

Changing  
Times Call for  
Professionalism

## **MAMC Summer Conference**

**June 15, 2023**

Nancy Ohle

989.274.2039

nancy.ohle@gmail.com

Politeness has become so rare that some people mistake it for flirtation.

Why Can't  
People Just  
Be Civil?



# The New Norm

## The Incivility Continuum

### Negative Behavior

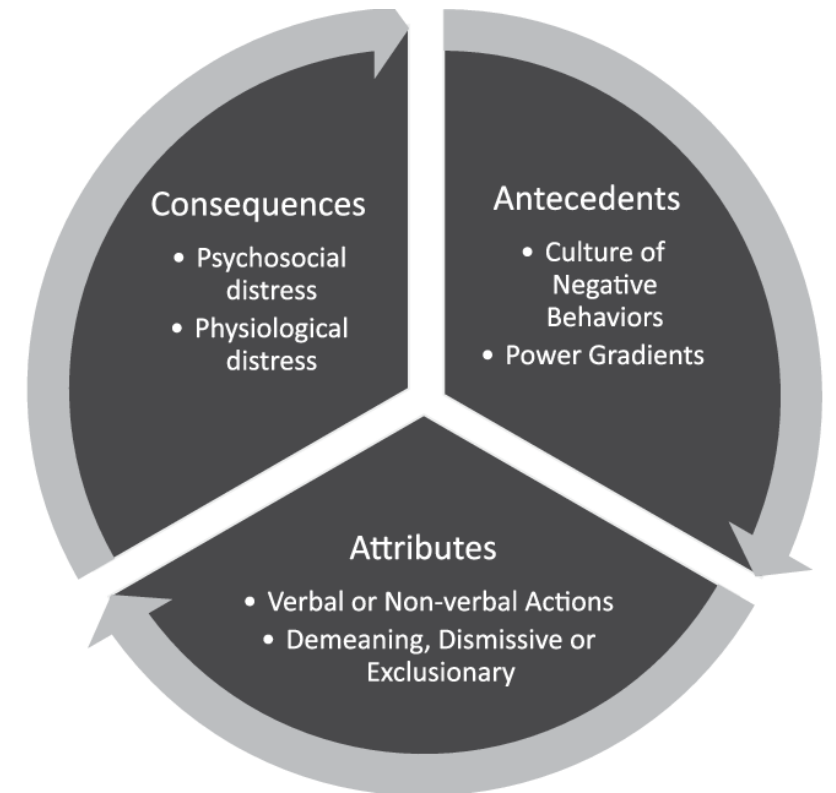
- Rude comments
- Insensitive actions
- Unintentional slights
- Complaining
- Gossip/rumors
- Cultural bias
- Crude jokes
- Profanity

### Verbal Aggression

- Yelling / loud voice
- Belittling comments
- Intimidation / threats
- Discriminatory comments
- Cursing at someone
- Humiliation

### Physical Aggression

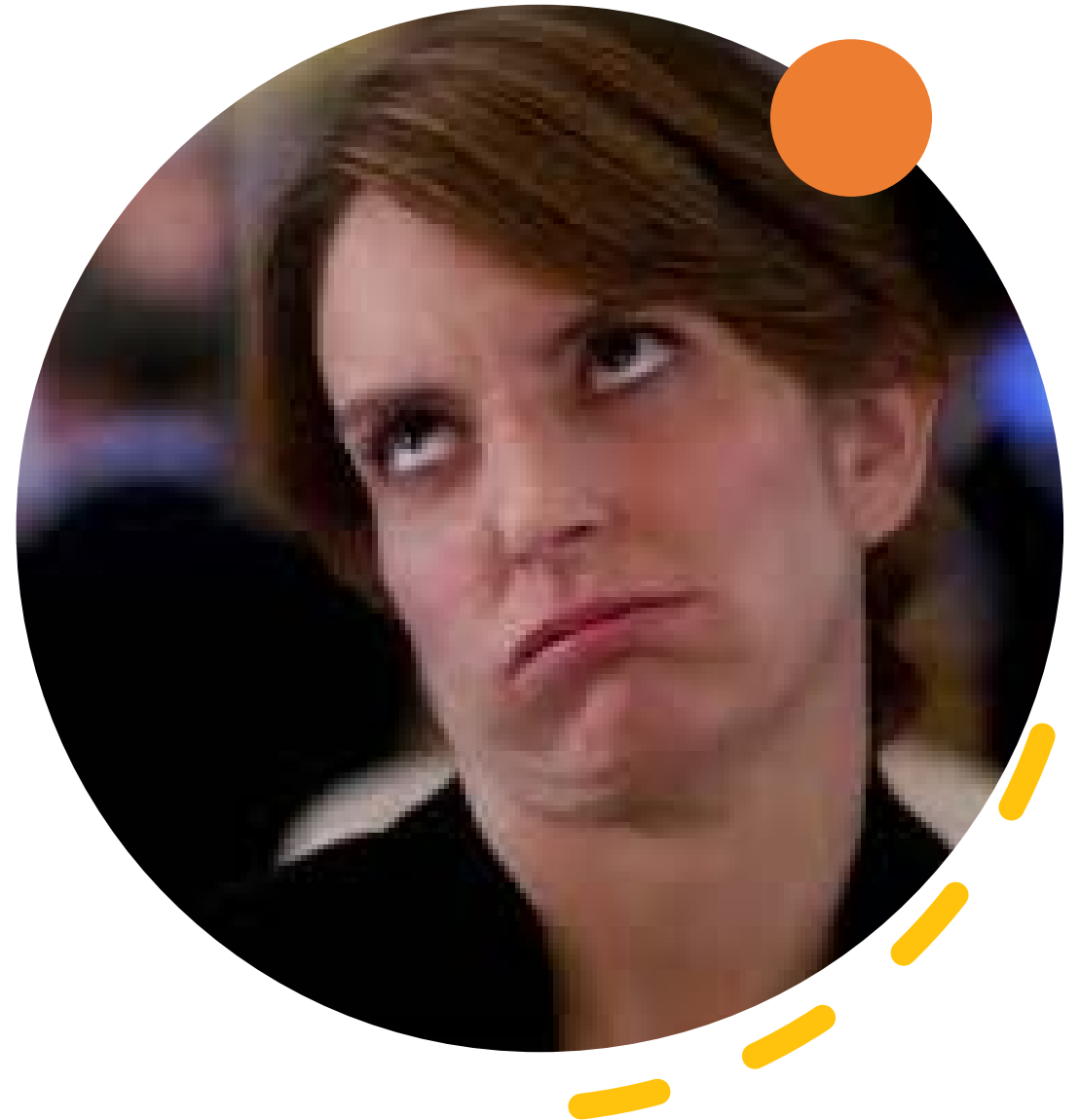
- Assault / Battery
- Throwing objects
- Violent outbursts  
(e.g., hitting the wall)
- Inappropriate touching
- Harassment



