

## **The Ethical Frames Model**

The Ethical Frames Model is drawn from several academic theories: Jonathan Haidt's Moral Foundation theory, Alan Fiske's Relational Models theory, Steven Pinker's views on rationality, and Spiral Dynamics developed by Clare Graves. I find the Spiral Dynamics theory a helpful addition because it describes the reactions of fear and disdain that people have toward those who have different dominant Ethical Zones and because it adds another Ethical Zone. But I don't approach these theories academically. I apply them to real-world marketing and advertising examples.

The insights about Ethical Frames are invisible to us until we look at it in a new way. Just like fish not being aware that they are in water or people not being aware that they are breathing oxygen, we aren't aware of our Ethical Zones™. They matter a lot—so much so that some people are willing to die for them. Despite our strong commitment to these ideas, we don't think about them, we just react. It's only when we run into people who have different beliefs that we start to see that differences exist. But rather than appreciate what others bring, we judge others for having different beliefs. We call them prejudiced and unethical, without trying to understand. But when we don't understand the context that these beliefs



arise out of, and what the beneficial parts of their belief system are, then we aren't being fair. Learning this theory will open your eyes and bring you to a new level of understanding.

There are six Ethical Zones in the primary Ethical Frames Model. The first five are the Moral Foundations as first described by Jonathan Haidt (a professor at NYU, author of the book *The Righteous Mind*). These five are Belonging and Community, Respect for Authority, Sacredness, Fairness, and Care/Harm. My book, *Marketing Landmines*, describe more about the origin of each of the Ethical Zone is, how it varies by Conservative versus Liberal, the psychological and neurological underpinnings of it, and give examples of where each has buried landmines.

The sixth Ethical Zone is Rationality and Reason, which adds a new dimension, drawing from UCLA anthropologist Alan Fiske's Relational Models theory and some thoughts from Harvard University Professor Steven Pinker. This completes the basic model of Ethical Zones. Here's a visualization of the model:





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These six Ethical Zones are behind almost every one of our societal conflicts, which are generated by different interpretations and importance levels given to the different Ethical Zones. These all relate to the armies that planted the marketing landmines: Conservatives and Liberals.

But that's not all – it's not enough to describe what's going on, its important to have solutions. So, I also draw on some research conducted by Robb Willer and Matt Feinberg to show how the Ethical Zone being used to support an issue or idea can be changed and that can change the result. I call that ReFraming.



