



by **Dave Kopel**

[Preventing Gun Violence Through Effective Messaging](#)” is the public relations guide for anti-gun lobbyists and advocates. The more accurate title would have been, “Anti-Gun Hate Speech for Beginners.”

Secretly produced in 2012 for New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s Mayors Against Illegal Guns (MAIG) lobby and its allies, it was recently discovered by gun rights supporters. The gun-ban talking points manual is filled with malicious lies about guns and gun owners, along with instructions for how the manual’s readers should disseminate those lies to the public.

After the mass murders at an Aurora, Colo., movie theater, Bloomberg vowed that it would never happen again—by which he apparently meant that his organization would never again lack a coordinated plan for the immediate exploitation of a horrible crime, regardless of the facts. His successful exploitation of the murders in Newtown, Conn., five months later showed his new plan in action. Since that tragedy last December, much of the rhetoric of the gun prohibitionists has come straight from the pages of Bloomberg’s [“Preventing Gun Violence”](#) P.R. guide—often verbatim.

That rhetoric has been carefully tested on focus groups in many different demographics. And all the rhetoric was rolled out within minutes of the Newtown murders last December.

Anti-gun consultants have found, “The notion that today’s weapons are different from what was available in the past is an especially powerful idea and helps

make the case for new levels of concern and scrutiny around access to weapons.” Thus the “Preventing Gun Violence” guide instructs readers to explain, “this isn’t a conversation about your grandfather’s hunting rifle.”

It’s a powerful idea, but it’s a lie. Semi-automatic rifles and handguns date back to the late 19th century. Detachable box magazines are also a very old idea. The AR-15 was invented in the late 1950s. In New York early this year, Bloomberg helped pushed through a ban on all magazines loaded with more than seven rounds. In California, the efforts he is supporting to ban all centerfire rifles that accept detachable box magazines may well succeed.

So what the “[Preventing Gun Violence](#)” P.R. guide really does is deceive its readers, most of whom are extremely uneducated about guns. Activists are urged to use “intimidating pictures of military-style weapons.” It’s true that to people who know little about firearms, an AR-15 made from black synthetics looks very different from a Remington 750 Woodsmaster, with its brown walnut stock and forend. But what readers of “Preventing Gun Violence” are never told is that they are being duped into the service of a lobby that is trying to ban both guns—since each of them is a centerfire semi-automatic that uses a detachable magazine.

Here is what “[Preventing Gun Violence](#)” says about guns like the AR-15 or the Remington 750: “They are useful for one and only one purpose—to kill as many people as possible in the shortest period of time.” Supposedly, “There is no conceivable sporting or other civilian purpose to these weapons.”

So if you own an AR-15, or any semi-auto rifle with a detachable magazine, you have “only one purpose—to kill as many people as possible in the shortest period of time.” That is hate speech at its worst.

It is a deliberate lie, intended to incite hatred of a large class of innocent people—the millions of Americans who own semi-auto rifles, including the AR-15, for the legitimate purposes of self-defense, hunting, target shooting and collecting.

But let’s suppose that your grandfather’s hunting rifle is a bolt or lever action, not a semi-automatic. “Preventing Gun Violence” tricks readers into going after those, too. A Bloomberg-backed bill in the Senate, S. 649, seeks to criminalize not just purchases, but gifts, loans, and other temporary transfers of firearms that occur amongst law-abiding firearm owners every day, unless the recipient of the firearm goes through a background check or unless the transfer falls into one of the bill’s intricate and narrowly defined “exceptions.”

So the “Preventing Gun Violence” claim that “[a]ll we are asking for is for all gun purchasers to be required to pass background checks,” is another lie. The federal and state Bloomberg bills regarding “background checks” apply not only to gun

sales, but also to gun transfers. That is, to temporarily loan a firearm to a family member or friend. For example, the Bloomberg-Schumer “background check” bill, S. 649, would make it a federal felony to loan your handgun to your spouse for more than seven days. (Details are in my April 5 article “Turning Gun Owners into Felons,” *National Review Online*.)

