The Art of Debating

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The social and political scrutiny faced everyday by Israel in the international spotlight is second to none. That is one of the contributing factors to the ever-increasing importance of the Lauder school of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy. The ability and requirement to be well versed in the issues surrounding Israel daily, are necessary tools in order to succeed and prepare for the world’s opinions of Israel and politically in general.

Another important tool, if not the most important is the ability to argue. To think quickly on one’s feet and prepare an argument or counter-argument in order to convey the message is not only a talent, but an art form. That is why during the 2010 Orientation Week, IDC brought in Ariel HaLevi from the “Debate Company” to teach the first year Government students about this challenging concept.

HaLevi himself was the captain of the IDC debate club during his time at the IDC. Graduating in 2004 with a degree in Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, he and a fellow graduate from the Arison School of Business, Gur Braslavi, started this company in order to improve public speaking skills, give the ability to convey messages concisely and clearly and teach persuasion techniques. They lecture around the world not only to students, but also to big companies, and government parties. They teach how to make impactful presentations, and how to be able to keep audiences not only interested, but convinced.

While there are obviously an infinite amount of external factors that affect the lecture being given, there are ten “Core variables” that one can control and if they do so successfully can swing the outcome of the argument in their favor. The method in which HaLevi goes about teaching persuasion techniques is by breaking them down into categories, into a “Persuasion Table.”

Each of the variables has a corresponding one across the table from it. HaLevi went on to explain each of the ideas and what they meant, and how to properly incorporate them into an argument in order to win. The key
is to have an impact on whomever it is being talked to. Whether it is a parent or a teacher, or giving a lecture to a large audience, the same rules and statistics apply.

A few statistics that came as a quite a surprise to the class was that non-verbal communication has a 93% impact on the person, versus only 7% from verbal communication. One of the great strengths of the lesson was that after giving that statistic, HaLevi then demonstrated how accurate it actually was. He presented himself as a salesperson for a marker and spoke monotonously, with no enthusiasm or body language. Now, despite the fact that he said it was “the best marker available,” and other hyperbole about the product, nobody wanted to buy it. He then excitedly started exclaiming that it was the “best marker available!!” with gesticulations and while moving across the stage. It had a large impact on the crowd, showing what a truly subconscious impact the non-verbal cues have on people. Whether it be body language, hand movements or even tone.

He also spoke about the impact of covert messages and how we can even use it to our advantage in school. One of the best covert messages is the use of a quote from someone else. It caters to the individual reading the article or hearing the lecture and immediately lends you credibility in their eyes. To be perceived is the step of “messenger.” Pre-conceived notions and stereotypes can derail a lecturer before he even begins speaking. Two ways to increase the perception of the messenger are to demonstrate a unique added value that one has, or to play “Jewish Geography,” and increase the common denominators between the two people in order to relate better to them. Lastly, he discussed the difference between information and knowledge. Information is facts that are held in the arsenal for the debate, and the knowledge is the analysis of the information. He also presented the website [http://learn.debate.co.il](http://learn.debate.co.il) which offers videos showing how to properly employ these techniques.

At the end of the hour and a half, HaLevi had successfully demonstrated his techniques and in the process gave a good idea about how to go about debating. To hear it from an IDC graduate, and to fully grasp the importance of this ability especially in Government, was great thing. The presentation itself gave a good opportunity to reevaluate some of the tactics we employ, and how to better incorporate the ten core variables into our skill set.