

Expert offers tips on how to keep calm when talking about politics

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Between controversial debates and campaign rallies, conversations during the election season can become divisive. However, one Baylor College of Medicine expert offers some tips on how to keep calm when discussing politics, especially in the workplace.

"It can be challenging to have a conversation about politics within the workplace because there are so many different levels of authority," said Dr. James Lomax, professor in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor. "For example, my role is to encourage people to be good students, residents, faculty and staff. I do not want to exploit a professional relationship by doing or saying something that a learner or colleague might feel upset by and not able to confront me about so I rarely and with some thoughtfulness disclose my political interests."

According to Lomax, it is probably best to avoid talking about politics at work altogether. However, if a discussion does arise and become heated, he recommends reminding yourself and others that you are all in a workspace and not a public forum.

"We have to respect each other's values and try to not make something happen in the workplace that should take place in a different space," Lomax said.

Lomax also said people should be cautious when using humor to talk about political topics in the workplace because it is easy to cross the line.

"It's better to use self-effacing humor than to make fun of someone who you're angry at, like a colleague. When you make fun of someone, you're vulnerable to getting on a slippery slope toward [unprofessional behavior](#)," Lomax said.

In addition, Lomax said beware of what you post on social media. With all digital communications there is the illusion that you can say anything you want immediately but doing that can get you in trouble.

"While you do have a right to freedom of speech and should exercise that, you should never post in a way that could be construed as representing your place of employment. If you are going to post something, post it as an individual. However, even then, be sure you don't post things that breach a professionalism obligation," Lomax said.

Given the particularly divisive nature of this year's election, Lomax advises people to gain a full understanding of the political issues before voting, especially if someone is undecided.

"If you are undecided, you should explore the issues further and have good conversations with people you respect and admire, regardless of their political affiliations," Lomax said. "I think it is important for everyone to be a part of an informed voting electorate."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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