

Top takeaways for building, fostering civility in today's polarizing world

Business and community leaders from across the state came together virtually this week to discuss practical ways to overcome the current culture of communication in America that can be polarizing and intense, spilling over into our workplaces and daily lives.

“The Power of Perspective: Talk, Listen, Respect, Repeat.” was the last of the Michigan Chamber’s Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Series for 2022 – just in time for the November general election. It featured renowned journalists (and polar opposites) Stephen Henderson and Nolen Finely who co-founded The Civility Project (CP), along with moderator and CP Executive Director Lynne Golodner.

“Ensuring civility and fostering pragmatic problem solving is a cornerstone of the Michigan Chamber’s philosophy and work,” said Jim Holcomb, president & CEO. “We’re deeply committed to hosting events like this and conducting ourselves in a way that builds this culture at all times. A special thanks to The Civility Project, our sponsors and all those who joined us for this important and timely discussion.”

Holcomb noted that the complex issues and potential solutions being debated throughout our state and nation generate a multitude of varying opinions. That’s a good thing — being part of a dynamic and inclusive society underscores the importance of listening to differing viewpoints and strongly held beliefs. But how can businesses help keep things civil in turbulent and transitional times? And how do they make sure divergent opinions can be shared without disrupting the workplace with disrespectful behavior between co-workers?

Here are our top takeaways on how and where to start building civility and ways to have difficult conversations:

1. **Start with the person, not the issue.** Get to know each other. Who are they? Where are they from? Ask about their backgrounds and the experiences that have shaped their views. This builds respect for each other’s humanity and can often be a game changer for the ability to have a meaningful conversation.
2. **Change your goal – and stay curious.** It shouldn’t be to win, score points or convince someone else to your position (yet anyway), it should be to listen and learn or better understand. These conversations should be honest give and take. Starting with that simple — but foundational — goal is essential.
3. **Know thyself and look inward first.** Recognize where you’re at and why, and make a conscious commitment to be open minded and more tolerant. Use what you hear to challenge or affirm your beliefs.
4. **Know when to walk away, but agree to come back.** Sometimes it might just seem like it’s pointless or something cuts to the core. Unless it’s egregious, always agree to come back. That commitment to try again can make a real difference.

5. **Level set.** When a conflict exists, set honest goals. Committing to “not lecture” or to “listen first, speak later” helps lay a foundation for engaging in civil conversation.

For more insights and to catch the full event, check out the [recording now](#).

Check out The Civility Project or schedule your own session [here](#), and learn more about their upcoming “[Civility Day](#)” Tuesday, Oct. 25 at Oakland University.