

Leading with Civility (Depolarizing Dialog)

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ATTITUDE

"THE GREATEST DISCOVERY OF ANY GENERATION IS THAT A HUMAN BEING
CAN ALTER HIS LIFE BY ALTERING HIS ATTITUDE."

- WILLIAM JAMES -

A universal cause of **CONFLICT**



***“It ain’t what you don’t
know
that gets you into
trouble...”***



***It’s what you know
for sure that just
ain’t so.”***

Mark Twain

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Questions



- Have you ever had a Trustee announce that she does not believe anything her colleagues on the Board say because they all lie all the time?
- Or a Board unable to reach a decision due to two sides to the issue unable to understand or even listen to the other side? Everybody is right & nobody is wrong. No Compromise!

The Challenge.



- Difficult problems cannot be fully solved by a Board that does not trust and respect the CEO nor each other. Or where discussions are adversarial in nature and tone. Debate rather than a win – win compromise.
- In such cases how does the Board regain respect for each other and practice civil behavior?

So... how did we get here?



- **Drivers of discord, distrust and division:**
 - ✓ **Political (hyper-partisan) tribalism**
 - ✓ **365/24/7 Cable News & Social Media**

- **When we focus on the *differences* (e.g. *identity politics*) instead of common interests, shared values and common goals.**

Listen to all (an alternative)



- Tough problems can be solved if all sides to an issue have input and are respected by listening to them.
- This requires you to listen not just with people who see things the same way, but especially with those who see things differently, and to respect their input.
- Even if such input is not provided in a civil manner.

Problem Solving Suggestions



- Pay attention to your state of being and how you are talking and listening. Notice your assumptions, reactions, contractions, anxieties, prejudices, paradigms, and projections.
- Remember that you don't know the truth about everything. Ask Questions for Understanding First. When you think that you are absolutely certain about the way things are, add "in my opinion". Do not take yourself too seriously.

Listen to All Sides.



- Engage with and listen to others who have a stake in the community and the college. Seek out people who have different, even opposing, perspectives from yours or represent communities that are under-represented in your institution.
- Listen with empathy. Look at the issue through their eyes. Imagine yourself in their shoes.

Listen & Reflect..



- Listen to what is being said not just by yourself and the Board but also the community. Listen to what is emerging as a whole. Listen with your heart.
- Reflect. Examine how what you are doing or not doing is contributing to things being the way they are. Camp out beside the questions and let the answers come to you.

Relax and then Speak.



- Relax and be fully present. Open up your mind and heart and will. Open yourself up to being touched and inspired.
- Speak up. Notice and say what you are thinking, feeling, and wanting. Speak from your heart but with data, not just stories.

Implement and Evaluate.



- As part of an annual evaluation process ask the Board/Team if they have listened to each other during the past year.
- In the past few month's have the Board's recommendations or decisions been inclusive and conducted in a civil manner?

Audience Discussion



- What are the first things that spring to your mind when you envision a “Civil Board of Trustees meeting”?

Questions to Ask The Board



- How does having civil engagements during meetings help your college succeed?
- Who establishes the culture in your college?

CEO's Role



- Establish trust – NO SURPRISES
- Communicate often- good news and bad
- Know your Board members – pet concerns
- Always seek a win-win when Board members disagree
- Partner with your Board Chair in managing the Board
- Practice civility!

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Rules of Engagement



- Pay Attention & Listen.
- Acknowledge the speaker
- Respect the speaker's opinions
- Think the best and think inclusive
- Mind your body when listening & speaking
- Speak calmly & respectfully
- Give praise when appropriate
- Respect other people's time & space

More engagement rules



- Speak using data not just emotions
- Look for bridges of agreement
- Be considerate of your speakers
- Refrain from idle complaints
- Accept and give constructive criticism and apologize earnestly when appropriate.
- Respect the environment and be gentle to animals
- Don't shift responsibility and blame.

Help Build Consensus



- Everyone is to help define a common goal & then all work together to achieve the common goal. Example – how does the matter affect student success? Listen to each other and build upon input.
- Help others Quiet their voice and listen.
- Win – Win solutions to such discussions are encouraged over Win-Lose solutions.
- If having trouble, return to the “bridge.” The point of common agreement and build from there.
- Help develop a set of Code of Conduct guidelines building on civility principles.

Board Self-Evaluation



- Boards must recognize which Trustees need help, and then provide the help thru mentoring, education, coaching, establishing ground rules, and enforcing state and local laws, policies, regulations and ground rules.
- Only the Board can regulate its members!
- The CEO's role?

Audience Discussion



- The faculty union on your campus has decided to support 3 candidates in an upcoming Board election for your 5 member Board of Trustees. One of the remaining two trustees is also closely tied to the faculty union and has been vocal in the past about policies supported by the union. What steps can you take before the election to create an environment of trust and respect?

Audience Discussion



- One of your trustees recently attended a straight pride parade and criticized colleges for teaching gay literature and history.
- The trustee also wrote a book critical of exposing children to LGBTQ topics and banning religion in schools.
- Faculty members and students have appeared at the last Board meeting shouting and demanding the trustee resign or be removed from the board.
- What should the Board & the CEO do in this case to have civil Board meetings?

Audience Discussion



- A group of students at your college printed up bumper stickers and placed them on their vehicles that read: “Made by American Wrenches not Chopsticks.”
- A group of faculty have complained to your office to prohibit the vehicles with these bumper stickers from driving and parking on campus.
- What do you do?

Alternative Debate Process



- An alternative form of discussion that could be used to depolarize groups is a debate process that varies from the traditional debate structure.
- Use of a moderator to present process and to coordinate the debate.
- Each side speaks on an alternating basis.
- All questions go thru the moderator.
- No winner is declared at the conclusion.

Sample Civility Codes



- Coe College,
www.coe.edu/studentlife/orientation/handbook/civility.htm
- University of California, Berkeley.
<http://students.berkeley.edu/uga/respect.stm>
- University of Chicago.
<http://civility.uchicago.edu/policies.shtml>
- Ocean County College
www.ocean.edu/campus/PAR/civility.htm
- Jefferson Community College.
www.sunyjefferson.edu/catalog/campus/civil.html

The Civility Quiz



- How do I view civility?
- The five main things that spring to mind when I envision a “Civil Board meeting” are:
- Examples of civil behavior that I have witnessed at a Board meeting during the past year include:
- Examples of uncivil behavior that I have witnessed at a Board meeting during the past year include:
- Creating a civil Board is important to me because?
- What role does respect play during Board meetings?
- I agree/disagree with this statement: The encouragement toward Trustee civility will help our Community College District. Why?
- I agree/disagree with this statement: During Board meetings our Board’s trustees are civil to one another. Why?
- Five things I can do in my everyday work/life to be more civil during Board meetings are:

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Resources



- Forni, P.M. *Choosing Civility; The Twenty-five Rules of Considerate Conduct.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002.
 - www.jhu.edu/civility
- Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence.* New York: Bantam, 1997.
- Kahane, Adam. *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004.
- Weeks, Kent M. *In Search of Civility: Confronting Incivility on the College Campus.* N.Y.,N.Y.: Morgan James Publishing, 2011.

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