

## CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS WHOSE POLITICAL VIEWS DIFFER: A FEW IDEAS

*You can enjoy a lively political discussion, and one that promotes mutual understanding, with someone whose politics differ from yours, while remaining friends. Those who teach negotiation techniques that preserve relationships offer hints like these:*

- ✓ **Anticipate talking with people with whom you disagree.** Think about your goals for the conversation. List the other person's views as well as your own, underlying interests – shared and differing -- and personal experiences that might relate to the reasons you disagree about candidates or issues.
- ✓ **Listen** for understanding facts, interests, and emotions. Also listen for points of shared values and perspectives.
- ✓ **Let them know you have heard and understood them.** If you can carefully and empathically word what you say in terms of the other person's views and feelings, it will not undercut your assertiveness or perspective. (“So the election results affected you deeply and personally.”)
- ✓ **Ask questions with the goal of understanding** more about the other person's view. Kwame Christian calls this “compassionate curiosity” and suggests it's a strong tool to persuade as well as learn, even on subjects avoided by some, such as race and equity. (“What are the most important political issues to you?”) (“How do you see your life and the lives of your loved ones being impacted by the election results?”) (“What do you hope to see the government accomplish?”) (“How are your priorities different than those of people from different backgrounds?”)
- ✓ **Humanize yourself.** Talk as a real person. Take some responsibility, for example. (So sorry if I'm off-base here; can you help me to better understand?) This helps you stay connected to the other person.
- ✓ **Offer your own thoughts** using mostly “I” statements and framed in the larger context. Recount a personal story to help with understanding that view. (“I recognize we both care a lot about .... I know that a lot of folks assessed the overall picture and thought as you did that we could best achieve that by ..... “I feel like the current political climate has encouraged people to focus on our differences instead of our common goals and values.” ... “I feel like the way issues are discussed these days makes it hard to separate political disagreements from personal attacks.”... “I have found myself feeling sad and hurt in conversations that others thought were ‘just politics.’”)
- ✓ **Allow the other person to save face.** Don't blame, attribute bad motives, or challenge self-esteem. (“Political messages have gotten so polarizing, it can be hard to remember how much we all have in common.”)
- ✓ **Distance yourself if your self-esteem is challenged.** Difficult conversations can be uncomfortable. If you find yourself getting triggered or your self-esteem is challenged, remember that you have a larger goal – to have a good conversation while preserving the relationship. One technique Roger Fisher suggested is to pretend you are on the balcony watching the conversation. If the other person is well-meaning, asking questions and listening for understanding can be persuasive approaches, as discussed above. If instead the discussion turns personal or the person is bullying or maliciously targeting you, consider exiting the conversation.
- ✓ **Focus on the future.** At some point, move the focus to the future. Perhaps indicate your view of what should be some aspect of the future and be curious about the other person's view. If you want to come to some agreement on how to exchange views in the future, perhaps begin with their ideas, before offering yours. (“Going forward, what can we do to have respectful interactions?”)
- ✓ **Keep the options fluid** until you agree on one, if agreement is your goal in this conversation. (“That's one idea. Let's think if there are other ideas as well.”). If your goal is just to leave things on a positive note, summarize and offer a fluid option there too. (“I appreciate you taking the time to help me understand your views. I hope we can talk more in the future.”)

FOR MORE ON DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS, SEE COURSES, BOOKS, COUNSELING RESOURCES, & REPORTING FOR HARASSMENT & DISCRIMINATION LOOK [HERE AND CLICK POST-ELECTION CONVERSATIONS](#)

Developed by the Divided Community Project <https://go.osu.edu/dcptoolkit>, with suggestions from colleagues throughout The Ohio State University.

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