

“Can we be Nice Now?”

A good friend posed the question “Will we ever be able to engage in civil discourse again?” While there’s no need here to rehash the nastiness of the recent political campaigns and divisiveness we’ve seen on the rise, we must recognize that it *has* become harder to have a real conversation about substantive issues with anyone who doesn’t share our point of view. Can we change that? We think so, but only if we admit that it may not always be *them* that’s the issue.

- **We are all Partisans:** The people you hang out with, the things you read, the programs you watch and listen to, and what you follow on social media all reflect your values and outlooks. We all tend to seek interactions that reinforce our own beliefs. It’s natural. It takes true effort to open up to new ideas or differing opinions and values.
- **Hating is Easy:** It’s surprising how often we hear people say they hate a person or an idea. Rather than trying to understand how it’s possible for others to hold beliefs different from ours . . . we totally dismiss them as bad people. It’s a lot harder to try to listen and understand.
- **Looking for Guidance:** It seems every major religion teaches some measure of compassion, tolerance and acceptance. Certainly Judeo Christian religions do. Loving thy neighbor and enemy are considered admirable at the very least, but such sentiment rarely permeates social interactions these days.
- **Change is Scary:** We write a lot about progress, technological advancement, and how the world can be a better place. But all of that means “change,” and whether or not the two of us think the future is bright, it can shake people up to think that the world is changing too quickly. It can be frightening and alienating, and we must understand that as inevitable as we think change is, there are those who want to hold on to what they have, what they know. And we must show them understanding.
- **Just Listen:** Are you a good listener? No offense, but probably not. It’s really hard to do, especially if you’re talking with someone who has a different viewpoint. You’re already formulating your argument with every word that comes out of their mouth aren’t you? Instead of convincing someone that they are “wrong-headed” we just might learn a little something or gain an insight if we stop . . . and hear them.

- **Don't Believe Everything You Think:** Author Alan Lokos said that. Opinions aren't facts, and facts have been in short supply recently. We're not inclined to question "information" (no matter how bogus) that supports our opinions and beliefs, wayward though they may be. It's sometimes useful to withhold acceptance of an idea and first try to do a little homework before you let the hook get set.
- **"Politically Correct:"** That term has been largely derided, as perhaps too many things get judged offensive or off limits under its usage. Conversely . . . just because someone's opinion is "genuine" or "honest" doesn't mean it ought to be shared or that it isn't repugnant. Thinking before speaking, considering the impact, and exercising a moral filter are probably good things to do.
- **Labels:** When we don't agree with people or understand them, it's pretty easy to paint them with a label. They are "ignorant," they're "elitist," they're "liberal" or "conservative," or worse. Categorizing a person frees us from trying to really fathom them. Instead we can say to ourselves "Oh, I know how *she* is." Do you really?

We believe we can be nicer. It might make us uncomfortable, and it's certainly not easy to try to grasp the views of people we disagree with. But we think it's worth the effort. Let's give it a shot.

Let's all of be as good as we can be. Let's listen, let's respect others, and let's try to understand those who think differently than we do. Sort of that "golden rule" thing . . .

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