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CRAIG PULLIAM CFP®, AIF®, CLU®, REBC | MICHAEL R. COMSTOCK CFP®, AIF®

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Commentary

“Take a Moment.”

None of us is without bias, and most of us aren't even particularly open-minded. To a large extent, we're products of our parents' influences, our environment, and the people we choose to associate with. We tend to have trouble accepting new ideas and other points of view. These days, with elevated levels of discord, (especially on the political landscape) it gets nasty. But we have a few thoughts on how we can begin to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding.

- **What is our Nature?** We have descended from beings who hunted with sticks and used stones as tools. Yet, we learned how to cooperate, to solve problems together, and thrive in diverse social relationships, says evolutionary anthropologist Augustin Fuentes. None of us are born hateful or vengeful; rather we want a sense of belongingness and to know we are valued.
- **Moral Superiority:** There are lots of issues facing us these days, and each tests our beliefs, our sense of justice, and what we choose to accept as fact. It's apparent that the “sides” on various issues each think they are right and that the other is wrong. We too often speak in pronouncements as if our opinions were the judgement of law and truth. We shout at each other, and when you shout you cannot hear.
- **What we Should be Hearing:** Many are hopeful for even more tolerance, openness, mobility, and a more global society. And while this may be desirable (not to all, we understand), such hopes must also account for and empathize with the fact that technological change which can cost jobs; legislation which recognizes gender differences; and rapid demographic shifts which change neighborhoods are understandably going to be distinctly uncomfortable for many good people. Of course such change is unsettling, so why do so many of us not understand this?
- **The Conceit of My Beliefs:** People ought to have a moral compass, and some set of core beliefs that help them understand the world, teach their children, and to effectively and compassionately interact with others. But who am I to say that my belief system, which works well for me, is necessarily the best for you? I can't presume to know your interests. What a conceit it is for me to shout you down and tell you how best to live your life.
- **A Caveat about Personal Beliefs:** Just because a person holds a conviction or opinion, doesn't make it socially acceptable or that it ought to carry equal weight with all other viewpoints. We might agree that overtly racist or sexist views, and positions with absolutely no basis in fact could be harmful if given too much credibility. Frankly, some things people say are just crazy, demonstrably so, and

ought to be challenged. Yet, issues such as immigration, abortion, and non-discrimination for a broad range of groups are naturally going to inflame passions, and demand open and honest debate. For us to be indignant that others could disagree with us on these issues is silly, and non-productive.

- **Where Does Antagonism Get us?** When you argue with someone about a Supreme Court nominee or gun control . . . and you just hammer away with your point of view, talking over them, just as they do the same back to you, where does that get you? Do you feel good about it? Rather than do that, when entering into a polarizing discussion try purposefully asking questions, and waiting to hear the answers . . . it feels a lot better. We can learn. We can begin to understand, and become more civil. That's a good thing, but not an easy thing. It takes discipline, honest interest in the other person, and sometimes a little tongue biting.
- **“Just the Facts, Ma’am”:** That's what Sgt. Joe Friday would say in the old TV show, Dragnet. These days, it's not so easy to just “get the facts.” So many sources of news and data have a slant to them, and some of what they espouse is pure bunk, or only tells part of the truth. And sadly it's our nature to find news that agrees with our own implicit biases. All we can say here is, it's best to seek facts and truths, no matter how damaging to our own preconceived notions. There *are* sources that are considered more even-handed (you might start with MediaBiasChart.com to give you some ideas).

We'll bet every one of you has recently been in a social setting, at the office, or on vacation with friends and absolutely cringed hoping certain subjects wouldn't come up for fear it would end in an argument and hard feelings.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could respect each other's differences and not channel our inner-Neanderthal and resort to throwing verbal sticks?

However, if all this fails, grab a glass of wine or a cup of tea, curl up on your couch and tune into a Hallmark movie. You'll see attractive folks, hear no profanity, grapple with few complicated issues, and it's all resolved in 90 minutes. Barely a whiff of controversy.

Craig Pulliam and Michael Comstock are CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professionals practicing at 112 Westwood Place, Suite 310, Brentwood, TN. They own Premier Wealth Management, LLC. Advisory services offered through Commonwealth Financial Network, a Registered Investment Adviser.

We can be reached at 615-777-2125.

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