

### 30 Ways To Leave Incivility Behind and To Improve Governing Body Discussion



Good discussion relies on the concept of synergy. That is, our decisions will reflect more than the sum of our individual efforts.

Remember that how an idea is communicated is equally, if not more important, than the idea itself.

Participate with the dignity and decorum fitting those who hold a public trust.

All points of view are good. Unique ideas help define the parameters of the discussion. Remember that there is “more than one way to skin a cat”.

The discussion should “build”. That is, it should grow in terms of possibility. Each idea should further push toward and contribute to a new solution.

You must participate in the discussion. More heads are better than one only if we have more. Also, we know that those who participate in a decision tend to support the decision.

Don’t operate as an individual. You are a member of a team. Do all you can to develop the team itself.

Assume that your position will change and there will be new and better alternatives which you cannot yet see. Don’t get stuck on your original position and don’t be afraid of change.

Respect the Mayor’s role as “chairperson”.

Respect our adopted rules of order.

Keep your discussion focused on the subject at hand. Direct your comments to the issue.

Don’t ramble, be concise.

Be descriptive, not evaluative or judgmental.

When possible, be specific rather than general.

Explain your reasoning.

Be honest.

Avoid win-lose statements.

Listen. Pay attention, stay engaged, and seek to understand each other’s views.

Dissension is OK, but respect the final decision. You need to support the decision because it was made through democratic means, even if it did not go your way. A unified front improves the likelihood of success much more than a divided front.

Don’t oversimplify complex issues. Don’t make simple issues more complex than necessary.

Stay forward-focused. Don't rehash what has already been decided.

Don't take comments personally.

Don't make personality-based comments. Comment on the issue itself.

Don't let honest differences of opinion degenerate into personality conflicts.

Don't just mind your manners, use your manners to influence those of others.

Take responsibility for eliminating incivility. Help diffuse incivility if at all possible.

Don't hold side conversations.

Don't discount each other's viewpoints.

Assume that good discussion will occur and that good solutions will be found (let the "self fulfilling prophecy" work for you). Stay positive. Don't become apathetic.

When all is said and done, and when the discussion and decision-making are finished, shake hands and move on.

This list partially developed from the following sources:

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4. Cleveland, Harlan. *The Knowledge Executive*. Truman Talley Books, New York, N.Y. 1985.
5. Fisher, Fred. *Council Development*. National League of Cities, 1980.
6. Hall, Jay. *The Structure of Competence*. Teleometrics Int'l, The Woodlands, TX. 1988.
7. Mahtesian, Charles. *The Politics of Ugliness*. Governing Magazine, Vol. 18, No. 9, June 1997.
8. Mosher, E.A. *Suggestions For Successful Public Service*. Kansas Government Journal. League of Kansas Municipalities. Vol. LXXVIII, No. 2, February 1992.