brute, is still out of bounds. As long as your lies are dignified, they pass. They may even get picked up and transmitted around the world by sloppy news reporting (once the NY Times or another “reputable” source publishes something, even if it's retracted, and even if it's commonly known to be false, it will be repeated by scores of people and institutions as though it were true).

Which brings us to the disturbing conclusion that, at this point in time, American public society values honesty less than steadfastness, or, put another way, talk more than truth. This is something that, upon reflection, every American should feel a bit of shame for. We ought to be ashamed. We are more upset when a politician changes his or her mind than when he or she refuses to accept the obvious (of course, this is a matter of degree, few people approve of the President or his handling of the Iraq, but, we're talking about a catastrophic mistake that will not ever be admitted while the man remains in office, and yet, after all he's done, he remains in office, which is itself a testament to the point I'm making). We feel somehow betrayed that a politician or public voice is in fact a person capable of rational thought, and not merely a brand that we have come to rely upon.

But don't we deserve this? Shouldn't we feel ashamed that we have allowed commercialism to triumph over public discourse? That we have allowed the public debate to take place in ad campaigns? Every single American understands that an ad campaign cannot be trusted, they may not be telling outright lies, but they are certainly not representing your interests. We understand this, yet we have chosen to consume this type of politics, in fact, we have chosen to consume politics rather than take part. Even associations conduct their “debate” (business) this way. Nonprofits simply ask that you write them a check, they don't want your opinion, they certainly don't want you to take part, they just want your money. To be a member is to be a consumer.

However, this is not how things have to be. If a candidate is not candid, don't vote for him or her. If a news show is just a bunch of people yelling, don't watch it even if they are screaming what you want to hear. If an ad criticizes a person or a position dishonestly, consider that ad and it's creators to be untrustworthy and despicable. In short, even if a politician or person supports your positions, if he or she does not employ a form of debate that includes you, he or she does not in fact support you. Such a person is actually against you. It is like cancer, just because you like to smoke, does not mean that your provider of cigarettes has your best interests in mind. If you're not playing a role, you are being rolled over, it's that simple. More will come from you writing a blog or comment than from watching some old guys argue. In fact, more will come from you turning off your TV than turning it on.

And all of this from flip-flopping? Yeah, think about. Flip-flopping is what organizations that have participants do. Organizations that have inactive members (aka minions) never change their course, at least not abruptly. They will crawl along and slowly turn, but they will never admit a failing and will try to convince you that their stupidity is steadfastness, that they will never flip-flop, that they are not dead wrong, but rather they have convictions. They will continue to ask for money while ignoring you. And you will wonder why things just keep getting worse, and until most people start

boycotting those who say flip-flop, take part only in organizations where they can participate as active members, and value humility and intelligence over certainty and steadfastness, you can count on things just getting worse.