“Preventing Gun Violence” also absolutely hates laws that allow citizens to carry firearms for lawful self-defense in public. So the guide informs readers, “Concealed carry permit holders have killed over 460 people—including 14 law enforcement officers—since 2007.” Their authority for this claim is the Violence Policy Center, the most overtly extreme of the traditional anti-gun groups. This factoid has already been debunked by Professor Clayton Cramer’s study entitled “Violence Policy Center’s Concealed Carry Killers: Less than it Appears,” (available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2095754>). As Cramer details, the VPC created the bogus figure by counting as “concealed carry killers” people who did not have a concealed carry permit, people who did not kill anyone, people who were found to have acted in lawful self-defense, people who committed suicide and people who did not use a concealed firearm.

When a proponent of licensed carry says, “We’re trying to protect public safety and reduce crime,” “Preventing Gun Violence” instructs readers to answer: “That’s just crazy. Public spaces should be places where families can go freely and safely and not be overrun by unknown people carrying hidden, loaded guns.”

Notice the complete absence of logic. The first response is to describe licensed carry as “crazy.” That’s not an argument; it’s just an expression of prejudice.

Second, the response ignores the fact that the millions of Americans with carry permits are highly law-abiding. In fact, their crime rate is far below that of the general public.

If you go to public places, it’s likely there will be “unknown people” there. Except to xenophobes, that’s not a problem. The people there who have carry permits are not “unknown” to law enforcement; they are people whom law enforcement has personally investigated and determined to be law-abiding and responsible.

Regarding the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE) “Fast and Furious” gun-running operation for the Mexican drug cartels, “Preventing Gun Violence” is particularly brazen, teaching readers how to ignore the facts of this deadly scandal. Readers are told to acknowledge that “Fast and Furious” was simply a “botched operation.”

That’s nonsense. There was actually nothing about “Fast and Furious” that was “botched.” Everything that happened was according to how the program was supposed to work: BATFE would coerce licensed firearm dealers to sell guns to obvious straw purchasers. BATFE would tell the dealers that the guns were

being followed at every step, but they were not. The BATFE knowingly and intentionally let the guns be trafficked into Mexico, where they would later be found at homicide scenes. And then the results would be used to bolster the case for gun bans in the United States.

“Preventing Gun Violence” readers are instructed to say, “I’ll tell you what’s really fast and furious here. The way the NRA and its allies play fast and loose with the facts—and how furious the American people should be that the NRA’s constant attacks on the BATFE help gun-runners get away with murder.”

As an example of the NRA supposedly helping gunrunners, readers are told there are “severe restrictions that are currently placed on the BATFE’s ability to trace weapons.” That is completely untrue. There are no legal restrictions on the BATFE’s ability to trace weapons. Any time a crime gun is found by a law enforcement agent, a BATFE trace can be requested, and BATFE has full legal power to conduct the trace.

When someone brings up BATFE scandals such as “Fast and Furious,” “Preventing Gun Violence” advises its readers to provide this response: “An NRA that constantly harasses U.S. law enforcement is the best protection the drug cartels could ever hope for.” This is a particularly atrocious lie. Check out <http://le.nra.org/> to see how the NRA is carrying out its long-standing mission of providing firearm training for law enforcement. And learn about the NRA Life of Duty program (NRALifeofDuty.tv), created to honor and support the law enforcement officers and military personnel who put themselves in harm’s way to protect all Americans.

For decades, the older anti-gun groups—such as the Brady Campaign, the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence and the Violence Policy Center—have engaged in relentless vilification of the NRA. Among the mainstream American population, that campaign has been a failure. The “Preventing Gun Violence” playbook warns that making anti-NRA arguments to broader audiences, “is, at best, ineffective, and, at worst, counter-productive.”

So the guide advises anti-gun advocates to criticize the NRA only when talking to “the base.” For broader audiences, the advice is to attack the NRA leadership, and to claim that it is out of touch with NRA members. That, of course, is a rather illogical argument. The NRA has some 5 million members—about a million who joined in response to the most recent Bloomberg-Obama assault on the Second Amendment, which was launched last December.