# Signs of Incivility

- Name calling
- Accusations of lying
- Profanity
- Belittling comments or put downs
- “Hate” speech
- Calls to threatening action
  
- Less obvious incivility is found in being disrespectful, angry, rude, discourteous, insensitive or demeaning toward others.
- Ex: Rolling your eyes, sarcasm in voice, exchanging “looks”

"It's the rolling of the eyes, the intonation of the voice, it's subtle."





# Aiming to Control You

- Incivility frequently is employed to gain the upper hand and, thus, ***control of the outcome.***
- Sometimes emotions get out of control
- Sometimes it is planned
  - Interest groups dividing around meeting rooms to give the appearance of the entire room advocating for their cause

# Passion or Incivility?

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What are you experiencing in terms of adversity and hostility?

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*Word descriptors, not enough time for stories*





What Did You  
Just See  
Happen in the  
Room?

# Will Yourself to Relax and Breathe

**“He who angers you conquers you.”**

- Relaxed muscles do not demand oxygen
  - You need oxygen to think and articulate clearly
- Limits cortisol flooding your system
- Oxygenates your brain
- Increases ability to think clearly





# Passion or Hostility?

## Regardless, people lose control....

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- When emotions are high, we have a PHYSICAL response that interferes with civility:
- Volume increases
- Filtering decreases
- Increased cortisol and/or adrenaline (Stress hormones)
  - Blood pressure rises
  - Short term memory decreases
  - Thinking ability impaired temporarily
  - Impacts social skills, mood, attention....



# Brain Chemistry

Thanks to MRI imaging technology, we have discovered that the part of the brain that responds to *emotional pain* is the same part that responds to *physical pain according to psychologist, Tom Bowlby.*

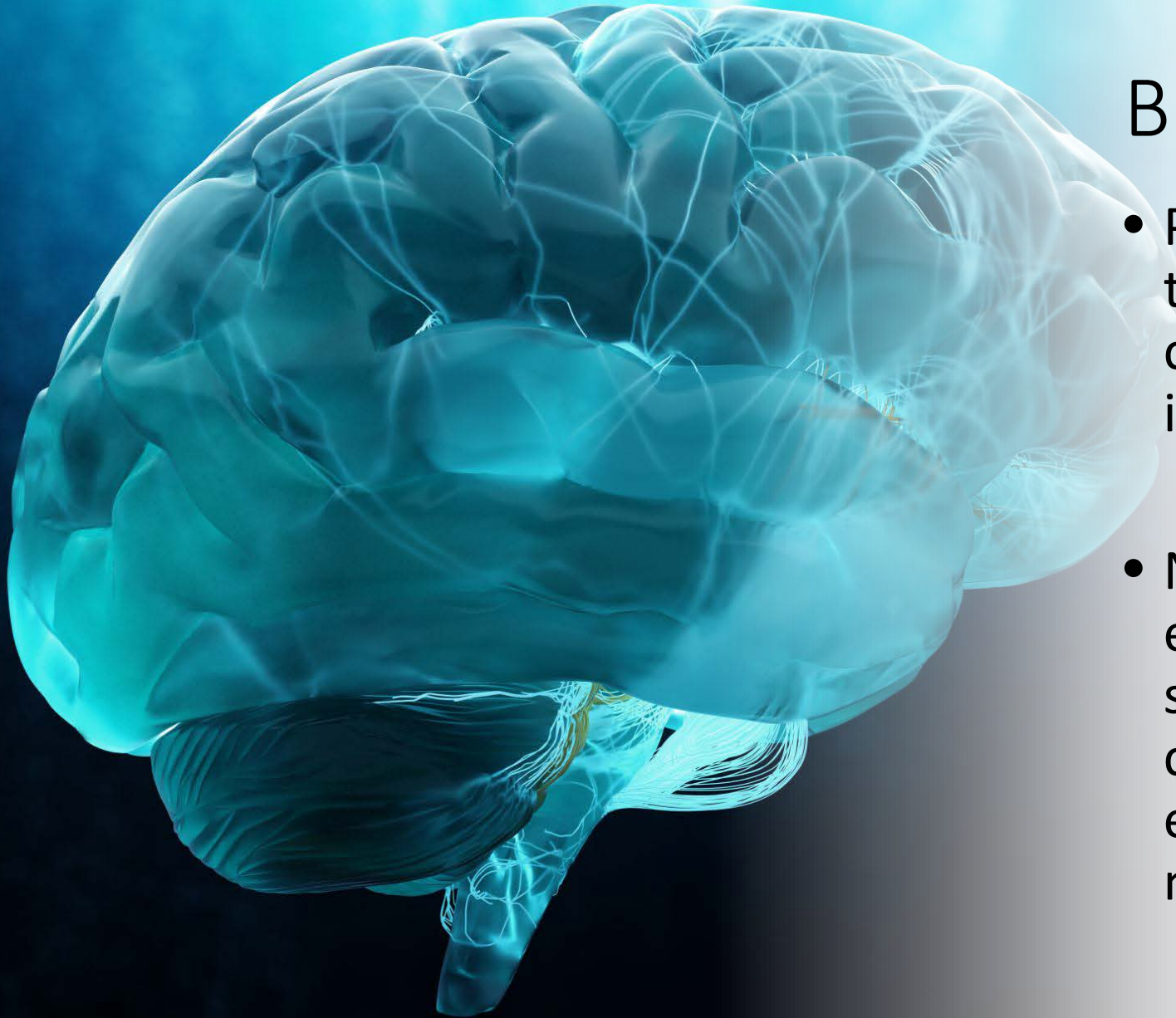
*This means that, to the brain, emotional pain is just as detrimental as physical pain.*



