

Political Preoccupation in the Work Place

Is the current political landscape having an impact on your work place? Many of us were taught as children that three subjects were off limits in “polite company”. Those were: Money, Religion and POLITICS. By all estimates, the increased polarization of national and global political views and the role of social media in today’s political discussion have had an effect on all communal settings, including work.

Betterworks, an HR company, reports that since the 2016 election, more people are paying attention to politics, and that includes when they are at work¹:

- 87% of employees “read political social media posts at work”
- 80% said they have discussed politics with professional contacts or colleagues
- Nearly 50% said they had seen a political conversation turn into an argument at work.

According to the American Psychological Association, one in ten American workers have experienced tension or stress from recent political discussion in the workplace.

In addition, *Human Resource Executive*² sites a survey by Randstad U.S. that found political conversations at work are common. According to the research, 49% of surveyed employees enjoy talking about politics at work, and 65% say they’re comfortable doing so. However, 55% report witnessing heated political discussions, with nearly 40% of respondents engaging in such discourse themselves. 72% say such discussions have caused them stress, and 44% say they’ve impacted their productivity.

It is unrealistic to ask, or demand, that employees avoid all political discussions at work. How is HR and company leadership expected to allow for discourse while not permitting disruption and work place harassment? You company should have a clearly stated policy against bullying or any activity that is intended to harass a co-worker. Be sure

¹ “Feeling Distracted by Politics? 29% of Employees Are Less Productive After U.S. Election” by Betterworks:
<https://blog.betterworks.com/feeling-distracted-politics-29-employees-less-productive-u-s-election/>

² “Is Politics Ruining your Workplace Culture?” by Human Resources Executive:
<http://hrexecutive.com/is-politics-ruining-your-workplace-culture/>

that your anti-bullying policies are revisited periodically. It is acceptable to inform all employees that HR, or leadership, will immediately intervene in any conversation that distracts employees, wastes company time, or has a negative impact on the company culture or operation. It is also acceptable to ask that all employees refrain from having politically provocative signs or collateral at their work station or in any common areas. If they are inadvertently brought into work, HR or leadership will request their immediate removal.

If you are a part of, or witness to, a political conversation that becomes contentious, encourage all parties to pause, respect one another, and return to work. Remind everyone there is not sufficient time in the work day to change anyone's mind about policy or party loyalty. If the current political climate becomes overwhelming for any employee, please encourage them to take advantage of your Employee Assistance Program (especially if they are concerned about confidentiality).

Above all, HR and leadership must set an example of respect, professionalism and safety; promoting a culture of teamwork and collegial conversations.

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