

2022 MACKINAC POLICY CONFERENCE

 detroitchamber.com/how-local-leaders-are-setting-the-stage-for-developing-civil-dialogue-today-and-tomorrow/

By Miranda Ferris

June 2, 2022

Key takeaways:• The Civility Project, led by Nolan Finley and Stephen Henderson, develops workshops to engage in civil conversations.

- At Oakland University, the Center for Civic Engagement is setting an example for students on how to have civil conversations, featuring debates between government leaders and others with differing viewpoints.
- At Strategic Staffing Solutions, Cindy Pasky believes that getting to know her employees is at the root of developing a civil work environment and giving back to the community as an organization.

It's one thing to talk or write about civility, but it takes courage and thought to lead healthy conversations with those who have different viewpoints. However, one of the keys to civility and respect starts with finding common ground.

Margaret Trimer, vice president of strategic partnerships at Delta Dental, led the panel discussion, A Case Study in Next-Generation Civility, at the Mackinac Policy Conference on Thursday, June 2.

Nolan Finley, contributor, One Detroit and DPTV and editorial page editor at The Detroit News, shared the work he's doing with journalist Stephen Henderson to develop The Civility Project. Through this initiative, they lead workshops to ignite healthy discussions. It is based on the idea that the key to civility and building respect is understanding others' values and experiences.

"The core principle of The Civility Project is that all good people come to their decisions or their opinions in the same way," Finley said. "They take the facts, and they run them through their own experiences and values, and they come up with a point of view. If it's different from yours, it doesn't make them evil, stupid, or sinister."

Ora Pescovitz, the president of Oakland University, believes the future of developing healthy discourse starts with the next generation. She talks about how the university's Center for Civic Engagement is where students can watch and learn how to debate in a civil manner.

"First, we have to educate [students] about the issues, and then we have to teach them how to address them civilly," Pescovitz said. "Universities like to do two things: teach them about the concepts and the issues, and that requires teaching them about fact-based problems."

Pescovitz also stressed how diversity plays an important role in having civil dialogue: "Diversity is one of the things that we value...diversity of race, diversity of socio-economic status, diversity of thought, diversity of geography. There are so many ways that we value and treasure diversity today."

For Cindy Pasky, president and chief executive officer of Strategic Staffing Solutions, one of the hallmarks of her organization is civility. For her, that begins with face-to-face conversations, even while hiring thousands of people per year.

"We still have human contact with every individual we hire," Pasky said. "That is the first step to driving a team that has the right attributes and characteristics no matter what their age or their background."

A key takeaway from the panel was the importance of in-person conversation instead of debating on social media. The panelists also shared feelings of hope that the next generation will be able to execute more civil conversations, despite the need for additional work to be done in the here-and-now.

“We ought to be better curators of the world we’re passing on,” Finley said. “We’re handling a lot of problems in a lot of different areas.”

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