# Brain Chemistry

- “**Fairness**” is very important to the brain. A situation perceived as fair lights up the same part of the brain as seeing a loved one or tasting good food does.
- Situations perceived as unfair light up the part of the brain that feels **disgust**.

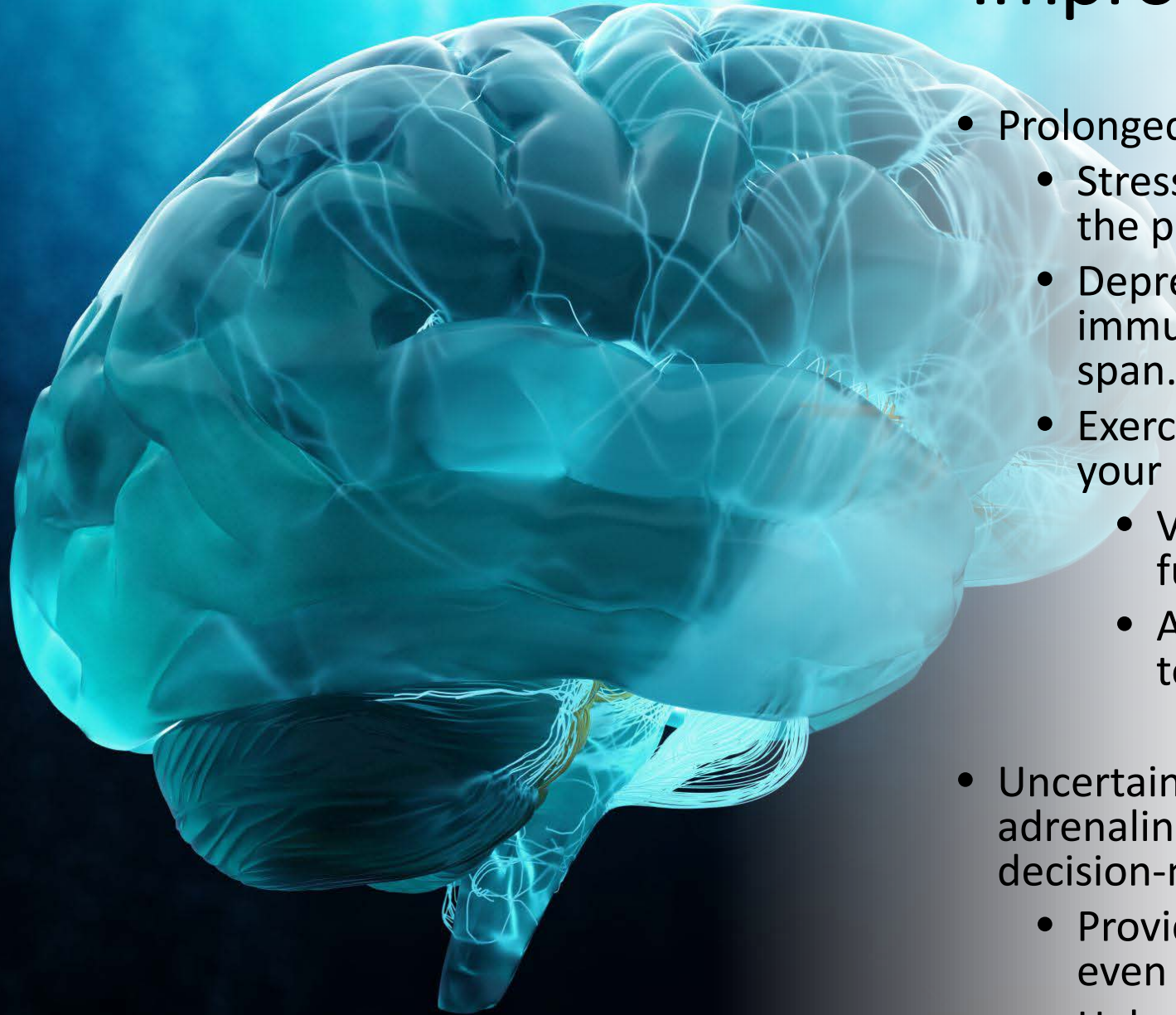




# Brain Chemistry

- Positive experiences lead to the production of serotonin, a chemical in the brain that can improve performance.
- Negative or painful experiences cause the secretion of cortisol, a chemical that has an adverse effect on memory, mood and mental function.

