

## Relieving Political Heartburn

*Prepared for The Journal Record, July 2019*

Are you avoiding your conservative or liberal coworkers because of their viewpoints? Heard one too many opinions about candidates in the break room? Witnessed employees who are no longer on speaking terms with each another because of feuding over politics?

Join the crowd: According to the American Psychological Association, one in four workers is negatively affected by political talk at work. This is especially true of Millennials who are feeling even more distracted and less productive due to political discord.

The bombardment of 24-hour news programs, contentious conversations, demonizing of candidates and vitriolic messages on social media have contributed to the friction. Not surprising, Gallup polls indicate that political volatility in the workplace has doubled since the 2016 election.

This is especially rough for employers facing a serious labor shortage. Based on a report published in *Forbes*, 35% of those surveyed would actually leave their jobs if their managers held different political views than their own. In fact, 58% would not even interview with employers that have political positions that the applicant finds disagreeable.

We are admonished never to discuss politics or religion, but squashing those conversations poses legal risks and is impractical to monitor anyway. So, why not embrace the opportunity to help employees understand how forthright dialogue can be a positive exchange? It could ultimately lead to better decision-making by seeking facts, learning emotional control and respecting others' life experiences or perspectives.

The old adage, "Be the change you wish to see" is good advice. Collaborate with your Human Resources pros to design appropriate communiqués that applaud civic involvement, while clarifying expectations about boundaries of harassment and alienation of team members. In fact, it may be possible to provide safe opportunities for discussions through Better Angels, an organization dedicated to depolarizing politics. During their national conference, I was impressed with a constructive debate between an Ohio Tea Party leader and that of a Black Lives Matter founder from NYC. It offered the surprising opportunity to find common ground.

Better Angels offers several online tools, including a self-evaluation assessment and simple pledges designed for personal accountability. They have a wealth of ideas that help us move from emotionally-charged banter to forums that foster thoughtful conversations and better relationships.

The bottom line? As Americans, we passionately want the best for our country. That requires integrity in the way we interact with one another in our ultimate quest to discover the truth.

Shannon Warren is Founder Emeritus of [www.okethics.org](http://www.okethics.org)