

TACTICS OF CONTROL

When words sound fair but actions don't follow, language stops informing and starts controlling. When we expose the patterns used to redirect attention, delay change, and justify decisions, we empower ourselves to resist the spin and act intentionally.

Naming these tactics is the first step toward breaking their hold—and making space for real accountability.

FALSE NECESSITY

"There is No Time for Debate!"

Words:

"We must act now for everyone's safety."

Actions:

Declare a crisis to shut down services and public debate, while they push through agendas that wouldn't otherwise get public support.

Takeaway:

Real urgency maintains space for public judgment and debate, even when hard calls must be made quickly. When questions and alternatives are shut down in the name of urgency, ask who is benefiting from the rush.



STRATEGIC VAGUENESS

Saying a Whole Lot of Nothing

Words:

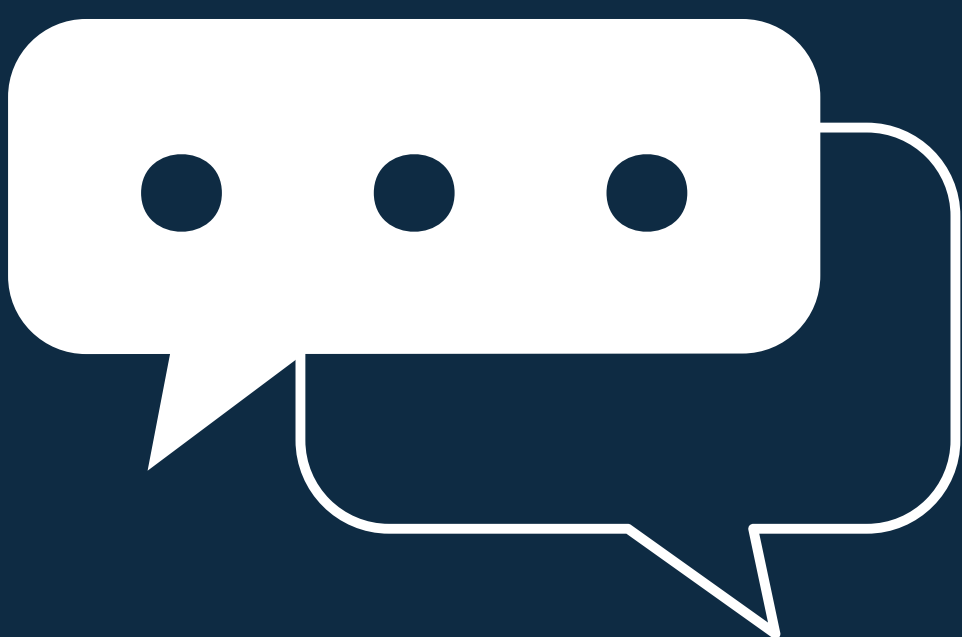
"We're committed to building a better future for everyone."

Actions:

Make broad claims, offer no actionable plan. Announce promises of change while avoiding specifics, timelines, or accountability.

Takeaway:

Real commitment names what will change, when, and how--and gives you the tools and leverage to hold them to it. Otherwise, the words are just placating



STRATEGIC TRANSPARENCY

The Half-Truths

Words:

"We're being fully transparent about the challenges we face."

Actions:

Share just enough data to explain a controversial decision—but skip any discussion about what else could be done, who stands to gain, and what the longer-term consequences might be—all to avoid pushback.

Takeaway:

If transparency makes decisions seem inevitable, that's not openness—it's optics. Real transparency reveals options—not just outcomes; it discloses the stakes, weighs the pros and cons, and invites scrutiny.





RULES ARE TOOLS

“It’s the Law”

Words:

“We’re just following standard procedure.”

Actions:

Enforce rules strictly when you challenge the status quo—but quietly bend or overlook them when it helps their agenda, protects allies, or speeds up what they already want to do.

Takeaway:

Rules don’t apply themselves. People do—and always selectively. Interpretation and enforcement are never neutral, so don’t ask what’s allowed, look at who’s bending the rules, and for whom.

