

# Promoting Civility



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# What is Civility?

- Free expression vs. respect for fellow participants in democratic process.
- Erosion of civility attributable to the elevation of self expression over self control
- Is it possible to be expressive & civil?

## *What is civility?*

“The way people treat each other with respect, even when they disagree.”






# Why is Civility Important?

- More people will participate in public deliberative process if not focused on personal attacks.
  - Data suggests incivility contributes to voter alienation & apathy towards government.
    - 60% of respondents “very concerned” with attacks
  - Inability to deal with problems linked to addressing them in a destructive way.
  - Treating others disrespectfully encourages public to engage in similar behavior.
  - Media coverage of personal attacks exacerbates phenomenon.
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# Is Incivility Necessarily Bad?


- Civil behavior reinforces status quo.
    - Example: Women's participation in politics
  - Other examples of civil disobedience?
  - Charles Flynn: Insulting political figures is important.
    - Indispensable democratic privilege
    - Provide check against leaders thinking of themselves in grandiose terms.
    - Example: British Parliament – PM able to move measures forward.
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“Revolutions aren’t made without ruffling  
feathers, and revolutionaries aren’t  
renowned for their etiquette.”

- Michael Reagan






“In a neighborhood dispute there may be stunts, rough words, and even hot insults; but when a whole people speaks to its government, the dialogue and the action must be on a level reflecting the worth of that people and the responsibility of that government.”

-- Martin Luther King, Jr.






# Strategies for Achieving Greater Personal Civility

- Guy & Heidi Burgess – University of Colorado Conflict Research Consortium
    - Separate People from the Problem
    - Obtain the Facts
    - Limit Interpersonal Misunderstandings
    - Use Fair Processes
    - Keep Trying to Persuade & Allow Yourself to be Persuaded
  - Tom Terry:
    - Identify the biggest redeeming quality of that person who's always driving you crazy. Keep it in mind the next time you interact.
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# Better Options to Increase Chances of Success

- Emphasize respect for all viewpoints
  - Don't create enforcement mechanism
  - Create opportunities for discussion and identification of shared values
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# So...Can Civility be Legislated?

- “Civility is itself something that needs to be sought, deliberated & negotiated.” -- Virginia Sapiro
  - Aristotle: Virtuous behavior must be voluntary and civility is a form of virtuous behavior.
  - States must decide for themselves
    - Thoughts on legislating civility in your states?
    - Opportunities/barriers to legislating civility in your state?
    - What changes must occur to allow for this type of legislation?
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# Quote, unquote


- “The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority.” – Kenneth Blanchard
  - “Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them?” – Abraham Lincoln
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# Strategies to Promote Greater Civility at Meetings


## ● THOUGHTS ON CIVILITY: Between the Elected Official and the Public

Measures agencies can take generally to promote civility

- Strategies for dealing with specific controversial items or instances of incivility; and
  - Thoughts on Gadflies
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# Measures to Promote Civility – Tips From Elected Officials

- Importance of Presiding Officer
    - P.O. Sets the tone for public comment
    - Mood can disintegrate if public thinks:
      - The matter has already been decided
      - The Legislature or Legislator doesn't care about public input
      - The Legislature or Legislator is being impolite or inconsiderate of the public it serves
    - P.O. is the protector of the process. Responsibilities:
      - Ensure all viewpoints are heard
      - Decision makers have all necessary information
      - Ensure public feels its input matters to the decision
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# Measures to Promote Civility – Tips From Elected Officials

- Importance of Valuing Dissention – The “Cornerstone” of the Democratic Process
    - Helpful hints from elected officials:
      - Citizens treat everyone with respect, honor right to differing opinions
      - Remind citizens to be respectful
      - Peer Pressure: the “shush”
      - Embracing dissention as a community value
      - Respect for what the public is saying
      - Give public adequate time to be heard and discuss issues at length
      - Be aware of body language, both positive & negative
      - Treat the audience the way responsible adults should be treated
      - Better to serve as example
  - “You do not lead by hitting people over the head – that’s assault, not leadership.” -- Dwight D. Eisenhower
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# Measures to Promote Civility – Tips From Elected Officials


## Adopting a Code of Civility

- Specific commitment to civility can be helpful
  - Examples:
    - Pledge of Civility
    - Commitment to Civil Behavior
    - Rules of Decorum
    - Can Civility be Legislated?
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# Codes of Conduct Civility

## WASHINGTON STATE SENATE: RULES ON DECORUM

- Prohibits conduct that is indecorous, boisterous or unbecoming language
  - Impose penalties
  - Presiding Officer sets the standard for conduct
  - Cell phone use is prohibited
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# Arizona Senate Rules: Decorum & Debate/Arizona House Rules

- No member shall be permitted to indulge in personalities, use language personally offensive, arraign motives of members, change deliberate misrepresentations or use language tending to hold a member of the House or Senate up to contempt

Arizona House Rule 19.