# Improve Brain Chemistry



- Prolonged stress will literally shrink your brain
  - Stress leads to cortisol and cortisol shrinks the part of your brain that stores memory.
  - Depresses your mood, suppresses your immune system and shortens your life span.
  - Exercise improves the flow of oxygen to your brain and reduces stress.
    - Vigorous 10 minutes improves brain function.
    - Aerobic activities increase blood flow to the brain and promote calm.
- Uncertainty in the brain leads to fear and adrenaline overload, reducing functioning and decision-making capabilities.
  - Provide people with clear information, even if negative, reducing uncertainty.
  - Helps increase safety

# Reprogram your Brain

- Positive and negative behavior is learned.
- When you do something; your brain makes connections to that task
  - For Example: The more you vent, the more you train your brain to vent.
  - ***You train your brain to focus on negativity instead of focusing on problem solving.***
  - You even increase your need to vent, meaning that you get angrier quicker when you are stressed.
- Train the brain to resolve problems ***positively.***
  - Asking someone who complains about a problem to present a solution will begin reprogramming the brain to stop the negativity cycle.



# Brain Chemistry: What Scientists Have Discovered

- The brain likes to be in control.
  - The safer it feels, the better it performs.
  - Involve others, including citizens and colleagues in decision-making
  - Perception of control over change or decisions helps people accept the change/decisions and get on board rather than going negative.
- One way to give control to citizens is to offer them alternatives
  - *Don't just ask "What would you like us to do?"*
  - *Instead, give two or three alternatives, ALL OF WHICH ARE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU, for them to choose from*





The “L”s Have It!



# Negativity: Tone and Language

Language  
directs  
thoughts

You think and  
act on your  
thoughts

*SO... Watch  
your  
language!*

# Watch Your Language

- Not just how you refer to others
- BUT HOW YOU *THINK* ABOUT OTHERS
  - *It'll show....*



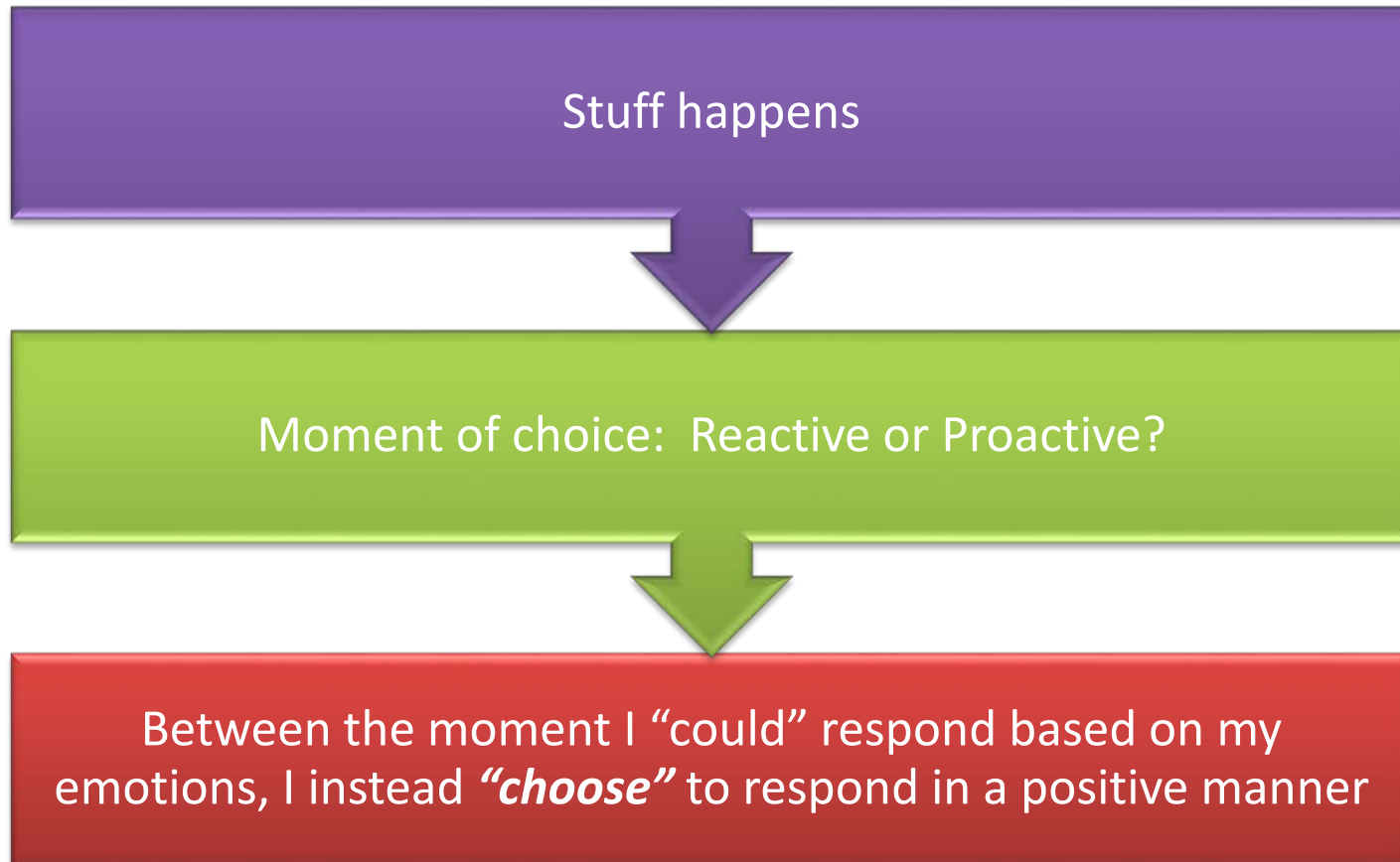


# Stuff Happens

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# Choose Positive: Re-framing



# Choose Positive Re-Framing

Re-framing IS looking at the situation differently

Re-framing is NOT lying to yourself

I may need to re-frame

- We have an angry citizen OR
- We have an opportunity to make things right

The result?  
**Positive influence.**



# Re-Framing Exercise

*In pairs, list 3 situations you've experienced or observed in the past week that were negative*

*Take turns re-framing each of those instances*

- *Don't get sucked into the negative*



# Quick to Judge?

“People average making eleven decisions about you in the first seven seconds of contact.”

