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Election Politics - Protocols for Office Talk

Most are familiar with the old adage cautioning against discussing religion or politics in polite company, but a recent survey indicates that many are not heeding this advice when it comes to talking politics at the office. According to a survey by Vault, 66% of respondents say that their co-workers discuss politics at work, while 46% have witnessed a political argument at the office.

Passion and Politics

With election season in full swing, impassioned political debate has the potential to escalate into conflict of a deeply personal nature, some of which may create bad will among coworkers that can far outlast the current issues of the day.

While a certain amount of political discussion at work is unavoidable, it is not surprising that such talk often leads to heated and emotional arguments. Political viewpoints often serve as umbrellas that cover a spectrum of deeply held personal beliefs that are formed by an individual's religion, culture, upbringing, economic class, and other influences.

Appropriateness: When and How

Best practice dictates that employees avoid political discussion of any form during the regular conduct of business. Interjecting political commentary into meetings, work-related e-mail and/or other official communication is both unprofessional and inappropriate. Doing so may drag down productivity, create unnecessary distraction, and can potentially alienate fellow employees and/or clients.

While the line is clear in the conduct of official business, it is not as clear when socializing with coworkers while on the job. The following are a few guidelines to help you steer clear of any unintended harmful side-effects that may come about when expressing your political views.



Be mindful of those around you.

While a boisterous political discussion may seem to you to be the perfect way to spend your lunch break, others may not share your enthusiasm for politics. Never take an individual's silence as agreement. It is equally likely to signal discomfort.

Before launching into a political discussion, ask all within earshot two questions:

1) Are you comfortable having a political discussion with me?

2) Do you mind overhearing me talk about politics?

If the answer to either of these questions is no, then it is not appropriate to continue.

Remember that others may feel as strongly as you.

While it can be frustrating when someone refuses to be swayed by your seemingly reasonable arguments, it is important to remember that others have deeply and honestly held convictions as well. Bullying and/or pestering others until they come around to your viewpoint is inappropriate behavior and will likely create conflict, workplace disruption, and hard feelings. Avoiding escalation always begins with respecting the rights of others to believe differently than you. When in doubt, it is best to "agree to disagree" and drop the issue.

Never make it personal.

People of good faith can disagree on all manner of things. A particular political viewpoint is nothing more than a set of ideas and has no bearing on an individual's integrity or intelligence. Never allow political disagreement to become personal. Always take care to avoid inflammatory language, personal insults, and sweeping generalizations. Allow your sensibilities to be guided by basic courtesy. A good rule of thumb is to follow the same conversational etiquette that you would follow if you were a dinner guest in your coworker's home.

Source: *EAPTOOLS.com*



Etiquette Tips for Working with People with Disabilities



The National Organization on Disability (NOD) reports that more than 54 million Americans have a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 was conceived with the goal of integrating people with disabilities into all aspects of life, particularly the workplace and the marketplace.

Sensitivity toward people with disabilities is not only in the spirit of the ADA, it makes good business sense. It can help you expand your practice, better serve your customers or develop your audience. When supervisors and coworkers use disability etiquette, employees with disabilities feel more comfortable and work more productively.

Practicing disability etiquette is an easy way to make people with disabilities feel welcome. You do not have to feel awkward when dealing with a person who has a disability. These tips are for anyone—with or without a disability—who wants to interact more effectively with people with disabilities.

Ask before you help

Just because someone has a disability, do not assume she/he needs help. If the setting is accessible, people with disabilities can usually get around fine. Adults with disabilities want to be treated as independent people. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. A person with a disability will often communicate when she/he needs help. And if she/he does want help, **ask how** before you act.

Be sensitive about physical contact

Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Grabbing them, even if your intention is to assist, could knock them off balance. Avoid patting a person on the head or touching his wheelchair, scooter or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.

Think before you speak

Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their companion, aide or sign language interpreter. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great; just talk to them as you would with anyone else. Respect their privacy. If you ask about the disability, she/he may feel like you are treating them like a disability, not as a human being. However, many people with disabilities are comfortable with questions about their disability after getting to know someone. A simple “I don’t feel comfortable sharing that” by the person with a disability can set the tone if it is not something that he/she is willing to share.

Don’t make assumptions

People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Do not make decisions for them about participating in any activity. Depending on the situation, it could be a violation of the ADA to exclude people because of a presumption about their limitations.

Respond graciously to requests

When people who have disabilities ask for an accommodation at your business, it is not a complaint. It shows they feel comfortable enough in your establishment to ask for what they need. And if they get a positive response, they will probably come back again and tell their friends about the good service they received.

Most importantly, if you do not know what to do or what something means, ask the person. They are the experts on their needs and how to best meet them.

Six Solid Workplace Relationship Skills for Employees

Properly managing relationships, particularly workplace relationships, requires a number of skills. With care, these workplace relationships become valuable resources, rather than sources of irritation, frequent conflicts, or personality clashes. Want to improve your workplace relationships?

Practice the following six relationship skills and you will be a happier, healthier, and more productive employee: *investment skills*, *receptivity skills*, *connective skills*, *impression skills*, *empathy skills*, and *repair skills*.



- 1. Investment skills** build up or nurture workplace relationships. These can include telling others they did a good job, praising your coworkers, or including them in social events.
- 2. Receptivity skills** include being a good listener, maintaining eye contact, asking for opinions, thanking coworkers for feedback, acknowledging that a coworker helped save you time, energy, embarrassment, etc.
- 3. Connective skills** include telling coworkers you appreciate them, encouraging coworkers, or honoring others' choices or deferring to what they want or would like to do.
- 4. Impression skills** get you remembered. They are positive behaviors others typically do not practice. These can include sending a handwritten thank-you note, taking the lead to coordinate a birthday, or sharing a skill or resource to elevate the effectiveness of a coworker, even if you create your own competition.
- 5. Empathy skills** include the ability to recognize others' emotions and identify unmet needs--need for a break, need for recognition, need for validation, need to be heard, or even need for a helping hand.
- 6. Repair skills** include the willingness to discuss your relationship, clear the air, or "check in" to address misunderstandings and obstacles that prevent feeling good about the relationship.

Stronger positive relationships with coworkers helps to create a more positive workplace environment. Your team is a resource for you, just as you are a resource for your team. Be available to others, and they'll be available for you, too! Need help working on your communication? Call your EAP!

Stress

Financial

Legal

Depression

For free and confidential assistance, call your
Employee Assistance Program and speak with a Care Coordinator:

(713) 781-3364

(800) 324-4327

Se Habla Español

(800) 324-2490

www.4eap.com

Marital Problems

Family Problems

Alcohol/Drug Problems

Other Referrals

Your employer has contracted with Interface EAP to provide you an Employee Assistance Program.