

Three Secrets to Becoming a Spin-Buster

1. **Know the Truth About What Drives Spin.** Spin is first and foremost an “ends justify the means” strategy. This makes excessive spin the preferred tool of fanatics who are so certain that *they* are right about what’s good for *you* that they feel justified in twisting the truth or even circumventing the law in order to make sure they get their way (even if you don’t agree with them). Because of this, spin is coercion, plain and simple.
2. **Understand That Not All Spin is the Same.** Spin may be an almost unavoidable part of the political landscape, but there are degrees of spin and spin beyond a certain point is flat-out unacceptable. Dr. Gruder’s *IntegrityWatch Spinometer* measures three degrees of spin: “Spin Speeding Ticket,” “Misdemeanor Spin” and “Felony Spin.”

Code Yellow – Spin Speeding Ticket: Subtle bias around relatively small details that slants an argument in your direction, whether or not you mean it to. If you feel passionately about something or someone it is natural to *somewhat* magnify evidence that supports your passion and to *somewhat* downplay evidence that challenges your passion.

Code Orange – Misdemeanor Spin: Lying about the truth or omitting facts or details regarding moderately important issues, whether through insufficient research or deliberate intent, because if they were included they would weaken your argument. The moderately important issue fades from importance relatively quickly. Turning a little thing into a big deal in order to manipulate people into inappropriately questioning the competence of an opponent is, at the least, Misdemeanor Spin. One-time phony outrage is Misdemeanor Spin. Misdemeanor Spin infractions produces temporary damage, but the cumulative effect of numerous Misdemeanor Spin infractions *do* produce lasting damage. Example: Hillary Clinton claiming that she landed in Bosnia under sniper fire when in fact a girl greeted her at her plane with flowers. Obama turning McCain’s \$5 million joke into a position because McCain did not explicitly answer the question after making the joke. Pundits deciding for Obama that his pig with lipstick comment was about Palin when he was talking about McCain who himself had used this term previously.

Code Red – Felony Spin: Deliberately lying about the truth (overt lying) and/or deliberately omitting facts or details (covert lying) regarding highly significant or important issues because if they were included they would weaken your argument. Impugning someone’s core motivations or character without a sufficient amount of indisputable hard evidence. Ongoing phony outrage is Felony Spin. Repeating this narrative so frequently that by the time the truth finally comes out, the lie has become so firmly planted in the minds of those being propagandized that they remain loyal to the lie. The journalism term for this favorite propaganda strategy of the Nazis is “sliding.” Sliding is Felony Spin. Felony Spin produces lasting damage to our entire political system and to society as a whole. Felony Spin Example: John McCain introduced Sarah Palin when announcing her as his running mate as having said “thanks but no thanks to the bridge to nowhere.” She went on to repeat this during her convention acceptance speech and in many other speeches thereafter. This is, in fact, not only a blatant lie but this lie was also a key centerpiece the McCain-Palin ticket used to prove how committed

she was to fighting congressional earmarks. Using such a bold-faced lie to demonstrate integrity actually demonstrates lack of integrity in the extreme. It is Felony Spin.

3. **Know How to Do Spin Tests So You Don't Become a "Spin Accomplice:"**

Spin Accomplices are accessories to the crime of spin: People who do not realize that what appears to be fact is usually spin are easily duped into being spin accomplices who pass on the spin to others just as the spin-weavers want them to do. Spin accomplices don't only include everyday citizens; politicians, spokespeople, pundits, and journalists are also duped into being spin accomplices too. The antidote to being a spin accomplice is to perform three simple spin tests that separate fact from misdemeanor and felony spin.

Test #1 – Verify the Information: The Political Fact Check project is a non-profit, non-partisan organization whose sole purpose is to separate political fact from political spin. They are so good at this, and so balanced in their analyses, that they have received one of my 2008 Integrity Inspiration Awards. Go to www.FactCheck.org or, if you are an educator or student, go to www.FactCheckEd.org. Here's another way to verify the accuracy of claims being made about the meaning of what politicians say: listen directly to the speech or interview rather than trust those who are telling you what to think about what was said. Listen particularly carefully to the context in which the comment is made. Search YouTube for that politician's name and the show they were on or the place they were speaking when they made the statement. You will usually find out this information through the information you get from Fact Check, but if not, you can find it by doing a Google search, entering the person's name and the topic or quote.

Test #2 – Evaluate the Degree of Spin: After you have found out the truth from Political Fact Check, use Dr. Gruder's IntegrityWatch Spinometer definitions to determine whether the spin merely deserves a "spin speeding ticket," if this is an example of "misdemeanor spin" or "felony spin." This will tell you how out-of-bounds the spinner has become. The more severe the spin, the less integrity the spinner has, and the more dangerous they therefore are. Remember that even though almost every politician and pundit spins to one degree or another, all spin is *not* the same! "Repeat misdemeanor spinners" as well as "single-incident felony spinners" are a direct threat to our government's ability to serve citizens by functioning at the intersection of individual freedom and the common good. "Repeat misdemeanor spinners" and "single-incident felony spinners" who share your beliefs damage the integrity of your point of view. It is your responsibility to take them to task. Ignore such spinners who do not share your beliefs and seek instead to find those who have a different perspective from you but how are relatively low on Dr. Gruder's IntegrityWatch Spinometer.

Test #3 – Use the Double Standards Test: Spin most commonly relies on a hidden double standard. The last thing a spinner wants is for someone to apply the same standard to their own position or candidate as they are using against the position or candidate they oppose. This final test will tell you how a lot about how much you can trust the spinner's ability to think things through in a way that you would be inclined to trust in the future.