- Rod Willingham

In person:

55% body language

38% tone of voice

7 % words

On the telephone:

87% tone of voice

13% words



## Set the Stage: **L**ook them in the eye when greeting

- Do you make eye contact with each person you greet?
- Do you appear relaxed and welcoming?
  - Do you **welcome** people both with your eyes and your greeting?
- Do you wave, bump elbows, shake hands?
- Do you tell them you're here to help them? *Do you mean it?*
- Do you tell people who are waiting how long you will be?
- Do you meet the standard of “personal and professional”?





# Look Welcoming Disarming

- Mentally compose yourself while speaking with the citizen
  - Shows on your face
- Smile when you speak
- Identify yourself/department/role
- Give people your office phone or perhaps an elected's phone number for follow-up
- Do not multi-task in person or on phone with citizens
  - If necessary, explain why you're multi-tasking, i.e. looking up information



# Self Check

When a citizen comes to your office or phones you with a concern is your first thought...

- “Oh my, here we go again?”
- “I don’t have time for this.”
- “How long is this going to take? I’ve got so much to do.”
- “So glad you called.” (rolling eyes)
- Why me?



# Re-frame your Thoughts

When a citizen comes to your office or phones you with a concern, reframe to:

- *“This must be important to them.”*
- *“Thank you for letting us know this.”*
- *“Tell me more.”*
- *“Who else might have this concern?”*
- *“So glad they came directly to me.”*



What do most people want from your **l**istening?

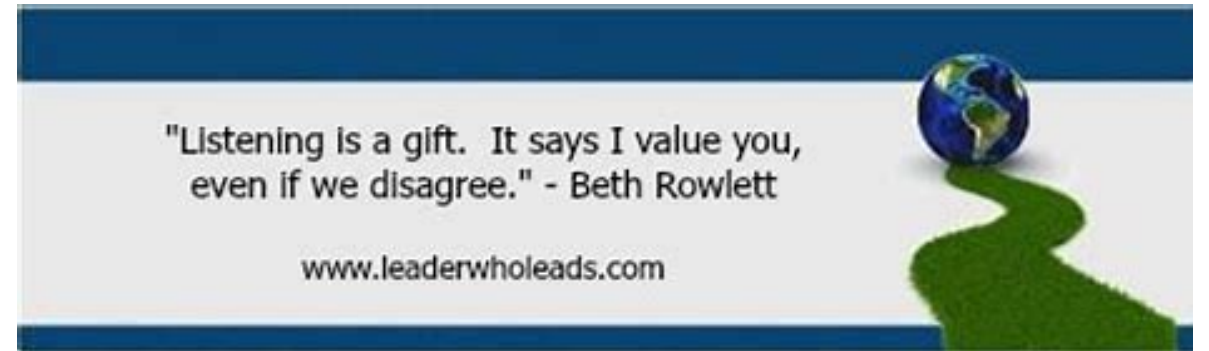




PSYCH 200

**MOST OF THE TIME, PEOPLE DON'T WANT  
ADVICE. THEY JUST WANT TO BE HEARD.**

# Show Others that You Value Them



“ Most people do not listen  
with the intent to understand; they listen  
with the intent to reply. ”

~ Stephen R. Covey

Actively **L**istening to **L**earn

# ACTIVE **L**istening Easier Said than Done





# **SHOW** that you are **L**istening

Acknowledge them.

- Keep eye contact
- Nod occasionally
  - *Unless you might telegraph agreement*
- Smile and use other facial expressions
- Note your posture
  - Open and inviting
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh
- Take notes when appropriate
  - Shows you're ready to follow up



# Active Listeners Follow these Six Points



1. Acknowledge your biases about what you might hear and check them at the door
2. **Paraphrase often** for full understanding of issues
3. Be careful in your use of “why” questions  
They may lead to defensive behavior
4. Check perceptions of what you **think** you see and hear
5. Ask yes/no questions to make sure you have agreement
  - “Am I correct in hearing that you requested your absentee ballot two weeks ago?”
6. Ask open-ended questions to get a fuller understanding of their issues  
Who, what, where, when, how

Don't Stop with  
Acknowledging



# Clarify What You've Heard

- Reflect by paraphrasing.
  - “What I’m hearing is...” and “Sounds like you are saying...” are great ways to reflect back.
  - Use body language to demonstrate you’re engaged.
- Ask questions to clarify.
  - “What do you mean when you say...”, “Is this what you mean?”
- Ask questions to probe for specifics.
  - “Tell me more about that.” “Who, what, where, when and how...”
- Summarize speaker’s comments periodically.
- *Clarifying helps further validate that the citizen is being listened to and heard by you*

