

Political Disruptions

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Political conversations were once considered taboo in work circles. Not anymore.

A growing number of employees are connecting with workplace friends through social media where opinions on a myriad of controversial topics, from abortion to gun control, are openly displayed. In fact, one report indicated that more than half of all employees are talking politics. This can lead either to problems or beneficial opportunities.

Potential political discord at work can be bad news for employers who rely on cooperation to get the job done. Ruffled feathers lead to poor productivity and increasing workplace hostility. There is reason to be concerned, as reported in a 2017 study by the American Psychological Association:

- 54% of workers have discussed politics at work.
- 40% of those surveyed indicated negative consequences as a result.
- 31% witnessed arguments; with about half those engaging in heated quarrels themselves.
- 26% felt tension and stress.
- 16% viewed their colleagues negatively as a result of these exchanges.

Employers can't police social media or act as hall monitors. Besides, people do not abandon their values, faith perspectives and political viewpoints when they cross the threshold of their workplace. Deeply held beliefs guide every aspect of our thoughts and actions - whether conscious or subconscious, right or wrong.

What to do? A few simple suggestions:

Reminders: First, check with your company's legal counsel regarding anti-harassment policies and ensure that these are clearly communicated - but don't rely on those alone. Companies should demonstrate the spirit and intent behind their approach to inclusiveness - important for an increasingly diverse workplaces.

Equip employees: Want to facilitate more constructive interactions in both personal and professional settings? Training programs on communication and conflict management abound. Now is the time to invest in helping to shape dialogue toward positive conversations that shows respect for those holding opposing positions.

Value added: Political discourse can be informative: A passionate, informed engagement in politics beats an apathetic, ignorant approach to civic involvement. Embrace the wisdom that can be gained.

Bind with common goals: Emphasize organizational goals that benefit all employees and require everyone to work together to achieve them.

Americans may differ in their approaches, but most of us desire unity over discord. With care, employers have the potential to play a key role in leading others toward productive exchanges that serve the greater good.

Shannon Warren is Founder/CEO of www.okethics.com, with monthly forums in Tulsa and OKC.