



Help Starts Here.

Washington State Employee Assistance Program

During Election Season: Supporting Your Employees When Emotions Run High

It's only logical that during this election season, politics and our feelings about the outcome will inevitably spill into the workplace. As much as we would want to ignore this reality, we need to be prepared to handle heightened emotions that might surface.

During these times, emotions can run high, and people are deeply invested in their beliefs, which can lead to more frequent and intense conversations. Successfully managing these dynamics requires a delicate approach that prioritizes respectful communication, inclusivity, shared purpose and harmony.

Employees, managers, and HR professionals must work together to maintain a respectful and productive environment. With thoughtful strategies and a commitment to respectful dialogue, workplaces can stay positive and unified, even in politically charged times.

- 1. First, Pause and Check in with Yourself.** Before you offer support to others, pause and check in with yourself. If you feel off-balance or your emotions are running high, re-establish your own sense of being calm and centered by trying a practice such as Box Breathing: inhale for four counts, hold for four, exhale for four, then hold again for four. Repeat for a few minutes or as needed. [Box Breathing Guide](#)
- 2. As Much as Possible, Maintain Neutrality.** Employees are more likely to remain loyal to organizations where their perspectives do not impact their professional standing or relationships with their managers. As a manager and leader, your ability to remain neutral and hear differing perspectives can help foster a greater sense of trust.
- 3. Encourage Respectful Dialogue.** All conversations, including those about politics, can and should be conducted respectfully. Encourage employees to communicate in a way that's inclusive, open, and curious, ensuring all team members can feel safe and valued. Setting some ground rules about this may help: listen to understand, no advice or opinion giving, remain curious and enter the conversations from a place of curiosity and to learn.
- 4. Practice Active Listening.** [Active Listening](#) involves truly hearing what the other person is saying instead of just waiting to speak. Even if you disagree, focus on their perspective by summarizing key points and asking clarifying questions. Aim to understand, not change their mind.

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- 5. Focus On Shared Goals & Values.** Remind employees that, no matter their political views, they all contribute to the same team objectives. Emphasize the importance of working together to achieve these goals. This can shift the focus away from a divisive topic and foster a sense of community and purpose.

Shared values may include:

- **Having respect for all:** Demonstrating open-mindedness and respect toward diverse viewpoints and backgrounds.
- **Lead with Integrity:** Upholding honest and transparent communication.
- **Belonging and Inclusivity:** Creating an environment where everyone feels valued regardless of their political beliefs.
- **Team Collaboration:** Actively working together toward shared objectives.

- 6. Address Performance, Not Politics.** When political discussions become distracting, address the resulting performance issues rather than the political conversations themselves. Framing the issue in terms of its impact on productivity keeps the matter objective and relevant to workplace expectations.

- 7. Workplace Civility & Respect.** Your existing policies on appropriate and expected workplace behavior, free from harassment, and focused on inclusivity for all may already address disruptions coming from political divisions. These policies can be reinforced if discussions cross the line and become personal attacks or create a hostile environment.

- 8. Find Common Ground.** When political discussions get heated, steer the conversation towards areas of agreement. It may be challenging to find common ground on topics that people feel deeply passionate about, but identifying collective values or goals can help bridge the divide and maintain a sense of community in the workplace.

- 9. Know When to Walk Away.** Despite your best efforts, political discussions can become too intense or emotionally charged. Recognize when it is best to step away and prioritize your well-being. Removing yourself from a tense situation lets you maintain composure and signals to others that the workplace should remain a professional environment.

Remember -- [the EAP is here for you.](#) Don't hesitate to turn to us for support with your specific situation: [request an organizational consultation online](#) or via phone at 877-313-4455.

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