

Civility and Local Government:

'Can't We All Just Get Along'? and Why
Good Fences Make Good Neighbors

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Civility

- the “way people treat each other with respect—even when they disagree”

• Promoting civility at public meetings; Concepts and Practice, Institute for Local Government (2003)

Is civility on the decline?



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Why care about civility?

- Incivility has a chilling effect on public participation
- Rudeness at work shown to decrease productivity (80% of respondents lost time to the incident or worrying about it).
- Incivility can create a security concern at public meetings (and workplaces).

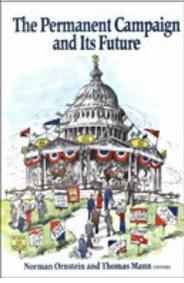
Bob Dole had it right...



Why the breakdown in civility?



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“Good fences make good neighbors”

Robert Frost, *Mending Wall*



Once you are elected, appointed, or hired...

•You are a public employee...

- And subject to all the common sense and legal limitations to what you say and do at work.

Illegal things

- [Race – Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
- [Color – Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
- [Religion – Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
- [National origin – Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
- [Age \(40 and over\) – Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967](#)
- [Sex – Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
- [Pregnancy – Pregnancy Discrimination Act](#)
- [Citizenship – Immigration Reform and Control Act](#)
- [Familial status – Civil Rights Act of 1968 Title VIII: Housing cannot discriminate for having children, with an exception for senior housing](#)
- [Disability status – Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#)
- [Veteran status – Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 and Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act](#)
- [Genetic information – Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act](#)

Nearly illegal things

- When do you plan to retire?
- "You people..."
- What did your parents die of?
- That dress looks great on you!
- He whined like a girl when I told him
- Sarah, you're a woman, what do you think about this issue?
- Where do you go to church?
- Are you pregnant?

Does this mean we can't have any fun at work?



What about incivility at public meetings?

- As elected or appointed officials we can model civility to each other.
- Being clear about how the public can comment and contribute can help.
- Establishing rules for the public speaking will help.

Some tips on running public meetings without mobs