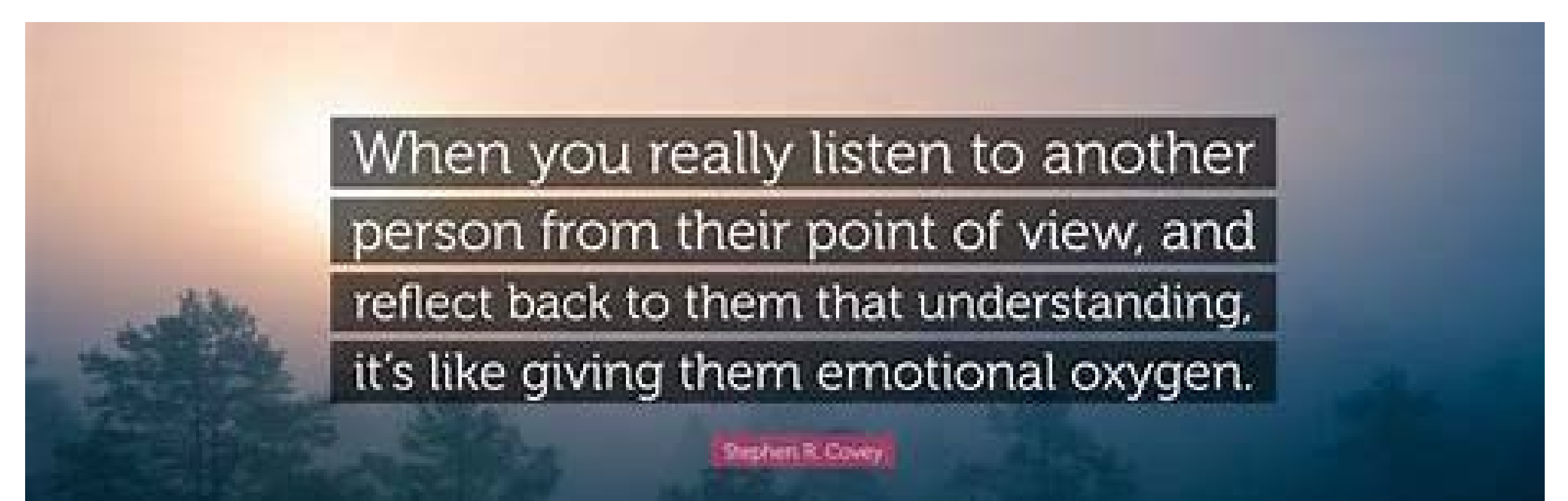


# Empathize where you can

When upset people get worked up, they are dealing at the emotional level, not the reasoning level.

- DO listen completely
- DO state your understanding of their feelings
  - Restating their issues may be confused with agreement
- DO try to identify their triggers
- DO NOT tell them what to think or how to feel

Remember that often the disruptive person is responding to their history, their values, their baggage, and you may represent that baggage whether accurately or inaccurately



When you really listen to another person from their point of view, and reflect back to them that understanding, it's like giving them emotional oxygen.

Stephen R. Covey

Supporting their Need to Be Heard

Covey: *Listen with the intent to UNDERSTAND*

- ***Be prepared to restate the other's point as effectively as they do***
  - Facts and ***their feelings*** about the issue
  - Demonstrate respect
  - *Stops the repeated efforts to make sure they're understood*
- Don't judge
- Don't interrupt with answers or counter-arguments
- Allow the speaker to finish first
- Preserve relationships despite differences





# When Listening, Your Response to What You Hear Telegraphs Proactive or Reactive Approach

## Reactive

- Rolling your eyes
- Sarcasm
- Laughing
  - Even if nervous laughter
- Raising your voice
- Cutting people off
- Debating
- Giving your perspective
- Multi-tasking

## Proactive/Professional

- Direct eye contact
- Listening completely
- Paraphrasing others for understanding
- Measured tone of voice
- Maintaining calm
  - React below their intensity
- Respectfully disagreeing when facts are mistaken
- Keeping your mind on the issue





**L**evel Set.

Show Respect and Kindness

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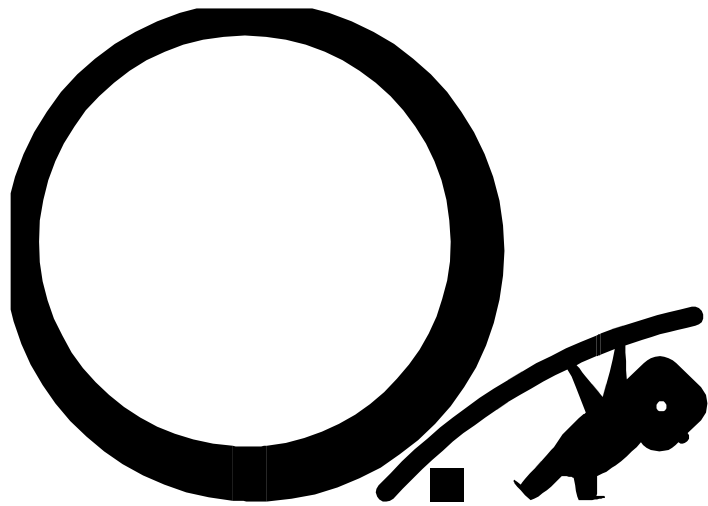
- Non-negotiables
- Address where you see it missing or abused

Treat everyone  
with kindness and  
respect, even those  
who are rude to  
you – not because  
they are nice, but  
because you are.

[WWW.LIVELIFEHAPPY.COM](http://WWW.LIVELIFEHAPPY.COM)

# Level Setting Attitude

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“Service under pressure works when you attack the problem, not the person.”

“What you call your customers will affect how you treat them, and how you treat your customers will affect how they treat you.”

“While your customers may not always be right, you always want to do right by them.”

# Level Set with “Them”

The logical side:

- Give people the right to be angry; it could be stress of the pandemic, political polarization, stressed out people
- Recognize aggressive behavior as the person needing control – and give them a little by giving them your attention while they have the floor
- Do not be drawn in by anger despite incendiary words
- Focus on the person
- Let them vent briefly and listen carefully
- React “below” their intensity – do not match it!
- **“Thank you” is your go-to phrase**
- Threats? Public safety or remove yourself immediately!



