

3 Ways to Discuss Conservatism With a Liberal

As the mantra of “don’t discuss politics or religion” repeats like a drumbeat in your head, you settle on “how about that game?”

Your desperate search for the safest question to ask a colleague as you wait for the morning coffee to brew is understandable. But you can find a way.

If conservatives refrain from engaging in the narrative, we let the media and politicians (ahem, President Barack Obama) paint us as crazy people who cling to “guns or religion.”

That’s where this column comes in—a place to help you talk to the people in your life (think neighbors, co-workers, family, friends) about conservative issues.

Trust me, it’s possible.

While I will explore a wide variety of relevant topics in the weeks to come, I’d like to start with something basic and broad: the term “conservative.”

Connecting

If you look at The Heritage Foundation’s definition, you find that conservatism is five pillars: free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values and a strong national defense.

So, there’s your answer, right? Just memorize and repeat when someone wants to know why you are conservative.

Wrong.

There is no faster way to kill a conversation than to

categorize your perspective like it's a to-do list.

When talking about any issue, you have to connect with the other person's interests. And that starts by being a good listener.

If you find your colleague doesn't give much insight into her ideology, ask questions. Find out what makes her tick by starting a conversation about her day at work or what's going on in the news. It's amazing how much you learn when you ask a question ... and then stop talking.

Comment

Once you gain insight into what issues someone cares about, the real work begins. You now have a blueprint for how to approach the conversation in a way that resonates with him or her, not *you*.

For example, if you find that your colleague talks about how expensive it is to run her side business, the free enterprise pillar is a good area to explore. Now, you're off to the races.

Here are a few strategies that work well:

1. Common Ground

Don't underestimate the power of establishing common ground. Doing so makes you seem reasonable and can go a long way in diffusing any tension or unwillingness to hear you out. If you're in agreement with someone on the goal, like his business succeeding, he is more likely to stick around and listen to your solution.

2. Examples

Don't underestimate the power of relatable examples, which can help people visualize your point. Often, the conservative principles we talk about can seem very abstract. Examples put

issues into context, especially when you can illustrate a point using a reference from their daily lives. For instance, if you want to promote free enterprise, talk about all the regulations their business currently faces and how there would be significantly fewer if free enterprise was more valued by our lawmakers.

3. Words

Finally, you have to use the right words. Don't even think about using the term "free enterprise." Instead, steal a page from the liberals' playbook: use emotion to push an agenda. Own words like "fair" or "choice," and statements like "you know better than a bureaucrat in D.C." Using emotional language will set you up for success.

Before you think that attempting a conversation is hopeless because "you don't know how liberal my co-workers are," keep in mind that people will listen if you talk about issues that matter to them. If done well, it's possible they won't recognize that you are approaching the conversation from a conservative perspective.

Take millennials. You may think it's hopeless to talk to that generation about free enterprise since so many view themselves as socialists. But when millennials are starting more businesses than the baby-boomer generation there's reason to question their dedication to socialism (do they really know what socialism is?) and an opportunity to use their entrepreneurship as a gateway to talking about free enterprise.

So, talk to a liberal today. Employ the strategies we just discussed and see if you can have a meaningful conversation about conservatism on her terms. Identify her interests, choose one of the five pillars that align with her interests, and use examples.

No pressure, but you may be the only conservative that tries to challenge her world view. And if we are going to preserve

the American dream, it's going to take all of us doing our part by first talking to the people we know.

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