

LESSONS FROM COGNITIVE SCIENCE

1. **The use of frames is largely unconscious.** The use of frames occurs at the neural level, so most people have no idea they are even using frames, much less what kind of frames.
2. **Frames define common sense.** What counts as “common sense” varies from person to person but always depends on what frames are in the brain and how frequently they are used and evoked. Different people can have different frames in their brains, so “common sense” can differ widely from person to person.
3. **Repetition can embed frames in the brain.** The technique of repetition of the same words to express the same idea is effective. The words come with surface frames. Those surface frames in turn latch onto and activate deep frames. When repeated over and over, the words reinforce deep frames by strengthening neural connections in listeners.
4. **Activation links surface frames to deep frames and inhibits opposition frames.** When the surface frames are activated, the deep frames that make sense of them are activated as well.
5. **Existing deep frames don’t change overnight.** Brains don’t change quickly. Just using your own language, with your surface framing, won’t necessarily convince people. Your deep framing must be established in order for your surface frames to have any effect. Persistence is key!
6. **Speak to biconceptuals as you speak to your base.** The brain permits different—and inconsistent—moral worldviews to govern different aspects of one’s life. The morality that governs your life Saturday night in the club might not be the same one that governs your behavior the next morning in church.
7. **The facts alone will not set you free.** Facts can be assimilated into the brain only if there is a frame to make sense out of them. We think and reason using frames and metaphors. The consequence is that arguing simply in terms of facts—how many people have no health insurance, how many degrees Earth has warmed in the last decade, how long it’s been since the last raise in the minimum wage—will likely fall on deaf ears. That’s not to say the facts aren’t important. They are extremely important. But they make sense only given a context.
8. **Simply negating the other side’s frames only reinforces them.** The title of the book *Don’t Think of an Elephant!* says it all: Tell someone that, and he or she will think of an elephant. Like every other word, “elephant” is defined by a frame that contains a mental image of an elephant and some crucial information about elephants: They have trunks, huge round bodies, big floppy ears, and so on. The word evokes the frame, even if you ask someone not to think of an elephant. When former president Richard Nixon spoke his famous line, “I am not a crook,” everyone thought of him as a crook.