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## Talking Politics at Work: Should You Speak Your Mind?

The 2016 political season is in full swing. And because it's a presidential election year with larger-than-life candidates, there's an added layer of interest. So, is discussing politics at work still taboo, or has it become more acceptable in the age of social media, when it can feel like everyone is talking about it? The answer somewhat depends on your audience, according to an Accountemps [survey](#).

Overall, 56 percent of respondents felt talking politics at work could result in hurt feelings and damaged relationships. The remaining 44 percent thought such conversations could be useful and informative.

There's a gender and age component to the findings – among the professionals polled, 66 percent of women thought talking politics at work was a bad idea, but only 48 percent of the men felt the same way. As for generational differences, 52 percent of respondents age 18–34 didn't see a problem with political topics in the workplace, whereas only 39 percent of those aged 35 - 54 felt the same way.

Regardless of how you would answer this question, political conversations are going to find their way into the workplace between now and November — and beyond. Should you or shouldn't you jump in? Here are some guidelines for talking politics at work.

**Gauge the relationship.** How well do you know the person? If you have a solid rapport with certain colleagues and know where they stand on most issues, you can likely talk politics without stepping on toes. But when it comes to casual acquaintances, play it safe and bring up other topics until you know them better.

**Tread lightly.** Many of us check news sites and social media throughout the day, which means there's a temptation to say to a coworker, "I can't believe what Candidate X just did!" Rather than just expressing delight or disgust at the latest news, you could take a more nuanced approach, such as, "Did you pay attention to last night's debate?" This type of approach can build relationships while helping you determine how to steer the conversation.

**Use tact and diplomacy.** Be sensitive to people who have differing opinions. Translation: Don't get on a soapbox and monopolize the conversation about how great your candidate is. Instead, make your point in a measured, balanced fashion, and listen to other viewpoints.

**Mind your social media.** It used to be that you wouldn't know other people's political or religious views until you had an in-person conversation with them. But with colleagues

connecting on Facebook and Twitter, some of those [professional boundaries](#) have become blurred. Pay particular attention to what you share on social media to avoid offending others and having them think negatively of you. Consider setting up private group conversations on Twitter or creating a custom group that excludes work friends on Facebook.

**Know how to walk away.** You don't *have* to engage with that coworker who's taking a political conversation to an uncomfortable place. If you've heard enough, politely excuse yourself and say you have to get back to work. Similarly, don't feel pressured into sharing your opinion. If someone asks what you think and you don't want to get into a heated discussion, you could use humor to diffuse the situation and say, "No way. I'm staying out of this one!"

**Know your company's policies.** Many larger employers have guidelines regarding political activities, such as passing out literature in the workplace or soliciting donations from colleagues. Even if yours doesn't expressly prohibit such behavior, play it safe by avoiding even the appearance of campaigning at the office, especially if you're in management.

Sometimes talking politics at work can keep you and others informed and deepen friendships with likeminded coworkers. The downside, of course, is that you risk damaging office relationships, which could make your job a lot harder — far beyond Election Day.

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