# Hawaii Rules Pertaining to Civility & Decorum


- Requires proper recognition of members  
“Mr. Speaker”
- “It is not the person but the measure that is  
the subject of the debate”
- Standard of Conduct

Hawaii House Rule 60






# UTAH-2009 Concurrent Resolution “A Call to Civility”

- Resolution of the General Session Directed to the Public & Elected Officials
  - Recognizes need for civil discourse-  
“responsible both on the exercise of over our rights and in protecting the rights of others”
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# Dealing with Controversial Agenda Items – Tips From Fellow Elected Officials

- Strategy meetings between lawmaker/staff prior to meetings
    - Anticipate issues and appropriate responses
    - Can staff help clarify informational issues?
    - Can/Should an issue be separated into parts?
    - Is further work needed?
  - Consider holding meetings between lawmaker/staff and stakeholders
    - Public acquires all info the lawmaker has
    - Public knows the governing body understands their concerns
    - Possible resolutions to controversy can be explored
  - Encourage public respect of officials
    - Take breaks when issues get heated
    - Use humor, as appropriate
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# Being More Assertive When Necessary

- Example: Verbal attacks on speakers, unruly, disruptive behavior
  - Potential disqualification for benefit
  - Ejection from meetings
    - Establish a record of warning and opportunities for voluntary reform
    - Last resort
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# Reaping What You Sow & Setting the Example

- Treat other legislators with respect – civil behavior sets the tone for others
    - Address members as Madame Speaker, Ms. President, Madame Chairwoman
    - Use own titles and last names at meetings
    - Avoid interrupting the legislators during discussions
    - Avoid negative comments about other legislators, staff and public
  - Abide by time limits similar to those set for public
    - Keep remarks brief & limited to merits of issues, not personalities
    - “What’s good for the goose...” – helps defuse frustration
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# On Gadflies...

- Who are they?
  - Every community has them...who are yours?
  - What are they motivated by?
  - Sometimes they're right!
  - How do you deal with them?
    - Do: Understand Motivations; appreciate principle
    - Don't: Respond in kind
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# More Thoughts on Public Comment & Participation

- Time limits do not represent lack of interest
    - Mutual respect of all speakers
    - Key points heard
  - Coaching public on participation can be helpful
    - Where emotion, conviction (including intimidation) have been effective before.
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# Dealing With Grandstanders

- What is a grandstander?
    - “Playing or acting so as to impress onlookers.”
    - Self-promoting
  - Why is Grandstanding problematic?
    - Responsibility & Respect
    - Public meetings not appropriate venue
    - True purpose for public meetings
    - Meeting time as a public resource
    - Other types of waste
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# Dealing With Grandstanders

- How does Grandstanding waste time?
    - Public Time
    - Staff Time
    - Colleague's Time
  - Potential Effects
    - Frustration/Resentment
    - Discourage attendance/alienation
    - Less informed/supportive public
    - Diminished respect
    - Inaccurate characterizations
    - Wasting public resources
    - Less time for other interests
    - Diminished pool of candidates
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# Is Grandstanding All That Bad?

- A slippery slope – the “something in return” mentality
    - Gateway to other legal troubles
    - Grandstanding  $\neq$  illegal activity, but a common thread
  - Personal advantages in return for service
    - Public service satisfaction
    - Benefits often inappropriate
    - Legal  $\neq$  ethical
  - “Everyone’s Doing It”
    - Other candidates
    - Tit-for-Tat
    - Two wrongs don’t make a right
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# Tips for Dealing with Grandstanders

- Forthright discussion

- Self-imposed limits

“Limit the length of comments during committee hearing meetings to 3+ minutes per speaker per item and do not repeat points that have already been stated by others.”

- Level playing field

- Sends message to potential offenders





# Tips for Dealing with Grandstanders

- Adopt provisions in conduct that address “grandstanders” codes of ethics & values
    - Emphasize communication, listening and adding value
    - Collaboration
    - Part of team
    - Phrase in the positive
  - Examples:

“Be respectful of other peoples time. Stay focused and act efficiently during public meetings.”

Obligation of the member to fully participate in meetings and other public forums while demonstrating respect, kindness, consideration and courtesy to others.
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# Patience and Communication

“The biggest obstacle to communication is the illusion that it has already occurred.

-- George Bernard Shaw

“Patience is the great lubricant of a civil society. To the extent that grandstanders and other meeting-time-wasters exhaust the public’s and their colleague’s patience, the civility and health of our civic institutions are put at risk.”

-- Institute for Local Government

