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## Is It Audacity Time Yet?



By Marty Kaplan

Today's *Morning Joe* bashed David Axelrod's performance on the Sunday talk shows. Because Axelrod wouldn't tell Chris Wallace or David Gregory that Obama was prepared to compromise on the Bush tax cuts — wouldn't use that specific word, "compromise" — Joe Scarborough and Mark Halperin concluded that Obama was still scared, unnecessarily and pathetically so, by the lefty blogosphere.

Ok, gents, time for a framing lesson. Frank Luntz and George Lakoff seem to be otherwise engaged, and the geniuses who came up with MSNBC's "Lean Forward" campaign are pitching their next rebranding gig (I hear that Big Tobacco is hiring), so I guess I'll do a guest shot here.

Mr. Axelrod: As you know, when the talking heads try to extract a "compromise" clip from you, that's Step #1 of their "Made You Say It!" game. If you give it to them, Step #2 is when they bomb you with the rest of the compromise word-cloud: cave, capitulate, give in, weak, wimp, loser.

Your job is not to avoid the mistake of saying "compromise." It's to reframe the game — and do it jubilantly, man, like you relish the fight.

Say that Obama is a terrific *negotiator*. Compromising is for wusses; negotiating is for leaders.

Say that Obama demands to know what Republicans are willing to give up in order to hand to Wall Street bankers (and also, by the way, to seven-figure-earning TV types) a trillion-dollar tax break, and to saddle the rest of the country with a trillion-dollar-bigger deficit.

Ask exactly what the Republicans are going to put on the table. This negotiation has to be a win-win for the American people, not just another sweet bonus for the same plutocrats who got us into this mess. (You don't like "plutocrats"? Too highbrow? Did that stop Teddy Roosevelt from making "malefactors of great wealth" a household phrase?)

Mr. President, when Mitch McConnell and John Boehner keep saying that they're not going to compromise on their principles, the amen corner on cable hails them as heroes. But if *you* say you're not going to

compromise, they'll call you a tool of the left. Don't let it spook you. When you walk into that meeting with the Republican leadership, you've got to be seen as the best deal-maker in Washington, the kind LBJ was, the kind of mofo that Rahm Emmanuel was supposed to be until the course of the health care bill on the Hill revealed that he was something of a pushover.

Don't negotiate with yourself ahead of time. Trash talk the opposition. Play mind games with them — freak them out with your confidence. Don't fall for their “mandate” crap — it's a con game. There's no evidence for it. Your tail is between your legs only if you say it is. You've got plenty of power, and it includes the power to define what victory is.

And for God's sake don't let “independents” — and what your pollsters tell you independents want — determine your negotiating brief. Independents aren't a party. You don't have to pander to them. They don't have your fate in their hands. They don't have a set of core principles. They're clay. They want a leader. If you climb up into your bully pulpit, they're the faces you're looking at. Educate them. Explain what's at stake. Tell them what Republicans want. Nail Republicans for their being in thrall to the extreme right and their lobbyists — to the top half-of-one-percent of the country who've been making out like bandits. The plutocrats aren't the job-creators; they're the freeloaders who want our children to pick up the bill for their tax cut.

This fight is made in heaven for you. If you let the media peanut gallery define winning and losing — and to alienate your base from you — if you fall for the fallacy that independents are a bloc with beliefs instead of an army you can mobilize, you might as well phone in the next two years.

Audacity is easy when everything's aces. It actually means something when the bastards think they've got you on the ropes.

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