

How to Talk with Someone

with

Different Political Views



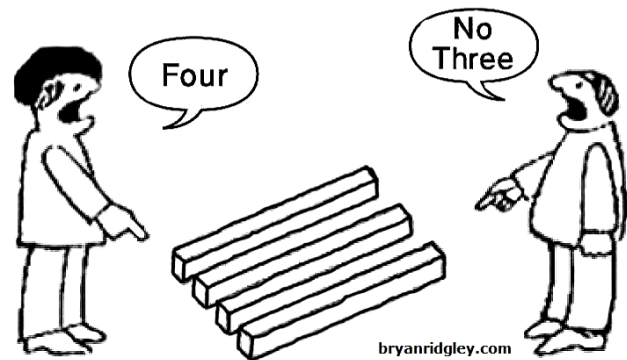
They tell you in college that politics is the art of the *possible*. It's not about what's right or what's best, but what you can get done. You compromise often



to get some of the things you want. Refuse to compromise, and you get nothing, thus failing your constituents, who elected you to make their lives better.

That is how politics used to work, but these days many politicians refuse to compromise, satisfied to follow the party line and slide safely into the next elected term. Seems more like the art of the *impossible*.

Sadly, that tone is infecting our neighborhoods. It pervades our families. It even lurks in our very own homes. We've become so afraid of fueling tensions that rather than seek common ground, we avoid talking politics at all, be it with family, friends, acquaintances, even strangers.



POLITICS PART OF OUR IDENTITY

Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute Trainer Aaron Lyons reminds us that politics are not just about opinions. He suggests our political views are often linked to our understanding of our very identity. He warns that "if your friend or relative finds their personal identity or core sense of belonging in the world in their political views, no amount of rational persuasion will alter this."

Lyons explains that change is usually incremental. It only happens as a person's identity makes a shift in a different direction. And it can only happen within the perception of safety; the more threatened we feel, the more we retreat into old ways of thinking and acting.

CHALLENGES CAN FEEL LIKE BETRAYAL

"Talking politics unearths deep core values. When we interpret those values as being challenged or undermined by those we trust or with whom we share a bond, the feelings of defensiveness, indignation and even betrayal can be overwhelming. We can end up speaking and acting impulsively, which then feeds a cycle of escalation."

IT COMES DOWN TO RESPECT

Conversely, avoiding challenging conversations may prevent outward conflict, but leave us feeling like we are walking on eggshells around one another.

Respect, he says, is the key, and can be conveyed through both language and non-verbal cues.

“Make genuine eye contact. Lean in. Keep an open posture. Ask questions that are not designed to attack or corner the person, but instead to explore their views. Instead of arguing over positions or trying to prove them wrong, find out what’s important to them about it. What are the underlying concerns, goals and values that would motivate them to take that stance?”



STAY HUMBLE

Psychiatrist and founder of Smart Politics Karin Tamerius teaches progressive activists how to communicate more effectively with people across the political spectrum. Her most critical advice is to stay humble. She points out that even if you are well educated on a topic, you don't necessarily have all the answers.

“Don't attack a person's personal beliefs,” she warns. “We have strong emotional attachments to them. We're wired to defend them. Our nervous systems treat attacks on our political beliefs the same way they respond to challenges to our physical safety. So if someone attacks my partisan attachments, I'm going to respond pretty much the same way I would respond if I were being attacked by a lion.”

GIVE PEOPLE SPACE TO EXPLAIN

The Village Square (a nonpartisan public educational forum) founder and CEO Liz Joyner implores us not to dismiss people just because they use a word or two that seems insensitive. She recommends giving people space to explain their intention behind the word. She also encourages us to consider the individual’s life experience, rather than what we expect of ourselves.

“When it's your turn to speak, it helps to explain how the issue affects you on a personal level. Facts and figures rarely persuade.”

She urges us to “appeal to their better angels rather than their inner statistician”. And she reminds us to listen with an open mind as there is always common ground to be found.

“Everybody believes they are the good guy. The only real way to disarm your enemy is to listen to them. If you hear them out, if you’re brave enough to really listen to their story, you can see that more often than not, you might have made some of the same choices if you’d lived their life instead of yours.”

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