

HOW TO HAVE A PRODUCTIVE POLITICAL CONVERSATION

STEP 1: Motivate Yourself to Engage with the Other Person

- People tend to assume people on the other side of an issue will be closed-minded, preventing people from ever engaging with them. We make this assumption because people believe the person on the other side bases their stance on their emotions.
- To motivate engagement, take a moment to reflect on the reasons why you believe in your position. Feeling more confident in your own beliefs can enhance your motivation.
- Importantly, take a moment to reflect on the reasons (and not emotions) that this *other* person might hold their opinion. Try to generate rational-to-you explanations for their opinion as this should help them feel more open-minded on the topic. It's also worth reminding yourself that people generally self-report being open to hearing contrary views

STEP 2: Actually Initiate the Conversation

- Keep in mind that there are better and worse times to have a political conversation. In particular, these dialogues are best had when both people are in a good mood.
- It's also important to make sure the conversation doesn't feel sprung upon them. Alerting the person that you would like to hear their opinion both communicates you're interested in listening to them and makes them feel like you're not trying to "catch them off guard"
- Make sure the motive for the conversation is about "learning," not "winning" or even "convincing." The first step to opinion change is becoming *open* to change, and that can only occur when people adopt a learning or truth-seeking mindset.

STEP 3: Foster an Open and Insightful Discussion

- Before explaining your views, ask the other person for their opinion. And don't simply ask the one question – ask follow-up questions on what they share! Asking questions communicate that you're interested in what they have to say and are genuinely listening to them.
- Don't argue over the minor "facts" you think the other person has wrong. If you contradict everything they say, they won't be open to anything you have to say. So instead, try to only "fact check" the bigger issues contributing to their beliefs.
- Try to acknowledge the parts of their opinion you think have merit. If you don't find any kind of common ground between your beliefs, it will be hard for them to take your opinion seriously.
- Consider engaging in *analogic perspective taking*. If you're trying to get them to take another person's perspective, have this other person recall a personal experience that generates the same thoughts and emotions that are evoked in the context you're trying to describe – even if their personal experience is in a totally different context

STEP 4: End on Good Terms and Don't Let This Be the Last

- If you can tell the other person is getting emotionally agitated, take a break, and remind yourselves that this conversation isn't about "who's right and who's wrong." It's about learning more about the other person's opinion and why they believe what they do.
- Pay attention to when the conversation is winding down. Of course, don't give up on a conversation too early! But you also don't want it to drag on. Hopefully, this is the start to future conversations, and so you don't want it to seem like it will be super long every time.
- Make sure to thank the other person for having the conversation and express how you're grateful they were willing to share their opinion with you.

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