



ENGAGING DIFFERENCES: THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF CIVIL DISCOURSE

Recognize that Engaging Differences Matters—Civil discourse starts with an appreciation of its essential roles

- 1. A More Perfect Union:** Constructive engagement across our divides is fundamental to fulfilling the promise of American self-government.
 - As James Madison argued, only solutions rooted in justice and the common good can attract broad support in our large and diverse republic.
 - With only a third of Americans identifying with either major party, and over 40% as independents, lasting progress demands collaboration beyond partisan lines in our civic lives.
- 2. Successful Personal & Professional Lives:** In the most diverse republic in history, confronting those who are different from us is inevitable in every aspect of our lives.
 - Engaging differences productively is essential to leading successful personal and professional lives.
 - Connecting across differences satisfies a deep human need for connection and community.
- 3. Concrete Impact:** The way we handle differences shapes real-world outcomes.
 - Bitter conflict often leads to personal and national dysfunction.

- Open engagement can sparks new insights and better decisions. Diverse perspectives drive innovative solutions that benefit everyone.

Engage Others Constructively—Treating others with dignity and respect is key

4. **Listening for Understanding:** Listening is essential for engaging differences effectively.

- Too often, we don't truly listen; instead, we make assumptions or focus on crafting counterarguments.
- Instead, approach conversations with curiosity and an open mind.
- Seek to find the merit, not just the flaws in what someone is saying.
- Use respectful, clarifying questions to deepen your understanding.
- Listen actively, summarizing what you've heard in your own words to confirm you've understood and demonstrate that you're truly listening.

5. **Empathy:** Empathy allows us to see issues from another's point of view.

- Recognize the humanity behind opposing viewpoints, viewing others not as political stereotypes, but as fellow Americans striving for a better future.
- Empathy deepens relationships and promotes trust.
- Seeing issues through others' eyes reduces conflict and facilitates constructive conversations.

6. **Intellectual Humility:** Understand that reasonable and moral people can hold different views. Accepting you don't know everything opens the door to learning from others.

- Recognize that one's perspectives are fallible.
- The evidence and reasoning on which our beliefs are based can be limited or flawed.

- Signal to others an openness to learning from them.

Respect One's Own View—Civil discourse requires we advance our sincerely held views

7. Conscience: Our conscience is sacred

- Our ability to reason for ourselves is at the core of what makes us humans and valuable to others.
- It's important for others to have an opportunity to learn from you, as well as you to learn from them.

8. Principled Advocacy: Speak up for your honest beliefs

- Respecting others doesn't require you to abandon your convictions.
- Focus on the strongest reasons for your views.
- Avoid personal attacks or seizing on others trivial faults or misstatements in favor of focusing on the merits of their arguments and yours.

9. Be Part of Superior Solutions

- Often, the best solution is one that neither you nor others can devise yourselves.
- Advocating for your genuine views can add the rigor needed to reach a better and more innovative solution.

Emphasize What We Have in Common—Successful navigation of differences is aided by keeping sight of shared values and experiences

10. Acknowledge Common Ground

- Avoid the destructive human tendency to be consumed by disagreement.

11. Practice the Art of the Possible

- Embrace improvements even if the outcome is less than everything you want
- Progress is usually incremental.

12. Build on the On-Going American Experiment

- Frankly acknowledge we have yet to fully achieve America's ideals.
- Remain united by our shared commitment to a more perfect union.

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