USING PRINCIPLE IN DEBATE

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This is based on my observations of international debating as well as my understanding of the empirical research on persuasion, which is my area of academic expertise.

Definition of principle: a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

If we can get the audience to accept a central fundamental idea, then it may be easier to dominate the persuasive landscape.

I am not going to talk about debating moral absolutes. I am not going to talk about Kant’s moral imperative.

Cognitive elements: Beliefs, attitudes, values.
Beliefs: What is.
Values: talk about the way things should be, our methods and our goals.
Attitudes: like or dislike based on whether the beliefs match the values.
When what is doesn’t match what should be, we want to act or change.
EXAMPLE: When you get paid $25 an hour (belief) and you think you deserve $50 an hour (value) you have a negative attitude about it. If you think you deserve $50 and you are getting $100 you have a positive attitude about it. If you think you deserve $50 an hour and you get $40 an hour in benefits worth $40 an hour you have a positive attitude.
You do this by changing beliefs and values.
Lots of belief argument going on, but also be in control of the values.
With a principle that you stand for you attempt to do that.

How to present it: early in first speech, prop or opp.
Must be:
1. Simple, can be general. Should be x is y, a is b, z is not q
2. Commonly accepted notion by audience, a general idea they would say “yes” to.
3. Rhetorically attractive.
4. Common familiar and accepted saying (perhaps but not always).
5. Fairly flexible, as values are goals that we strive for but may not achieve.
Should determine it early in prep and then stick with it.
“All citizens should be equal before the law.”
“Each human has dignity.”
“Hard work should be rewarded.”
“We should help our fellow humans.”

Uses:
1. Gain affirmation by listeners. The studies about the early yes. When people say yes early in your message they are more likely to agree with you later.
2. Establish commonly accepted basis for discussion of the motion. Make them disprove this popular and accepted idea. Challenge the other team to disprove your principle. It can be a difficult task for them.
3. Indicate an important decision rule using the principle.
4. Establish a team line. Something you stand for.
5. Help discover additional arguments that the principle suggests to you.
6. Avoid contradictions. If two arguments do not live in harmony with your principle, there is a problem.
7. Argumentative consistency throughout the debate.
8. Repetition. Moderate repetition can be very persuasive.

VIDEOS

Alfred Snider

Filip Dobranic, Top ESL Speaker WSDC
Winning on Principle - https://vimeo.com/99617900
Principles & Philosophies Debaters Struggle With - https://vimeo.com/32476257

Stephen Boyle, Irish National Champion
Debating Principles - https://vimeo.com/7929633
PRINCIPLE EXERCISE:

Divide the group up into pairs: one proposition and one opposition.

Provide each pair a topic and give them just a few minutes to think of the principle for their side and integrate it into a one-sentence team line (the general position that a team will favor reduced to a simple sentence).

Ask each team to discuss their analysis. Help them word the principle and suggest alternatives.

Tell all participants to take notes on the topics and principles.

Cautions:

• Don’t spend too much time on one topic. Move along.

• Focus on how participants phrase their principle; make sure it is a complete thought, a snappy phrase (short, to the point and using lively language), and a statement most would agree with.

• Contrast the two opposing principles on one topic and ask the group which side is more likely to win.

• Repeat as often as you can.

MOTIONS TO USE:
THBT the West should actively include Iran in the resolution of the Syrian conflict. 1ST ROUND
TH regrets that Brazil is the host of the football World Cup 2014. 2nd round
THBT governments should actively discourage consumerist lifestyles. 3rd round
This house believes that governments should prioritize policies that reduce social inequality over economic growth. FINALS
THW give more votes to citizens according to their performance on a current affairs test.
TH regrets that Western Media demonised Islamist Terrorists rather than portraying them as criminals with legitimate grievances.
THW ban video games in which the player engages in brutal and immoral violence in a realistic setting.
THBT online matchmaking is a better system than traditional dating.
THW allow internet users to sell their own personal information for profit
THBT USA should drop all charges against Edward Snowden
THBT in instances where peaceful protests are met with a disproportionately violent state response, protesters should respond violently.
THBT a world without organized religion would be a better world.
This house regrets the rise of anti-hero in media.
THW criminalize the public denial of evolution.
THW abolish educational track systems in schools.
THBT life-extending medical procedures should be denied to the terminally ill.
THW Prohibit Religious Organisations from Speaking out against Homosexuality.
THBT states should take active measures to limit the spread of American pop culture.
THBT that developing countries should support commercial surrogacy.
This house will make parents legally responsible for their children’s crimes.
THBT crime against animals that are members of an endangered species should be sentenced as if the animal were human.
THBT digital communication is more important to humanity than face-to-face contact.
This house would prevent debate tournaments from using motions in which participants previously had personal traumatic experience. NO
This house would make wearing fur illegal.
THW directly elect public representatives by random lottery. NO
THBT foster children should be placed into families with similar backgrounds (race, religion, etc)
THHT politicians should not have public profiles on twitter and other social networking sites.
THW eliminate any legal or ethical limitations from the field of genetic research on improving the human body.
THW give primates (e.g. monkeys) and cetaceans (e.g. dolphins) the same rights to life, freedom from physical harm, and freedom of movement as humans
THW allow legislation through voter initiated referenda.
THBT developing countries should nationalise companies that extract their national resources