



Braver Angels

“Rules of Engagement”

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Stephen Covey

The following is intended for a general overview of Braver Angels’ principles and practices. It is not intended to replace the skills someone can learn at a Braver Angels workshop. More information about Braver Angels’ workshops can be found on the flipside of this page.

As individuals, we try to understand the other side’s point of view, even if we don’t agree with it.

- Listen without thinking about your points. After the other person has shared their thoughts, summarize what they said. Check for understanding before responding.
- Be humble and vulnerable.
- Ask only questions that help you better understand the other person’s position/s. • Refrain from asking “gotcha” questions.
- Consider (or even ask the other person) “What life experiences have influenced your values and beliefs about public policy and the public good?”

In our communities, we engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.

- Agree on ground rules before a challenging discussion.
- Use “I” statements. For example, “I’m having trouble understanding that thought process” rather than “Your thought process is wrong.”
- Speak only for yourself, not for your “side.”
- Share points from someone on the “other side” who made valid points.
- Share valid criticism of your own side.
- If the other person says something offensive to you, re-engage respectfully and/or ignore and move on. • Stick to facts and avoid exaggeration.
- Avoid sarcasm.

In politics, we support principles that bring us together rather than divide us.

- Avoid name calling and labeling (e.g. “wingnuts,” “Bible thumper,” “libtards,” “snowflakes.” • Look at how you and your side may have contributed to the problem.
- Avoid characterizing other’s beliefs.
- Realize it’s OK to have strong opinions as long as we express them respectfully. • Criticize the policy, not the “side.”
- Avoid “they all” or “you all;” it’s a classic sign of stereotyping.

more information, visit our website at braverangels.org