# Level Set Yourself

- Don't REACT to hostile people. Tell yourself to be calm; manage your physical reactions.
- Don't take this personally.
  - They are often mad at everything
- Have a plan in advance for responding to your emotional triggers.
  - Often the “other” is making it personal
- Breathe
- Empathize; understand, don't necessarily agree.
- Move to problem-solving mode



# Policy level sets by NOT making it personal

- Don't just quote policy
- Quote the *reasons* for the policy
- Defend the policy
- Don't throw policies "under the bus"
- If you can't defend it, work to change it if you can do that within regulatory guidelines
- *Means the citizen isn't being personally targeted but subject to the collective good*



Policies



Breathe some more....

and then breathe again.

Being negative only  
makes a difficult  
journey more difficult.  
You may be given a  
cactus, but you don't  
have to sit on it.

*Joyce Meyer*

meetville.com

**L**ead by Example.  
Stay a “Cut Above”

# For Day-to-Day Interactions with Hostile Citizens: Stay a “Cut Above”

- Show respect for others’ views despite their escalation
  - Respect doesn’t mean agreement
- Exercise good judgment; logical decision-making
- Know the difference between rules and guidelines
  - Citizens are coming armed with legalese
- Consider what impact vocal minority will have on decision-making
  - Do you need to gather more opinions in a more controlled setting?
- Consider long term and unintended consequences of decisions
  - Pressure? Emotions?
- Make decisions in keeping with the strategic goals of the community
  - Know and follow policy and ordinances



Take the high  
road; it's far  
less crowded.



# Lead by Example with Confidence: “A Cut Above”

- Can you exercise complete control?
  - Tone
    - Confidence
  - Pitch
    - High pitch sounds emotional or hysterical
  - Pace
    - Fast talking appears nervous
  - Body Language
    - Relax
    - Be open
  - Posture
    - Stand strong
  - Eye contact
    - Direct demonstrates confidence
  - Stay the Course
    - Know your objectives
    - Don't be diverted with multiple arguments





## Lead by Example: Approaches with Hostile People

- Maintain eye contact with them
  - Just looking at the disrupter shows you're listening and not intimidated
- Listen attentively for legitimate points/criticism
  - Jot these down. Do not respond.
- Don't second guess yourself
  - Lack of assertiveness makes you a target
- Keep control of the situation/meeting
  - Follow and uphold your guidelines
  - Don't think that holding public comments to the end will help. NOT.
- Don't be afraid to disagree
  - Express yourself openly yet professionally only after the other has been heard

# Lead by Example: Don't Argue

- Be calm. You will appear in control, centered and more respectable
- Build rapport
  - Be attentive; look people in the eye; acknowledge but be careful with the nod – may signal agreement
- Never debate someone who is entrenched in their views
  - This includes in “letters to the editor”
- Listen, carefully, then:
  - State your view of the situation
  - If no sign of listening or consistent rebuttals, state that you **respectfully disagree** and don't engage any further.



Can Electronic Communications Cut Down on Adversity/Hostility?  
**NO.** Often they **ESCALATE** hostility.

Subject to:

- Interpretation
- The tone you present
- The reader's literacy level
- Unasked and unanswered questions
- Choosing to read or share only part of your message with others



# Digital Footprint

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Whether email or text, information doesn't go away

- Implications?
- FOIA.

Receiver is not the only one receiving in most cases.

- How does this help/hurt you?



## Email: Tone is Key

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"Tone in writing refers to the writer's attitude toward the reader and the subject of the message. The overall tone of a written message affects the reader just as one's tone of voice affects the listener in everyday exchanges."

### *Unsure of your tone?*

*Start new email and do not put address in until you have come back later to re-read or had a colleague check your tone.*



# Appropriate Level of Difficulty

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## *Keep It Simple*

- English Language Learner?
- Familiarity with the policies?
- Acronyms and abbreviations?
- Industry language?
- Literacy level of reader?

# Responding to Hostile Emails



## Do's

- Put the original email away until calm
- Breathe
- Consider your desired outcome before responding
- Remember your response is likely to be shared
- Keep response simple and focused on the problem, not the person

## Don'ts

- Respond immediately
- Paraphrase or use their hostile language verbatim
  - Edited responses can be shared with media
- Take the bait
- Make them feel stupid
- Patronize or condescend
- Overcommunicate



# Professional Guidelines when Texting

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**Text only when there is an established relationship or phone/face to face not available.**

- Once you have developed a comfortable relationship in person, by phone, or by email, ask what their preferred mode of communication is and let it be your guide.

**Pay attention to timing.**

- Limit texting to work hours unless encouraged to text any time. Sending a text after hours signals urgency.
- Texting infringes on others' personal lives.





# More on Texting

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## **Know when to make a call.**

- Anything complex that might require further explanation should be handled with an email or a phone call.
- A short text could be a good start to inquire as to the best time to talk.

## **Keep it brief.**

- With voice-to-text capabilities, it's easy to send a rambling, lengthy text message. **DON'T.**
- If your message is more than a couple of sentences in length, a phone call or email is probably better.



# More on Texting

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## **Don't text confidential news.**

- As with other digital communication, be careful since your words can live forever in a screenshot. Once you hit send, it's out of your control.

## **Remain professional.**

- Every piece of communication is a reflection of your professionalism, including a simple text.
- Save emojis and memes for personal interaction.
- Avoid confusing abbreviations.
- Spelling and punctuation count.
- Refrain from text chat in professional texts.

# More on Texting

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## **Text clear, specific information.**

- Use texts for information that has little room for misinterpretation.
- Avoid attempts at humor or witty remarks - without a lot of context, your message could get lost in translation.
- Texting is FOIA-able.