“Preventing Gun Violence” informs readers that the NRA “is morally bankrupt and doesn’t have anything to do with protecting freedom”; that NRA wants “any gun to be available to anyone, no questions asked,” and “The NRA’s dream is to have weaker laws—easy access to guns for those who should never have one.” The truth is that the NRA has always been in the lead for strong law enforcement

against gun possession by people who should not have them, such as convicted violent felons.

Much of “Preventing Gun Violence” consists of short responses that readers are supposed to give in response to pro-Second Amendment arguments. For example, after a mass murder, a pro-Second Amendment person might say, “If an honest citizen with a gun were present, this might not have happened.” “Preventing Gun Violence” instructs readers to answer, “There’s not a shred of credible evidence that more guns and more shooting save people’s lives. More guns and more shooting mean more tragedy.”

That’s another lie. As I detailed in a Jan. 15 article in the *Los Angeles Times* (“Arming the right people can save lives”), there are numerous cases where armed citizens have stopped mass shootings: Pearl High School in Mississippi; Sullivan Central High School in Tennessee; Appalachian School of Law in Virginia; a middle school dance in Edinboro, Pa.; Players Bar and Grill in Nevada; a Shoney’s restaurant in Alabama; Trolley Square Mall in Salt Lake City; New Life Church in Colorado; Clackamas Mall in Oregon (three days before Sandy Hook); and the Mayan Palace Theater in San Antonio (three days after Sandy Hook).

And, “more guns” does not mean “more tragedy.” Since 1982, the number of guns in American hands has increased by over 80 million, while the homicide rate has fallen by over half.

If the pro-rights person says, “We’re defending our Constitution, which protects our right to bear arms,” the anti-gun person is instructed to respond, “Maybe they missed the Declaration of Independence, which defends life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

This is quite a non sequiter. What the “Preventing Gun Violence” people apparently missed is that the way the signers of the Declaration of Independence protected “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” was by using guns to fight a government that was trying to confiscate their guns. (Details are in my article “The American Revolution against British Gun Control,” available at davekopel.org.)

“Preventing Gun Violence” even has specific instructions for how to exploit mass murders. “That means emphasizing emotion over policy prescriptions,” it instructs. After all, if you start talking about specific “policy prescriptions,” then you have to make a credible argument that the policy might have prevented the murders. And that’s usually an impossible argument to make. So, according to the playbook, it’s better to emphasize emotion, and hope that the emotional aggression will pave the way for the enactment of anti-gun laws regardless of whether or not they would have done any good.

The National Rifle Association has a long-standing policy of not making immediate comments after a shooting. It is respectful to everyone involved to at least wait for the funerals, and the facts, before beginning a political debate. But “Preventing Gun Violence” actually teaches how to attempt to twist the NRA’s decency into a supposed sign of depravity. Anti-gun advocates should say, “They know their reckless agenda is indefensible, especially in the face of this kind of tragedy. That’s why they’ve gone into hiding.”

Three public relations strategy firms produced the “Preventing Gun Violence” guide. One, the OMP firm, has other clients that include Oxfam, an organization which was originally created for famine relief, but which is now at the forefront of the international campaign to ban firearms. Another, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, has provided political consulting services for presidential campaigns of Bill Clinton and Al Gore, and for anti-gun advocacy groups such as the Joyce Foundation, Center for American Progress, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Third Way and Bloomberg’s Mayors Against Illegal Guns. The third, KNP Communications, offers debate and media training for Democratic candidates.

Public relations firms are generally not in the business of fact-checking their clients’ claims. Even so, these firms should be ashamed that their blind acceptance of whatever the Bloomberg lobby told them has made them complicit in the publication of a manual full of hate speech and baseless accusations.

“Preventing Gun Violence” demonstrates that Bloomberg and his lobby are masters of deceit. The manual purports to be a guide to effective communication, but what it really does is fill the heads of naive readers with lies, which the readers then spread in public.

Ultimately, those readers are also victims of Bloomberg’s machine. That means that we should treat Bloomberg’s victims as victims, and not jump to the conclusion that they are bad people. Many are simply gullible. And when they spout language straight out of “Preventing Gun Violence,” it’s okay to point out that they are directly copying (or copying someone else who copied) language written by public relations firms for Michael Bloomberg.