FAKE LISTENING

“Your Voice Matters”

Words:

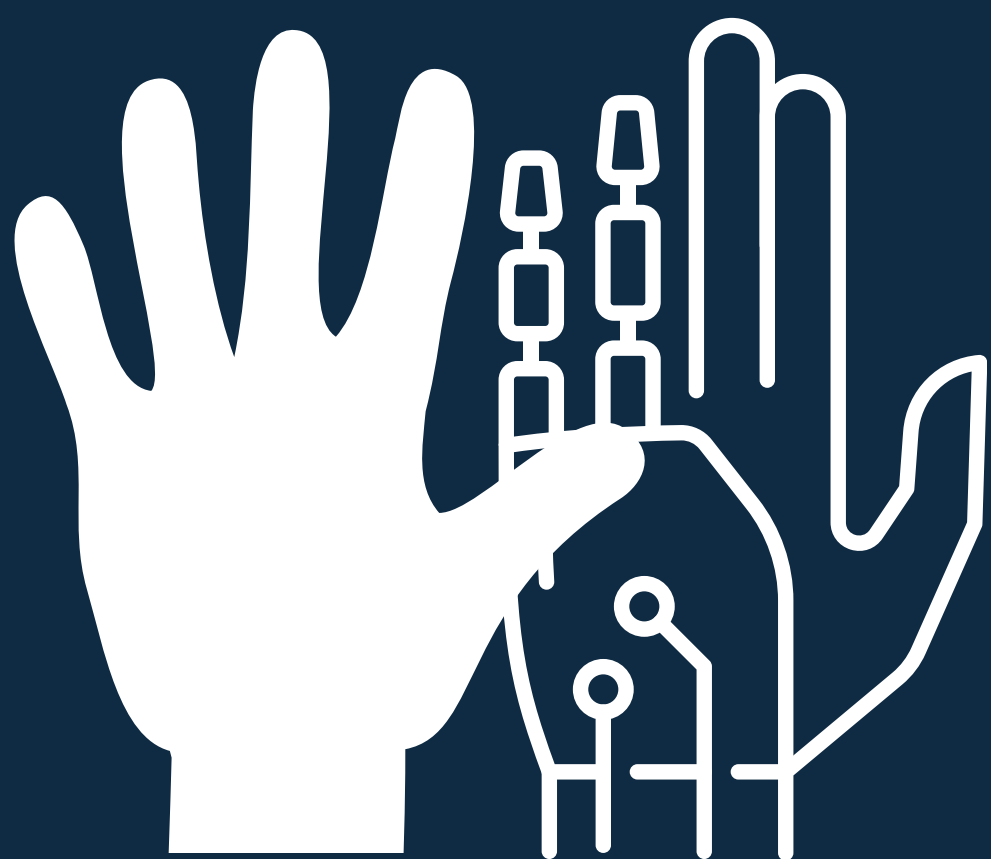
“Your feedback will shape our decisions.”

Actions:

Host sessions, collect input, tweak the headline—and go ahead with the plans they already made.

Takeaway:

If the plan stays the same and only the messaging changes, you weren’t heard—you were handled. Real listening doesn’t manage dissent—it responds with concrete changes to the plan.



ELITE CAPTURE

Co-opting the Critics

Words:

“We’re bringing new voices to the table.”

Actions:

Invite you in—but bind your speech, narrow your role, and dilute your demands

Takeaway:

If a seat at the table puts limits on your voice, that’s not inclusion—that’s containment. Real inclusion shares power, not just space.

BLAME SHIFTING

“It’s Not Me, It’s Them!”

Words:

“We’d fix it if we could—but it’s out of our hands.”

Actions:

Enforce harmful policies while pointing to past governments, higher-ups, or abstract forces.

Takeaway:

If someone says their hands are tied, ask whether they’re building power to change things—or just trying to dodge the blame.





DIVIDE AND DISTRACT

“They’re the Problem”

Words:

“They’re the ones making everything worse.”

Actions:

Blame a vulnerable group for a larger problem. Stir up division between communities. All while deflecting attention from the systems and authorities causing the harm.

Takeaway:

Blaming groups distracts and divides us and protects those in power. When we look directly at the system or authorities causing various harms, we build power by connecting our struggles.

BOOTSTRAPS MYTH

The Exception Proves the Rule

Words:

“If they can make it, anyone can.”

Actions:

Hold up a single story to dismiss the pattern. The exception becomes a shield against structural critique or change.

Takeaway:

Using one person’s success to prove that a system works hides how it can fail most other people. Stories that empower us don’t skip the struggle—they show it, and reveal how the world can change for the better.



WEAPONIZING EMPATHY

We’re All Just Human

Words:

“They’re doing their best—it’s a tough job.”

Actions:

Call for compassion for those in charge when their decisions are criticized but show none to those living with the consequences of those decisions.

Takeaway:

Whose humanity are you asked to consider and whose to overlook?

CONSIDER

People’s principles and beliefs are best judged by what they do—not what they say.

When the truth feels murky and the motives unclear, always ask:

What actions are these words justifying—or making possible?