

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:



NAVIGATING POST-ELECTION CONVERSATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

JOIN MFHA NOVEMBER 7 AT 2:00PM ET FOR A DEEPER DIVE ON MANAGING POST-ELECTION WORKPLACE DISCUSSIONS DURING OUR “MANAGING CIVILITY AND BELONGING IN THE WORKPLACE POST-ELECTION” WEBINAR.

As leaders in the foodservice and hospitality industry, it's essential to be prepared to steer civil and inclusive conversations about the November election within your workplace*. This period can bring heightened sensitivity and potential division among employees and customers. By fostering an environment rooted in your organization's values and culture, you can create a respectful space for dialogue, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected. Creating this safe and respectful environment is critical to a positive employee and customer experience, which is essential for business success. The following FAQs aim to provide high-level guidance on managing political discussions in the workplace effectively.



FAQs:

QUESTION: Should we allow political conversations in the workplace?

ANSWER: It is difficult to fully prevent political conversations in the workplace, especially during sensitive times like election season. While it's important to allow freedom of expression, workplaces should maintain an environment conducive to productivity and inclusiveness. Organizations can allow these discussions but with guidelines; policies that can provide guardrails that are not disruptive to the work environment.

QUESTION: How can I support civil conversations about politics among employees?

ANSWER: Encouraging civil conversations begins with establishing clear communication norms and reinforcing workplace culture, policies, guidelines and values. Set expectations for respectful dialogue, emphasizing the importance of listening actively and valuing varying perspectives. Coaching employees on how to engage in constructive discussions can help them navigate political conversations with each other and with customers without escalating tensions.

QUESTION: What steps can I take if a political conversation becomes heated?

ANSWER: If a discussion escalates, it's important to intervene promptly. Remember and remind employees (respectively) of the agreed-upon norms for respectful communication and related company policy. Use techniques like an "I statement" to acknowledge and reiterate the importance of the respective opinions without assigning blame, encourage a break, or redirect the conversation.

Sample #1: "I hear you and respect your opinion, but I do not feel the same way. Let's discuss something else instead."

Sample #2: "I appreciate the importance of this conversation and understand the value of your perspective. I feel we might need a moment to reset, so we can continue with a fresh outlook."

Sample #3: "I appreciate the importance of this conversation and understand the value of your perspective. I feel we might need a moment to reset and connect later."

QUESTION: How can I prepare my front-line staff for conversations about politics with customers?

ANSWER: Front-line employees interact with a diverse customer base, which can lead to politically charged conversations. Prepare your staff by providing information on de-escalation techniques and respectful redirection. For instance, equip them with polite responses like, "I'm here to make sure you have a great experience. Can we agree to keep our conversation on today's specials?" Reinforcing or reminding staff of your organization's commitment to positive customer experiences and mutual respect can help staff feel empowered and supported in handling challenging conversations. Consider utilizing more experienced non-manager staff as additional frontline support for employees.

QUESTION: What should I do if an employee feels uncomfortable with a political discussion happening near them?

ANSWER: Encourage employees to speak with a manager if they feel uncomfortable with addressing a nearby conversation directly. You can also create "politics-free" zones within the workplace where employees can step away if needed. Make it clear that management is committed to maintaining an environment where all team members can feel at ease and productive, regardless of the topics discussed around them.

QUESTION: How can I set boundaries around political expression, such as wearing political apparel or pins, without stifling free expression?

ANSWER: Appearance and professionalism are part of the customer experience. Consider discussing with your legal or Human Resources department about establishing a neutral dress code policy that avoids all types of political or cause-related apparel and pins while employees are on shift. This approach allows you to maintain a distraction-free environment, while employees retain freedom of expression outside of the workplace. Be transparent about the rationale, emphasizing that it supports a respectful atmosphere for all customers and team members.

QUESTION: What role should leaders play in managing political discussions?

ANSWER: Workplace leaders play an outsized role in (1) being knowledgeable and communicating the organization's policies and values with a level of steadfastness; (2) setting the tone for workplace culture; (3) modeling a "hands-on vs. hands-up" approach; (4) modeling respectful behavior themselves; and (5) creating and maintaining a safe, environment that is conducive to productivity.

QUESTION: How can I address uncivil behavior related to political discussions?

ANSWER: Uncivil behavior must be addressed immediately to prevent escalation and mitigate risk. If not already established, set a clear policy on workplace behavior that includes consequences for uncivil conduct. Also, implement a process for employees to report inappropriate behavior, ensuring that all complaints are taken seriously and addressed fairly.

QUESTION: How can I ensure that all employees feel supported and included during heightened periods of external tension?

ANSWER: Encourage diverse perspectives by creating opportunities for all employees to share their thoughts and experiences. Consider hosting a townhall meeting or discussion forums that focus on inclusivity. Encourage managers to check in with team members individually to ensure they feel heard and valued. Facilitate open lines of communication by considering guided discussion forums, team huddles, and individual check-ins with team members to address concerns and provide support, fostering a sense of stability and belonging during challenging periods.

By preparing your team and creating an environment of respect, you can navigate the complexities of political discussions effectively.

* **Uncivil or Incivility:** *discourteous or impolite language or behavior*

For more resources, visit the www.MFHA.net. For further assistance or inquiries, please reach out to the MFHA team at info@MFHA.net.

Disclaimer: this document is not an attempt to share legal advice, and all policy changes or recommendations should be approved by your organization's legal and/or HR department.