

How to Talk Politics and Remain Friends

- The **High-Five Technique** for polite political discussions
- And many other tips and hints on civil discussion
- By Tom Currie, Natick MA, August 19, 2024

Political Discussions?

Yes.

(but let's be polite and friendly)

Remember Election Day is the first day I get my mail-in ballot,
not November 5 !!

(about 5 weeks before election, ~October 1)

Who are we?

- We are a population of people with a population of ideas and points of view
- We are neighbors, friends, fellow travelers, Church members, coworkers, folks at a party, your barber, retail workers, etc.
- Almost everyone you meet is a pleasant person with valuable viewpoints.
- Often the person you talk to will have a very different viewpoint on a political topic
- No one wants the conversation to end with bad feelings
 - It's 10x worse if someone is trapped in a conversation (e.g. your barber)
- We want all involved to feel the conversation was fun and worth while.

When might we talk politics?

- At lunch or the coffee station with your coworkers
- At family gatherings
- At church coffee hour
- At a pub with friends
- On the sidewalk with neighbors
- In line with strangers
- See the risk of starting arguments? [These interactions need to be pleasant.](#)



Advice from Zach

- Zach is a friend from Church
- He acknowledges that talking about religion is frowned upon in society.
- His advice was to work in your involvement at church into every conversation.
 - Do so naturally and without intimidation, just bring it up casually
- Example from a work-lunch chat:
 - “Last Saturday I took two pews out of the sanctuary to provide wheelchair access. They almost got stuck in the aisle.”
 - This example shows your involvement in Church, it’s interesting regardless of your coworker’s religious views, and it helps your coworkers get to know you.
- The same notion can be used in politics.



The High-Five Rule

- Set the tone of a political conversation with the High-Five Rule.
- **I love talking politics, but I have a rule, we must commit to remaining friends even if you think I'm a nut and I think you're a nut. I use a high-five to show our friendship whenever the conversation gets spicy.**
- Seal your commitment with a high-five and end the conversation with a high-five.
- I have used this with friends, coworkers, my barber and strangers at parties. It works. People respond to it with respect.
- Watch Vivek use my technique on YouTube: https://youtu.be/zqvCjPKrIXU?si=vnN87Nu_WCK9IC7A

When to talk politics

- The entry often comes casually when someone mentions something in the news.
- Know when NOT to talk politics,
 - Read the room
 - Know when to back off and stop the discussion
- When is it OK to talk politics?
 - Dunno, but more often than you think, if you are respectful.

How to Talk Politics

- Be respectful
- Ask for the other person's point of view
 - Or ask their advice on political issues
- Look for common ground
- Stay practical
- Stay light-hearted and relaxed
- Admit when your information is suspect. "I saw this on the internet" "I hear this from one podcaster." "I've heard this from several separate sources"
 - "I'd rate my comment on <topic> at only 60% credible, so I do not fully buy into it"

Body Language and Demeanor

- Relax, enjoy the academic discussion.
- Don't get too fired up.
 - Don't lift your bottom off the chair, that's a sure sign that you are losing your cool, especially if you point.
- I sit back in the chair, in a relaxed manner
- Smile, laugh
- Treat topics and other's opinions seriously.
- Respect your friend's opinion as much as your own.



Two Movies on One Screen

From Scott Adams, Dilbert creator.

- A Republican and Democrat walk into a theater and watch a movie. When they exit and are asked about that movie, they both describe completely different movies.
- This is observable all over our society.
- Explain this phenomenon to those who you have political discussions. Marvel when it applies to your current discussion.
- I promise you will encounter this often.



Discussion Technique: Binary vs 3D

- The media presents issues with only two sides, A or B (and B is evil)
- The truth is that the solution is never A or B, it's often something entirely different from an entirely different direction.
- Greg Gutfeld refers to this as “the prison of two ideas”
- Find the unusual angle, it makes for fun discussion
 - Practical solutions and very unusual viewpoints (sometimes labelled “conspiracy theories”) can fit together if kept light hearted. Laugh a little and discuss why the conspiracy theory is perhaps still unlikely, but no longer a nonsense view.

Solve the World's Problems

- The best place to find common ground with someone of a different political perspective is to discuss a problem in society
- Ask for their ideas
- “What would you do about the homeless problem?”
 - Could be any topic of the day, immigration, a local issue, schools, economy, etc.
- Remember that **each problem has several viable solutions**, not just your solution
 - A good solution might not align with your preference, but if it might work it can be agreeable.
 - **Other people come up with fascinating new views** to a topic



Retreat to the Technical

- When a topic gets too emotional or too mired in details, the discussion needs to be reset.
- I will “retreat to the technical” in order to reset the conversation.
- It means move back to the big picture, focus on the issue and what we can practically do to resolve it.
- Example: A technical project is late with critical errors
 - Managers will focus on why it is late and who made the errors
 - You’ll only finish the project and ship the product if you determine what to do today to fix the errors and get the manufacturing back on track.
 - Now apply that to a political issue, like border control.

DON'T

- Don't lose sight of the techniques during the conversation. Remember, you just promised to remain friends...
- Don't allow the conversation to turn angry
- Don't spend time on topics you cannot support
- Don't get pulled down into the details, stay big picture
- Don't believe any news (right or left), keep a healthy skepticism
- Don't use rude jokes that are floating around the memes and tweets
- Don't call people fascist, nazi or a threat to democracy. They are not, it's silly hyperbole
- Don't read minds (or admit when you are mind-reading)
- Don't be adversarial. Remember the left's Thanksgiving talking point lists?
- Don't lose friends

Quick Hits

- Leadership ability is critical, even if I disagree with the official.
- You only understand a topic if you can argue the adversary's side
- point out that a topic is a hoax, lists of about 20 democrat hoaxes are common on line. (Fine people hoax, drinking bleach hoax, etc)
- Point out fake news when it comes up. Remember, there is fake news on both news silos.
- Don't be afraid to speak your mind on a topic when appropriate. But remain respectful, it can get spicy.
- However, don't speak your mind when it is not helpful or it's moot.
- Use positive examples from the other side (Ted Kennedy's constituent services, Bernie Sanders could fill a stadium when he spoke, etc)
- Avoid changing subjects mid discussion

What Now?

- You tell me. Are my techniques helpful? Can you use them?
- Try it, have some political discussions with these techniques in mind.