## **Reply promptly.**

- Texting conveys a sense of immediacy.
- When you receive a message from a citizen, business, or your boss, respond in a timely manner.
- When a text is emotional, give yourself some time to think your response through before responding.





# More on Texting

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Be aware of your tone.

- Short and fast may come across as harsh.

**Always check before hitting “send”.**

- Autocorrect or voice to text may result in inappropriate or incorrect information being sent.

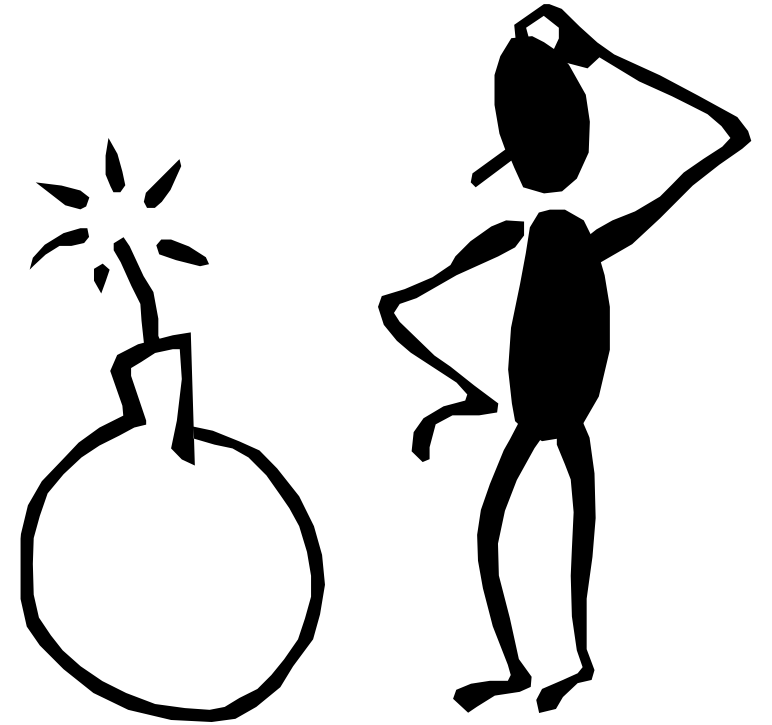
<http://www.businessinsider.com/texting-etiquette-rules-every-professional-needs-to-know-2013-9>


# Problem-Solving with Citizens?

## Try these things:

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- **Listen attentively**
  - Allow the citizen to vent
- **Listen attentively**
  - Be calm, *breathe*
  - Write things down
- **Listen attentively**
  - Don't respond emotionally
  - Acknowledge the emotions of the citizen – Name that emotion
- THEN, get down to business and fix the problem



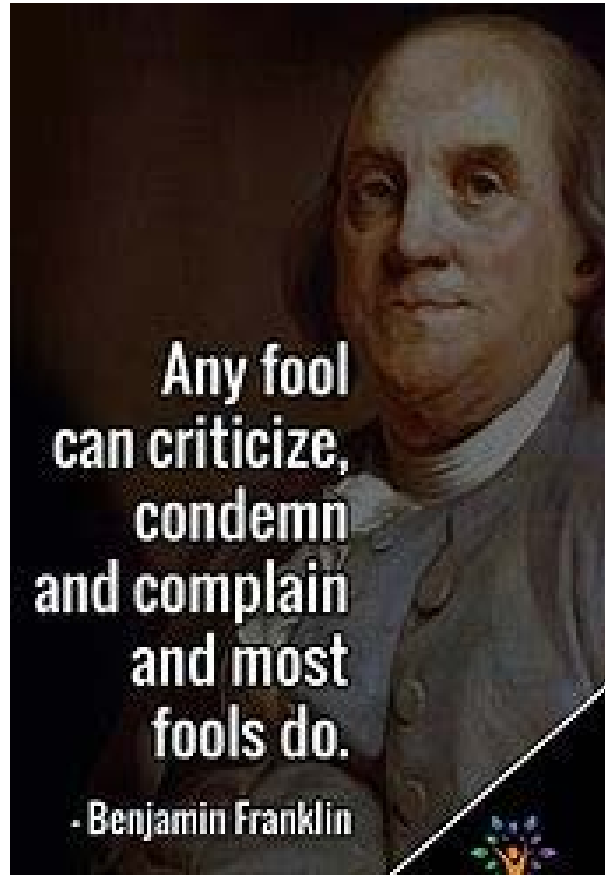
A scenic landscape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. In the foreground, there are some thin, dark vertical lines, possibly reeds or grasses. In the middle ground, there's a body of water reflecting the sky. In the background, there are mountains or hills. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

You can't change  
how people treat you,  
or what they say about you.  
All you can do is change  
how you react to it.

**SOME OF US  
SHOULD RECEIVE  
MEDALS FOR  
BEING ABLE TO  
BITE OUR  
TONGUES SO  
HARD WITHOUT  
BITING THEM OFF**

*Your tango*





**Any fool  
can criticize,  
condemn  
and complain  
and most  
fools do.**

**- Benjamin Franklin**

Leave being foolish  
to others!

# The Professional's Approach to Negativity: Starts with Thoughts and Works through Words

## **Negativity sucks away energy.**

*If part of the negativity stems from your attitude or perspective, commit yourself at the beginning of each day and each activity to find something positive in yourself and in others around you. If the people around you are negative and you can't change that, either distance yourself mentally and emotionally from the situation or view it simply as one obstacle you face in pursuing your own professional potential. Get in the habit of ending your day by practicing gratitude. Try finding several gratitudes each day to train your brain to find them routinely. **Stay focused on your own professional goals and make the best of the situation.***