



How To Discuss Politics (if you must)

Dear Aunt Bossy, I was hoping that after the election, all the arguing would settle down, but I think it is getting worse. I always feel very frustrated when I am trying to explain how I see an issue or problem. What advice can you give me so I have a better chance of convincing people of things?

Sincerely,

Lottie

Dear Lottie,

Firstly, give up on the idea that you will convince anyone of anything. The best you can hope for is to stop an uninformed or illogical person in his or her tracks. Our world has become so polarized, and many people have invested so much in "being right" that they will never be able to relax enough to even consider that, perhaps, they don't know something, or that their viewpoint could possibly be incorrect.

Before you engage in a conversation, realize that you must genuinely care about the other person's thoughts and your tone should reflect that. If they reveal themselves to be utterly stupid or uninformed or full of hate, you can avoid talking to them in the future.

Here are some rules to follow that will give you a better chance of communicating effectively. You may not convince others, but you will learn to think more concisely and clearly and, thus, impact all of your communication for the better.

1. Make certain you understand other people's point and let them know you have heard them.

A good way to do that is to repeat their concept. This will allow them to hear it out loud, and allows you to add some context that sets the stage for your thoughts.

For example, if someone says "All poor people are lazy." You can repeat, "So what you are saying is that anyone who is poor is poor through his or her own fault." (Don't repeat it like a question. Repeat it as a statement.) When they hear what they said, they may recognize how stupid it sounds, and moderate the statement. That will give you a chance to dig deeper by probing with words such as, "How does that work in your eyes?" "What would you do to change that?" Keep your tone open.

If the other person sticks to their original words, he or she will just dig deeper into a black hole. If not, you will be ushering that person along to consider the thought and perhaps realize the ridiculousness of that kind of generalization

2. Avoid generalizations.

Most of us know that stereotypes are based on some reality, but we also know there are millions of exceptions to every single one. If you say "All rich people care about is making more money," you sound like a fool.

If you object to a specific rich person, be specific about how they only care about money, or acknowledge that they may do many good things, but you think they only care about money because of a specific action they have taken. Never forget that all of us are complex creatures

and a mix of good and bad, selfish and unselfish.

3. Stick with the subject.

There are a lot of really bad communicators out there who just change the subject. If someone says, "Melania Trump is a beautiful woman" and you answer, "What about Roslyn Carter, don't you think she was beautiful, too?" you have changed the subject like a seven year old kid telling his Mom when she corrects him for swearing, that Bobby pooped in his pants at school. One has nothing to do with the other.

4. Do not assume the motives of others.

If someone disagrees with you or has a different viewpoint on something, it does not mean that person is evil, bad, stupid, uninformed, or dishonest. It could mean that, but unless you have personal knowledge of other behavior, you have no human right to assign the motive. You can point out what others have specifically done, but you can't say what motivated them unless you have personal experience with them.

5. Keep your emotions in check.

I am always astounded when I see interviews on current affairs where the well-educated, supposed expert starts out with "I feel." The on-the-street interviews are even worse. "I feel like Cuba is a free country where everybody can live how they want."

When you are talking politics, especially, people feel all sorts of things that are only real to them. "I feel like he really cares about us." "I feel like she despises little people." "I feel like his wife hates him." On and on.

If you say, I think so and so really cares about people because he did a specific thing (name it), that is completely different, and can lead to conversation.

6. Check your hate and anger.

The world is a beautiful place with lots of problems. Being angry and hateful changes nothing but yourself, and that change is for the worse. It will handicap you so that you will not have the energy to go out and uplift every person you meet, which could very well be a way to dampen

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy
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the argumentative state people appear to be living in these days.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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