

# Agree to Disagree is a Copout



## Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will be able to better articulate their perspectives and thoughts in a conflict situation.
- Through practice of language and following of simple steps, participants will be able to navigate their own personal and professional conflicts.

## Supplies:

- Flipchart
- Markers
- Slide Show

## Facilitation notes:

- Items in *italics* are notes for the facilitator
- Items in highlighted in gray are questions the facilitator should pose to the group
- Items in regular font should be shared with the participants, but not necessarily read verbatim. The facilitator can put them in her own words to make it conversational.
- The left-hand column below gives you lots of information! The images are the corresponding slides to what is listed in that section of the written content. The numbers (example "5/5" or "5/10") refer to timing. The number to the left of the slash indicates the amount of time that section should take to facilitate. The number to the right of the slash is the total amount of time that will have elapsed by the end of that section.
- "Slide" indicates that the PowerPoint should be advanced. Make sure you review the slides along with the facilitation guide in preparation for the program. Sometimes "Slide" advances to the next, and sometimes it starts animation within the same slide. Practice!
- Make sure to check the slides! Sometimes formatting can be strange when documents are downloaded.

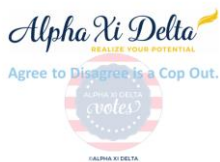
5/5

## Welcome and Introduction

Hello and welcome!

This program was created as part of Alpha Xi Delta Votes, an initiative to help our members feel confident and have the tools needed to be civically engaged, feel connected to others and have conversations that are civil and productive.

Navigating conflict and confrontation is a part of human nature, it's healthy to disagree. When we have a disagreement it opens us up to the opportunity to discuss and better understand each other's perspectives. But how often do we pursue the conversation? It is easy to get frustrated or "agree to disagree", but this type of action can inhibit growth and development. With appropriate tools and language, we learn how to not just resolve a conflict, but to transform it into a stepping stone for furthering ourselves and our chapter. *(Slide)*



5/10

# Disagreement

As Bret Stephens describes, in his article, *The Dying Art of Disagreement*, “Intelligent disagreement is the lifeblood of any thriving society.” So why do we seem to have so much trouble progressing our conversations when we can’t see eye to eye? To create safe spaces we tailor our environment to be more “agreeable”; our neighborhoods, social media, what we read or listen to, who we talk to, etc. But what happens when we create these safe spaces, do they provide a space *for* thought, or *from* thought? Leaning into disagreement is uncomfortable, but when done productively we understand more about the topic at hand, and can even find common ground.

Today, we are going to spend some time pushing ourselves, outside of our comfort zones, to learn more about how we can be more disagreeable in a positive and effective way. To start, *(slide)*

Think of a topic or idea that you, or others disagree on. An example I’m sure we can all think of, is politics or an issue that is politically driven. While this is an excellent example, for today’s purpose, let’s choose some other topics that we can use, as we learn and apply some new, helpful tools for disagreement. Some examples to get you started could be lowering the drinking age to 18 versus 21, or another example, could be having a third party vendor at social events versus BYOB.

What topics or ideas come to mind that you or others disagree on, can you provide an example?

*Solicit responses and take note on flipchart*

Thank you so much for those examples, I want you to keep these in mind, as we walk through some next steps together. *(Slide)*

“Intelligent disagreement is the lifeblood of any thriving society.”

-Bret Stephens, *The Dying Art of Disagreement*

What are some examples of topics we disagree on?



*Changing our Habits*

KYLE PHILIPSON

20/30

# Changing our Habits

While it may seem unlikely, if you take the appropriate steps you can leave a disagreement enlightened, or with an entirely new perspective. With a partner, please select one of the example topics of we just gave.

*Allow time for partnering and selection of a topic.*

Now, with your same partner, decide who will be for and who will be against the topic you chose, even if you both feel the same way, go ahead and pick one for the sake of practicing.

*Allow time for discussion.*

Excellent, let’s continue. *(Slide)*

The first step to changing our habits?

1. Don’t assume bad intent

*Changing our Habits*

1. Don’t assume bad intent.



KYLE PHILIPSON

There are many factors that influence people's ideas or understandings, just because it's different, doesn't mean it's bad or wrong.

**(Slide)** With your partner, I want you to identify some stereotypes or attitudes we might assume go hand and hand with each side of your argument, the side that is for it, and the side against it.

For example, if the topic you chose is lowering the drinking age to 18, you might assume someone who is against it is modest and conservative, or maybe they are over 21 and it doesn't affect them, so they are less invested. Comparatively, we might assume someone for it is rebellious or irresponsible in nature, maybe they support it because selfishly they want to drink without getting in trouble.

*Allow time for discussion. Further discuss example for clarity if participants get stuck.*

Great! Would anyone like to share some of the stereotypes we might assume accompany these topics of disagreement?  
*Allow time for responses and provide appropriate affirmation.*

Thank you! So now that we have recognized the assumptions or bias we might have in response to a particular disagreement, we can probably assume, that in most situations, we don't fully understand why the other person is for or against it. The best thing to do when we don't understand someone's perspective? **(slide)**

2. Ask questions.

If you don't understand the why, ask. If you think you heard something one way, ask for clarity to confirm your understanding and to show your respect to the other person. **(Slide)**

Take some time to ask your partner about their "stance" on the topic you chose. If you need more clarity, ask a follow up question. Why are they for/against it? What is their previous experience with said topic? Ask them what they mean when they say "\_\_\_\_\_", etc. Go ahead and take some time to discuss the "why" with your partner.

*Allow time for discussion.*

Now that you've had some time to discuss, did anyone share anything interesting or hear something their partner said that stuck with you?

*Allow time for responses and provide appropriate affirmation.*

The next step can be easy to forget. **(slide)**

3. Stay calm.

Identify some stereotypes or attitudes we might assume go hand and hand with your opponents side of the argument.

2. Ask Questions.



Questions to Consider

- Why are they for/against it?
- What is their previous experience with the topic?
- Ask them what they mean when they say \_\_\_\_\_.

3. Stay calm.



The worst thing we can do is make accusations, raise our voice, or lose our temper. This will only widen the divide between finding common ground and understanding.

Instead try.... (Some breath-taking exercises, taking a moment and stating that you're going to take a moment, etc. A simple google search may be able to give some ideas)

And last, but not least *(slide)*

4. Make the argument if you can.

What if we approach things from our partner's perspective? If we state our claims and ideas in a way they can understand, we will be able to better communicate. The goal isn't always to change the other persons mind, so much as it is to help us find common ground and help them to understand our point of view. **Something to remember here is HOW you're saying something can be just as important as WHAT you are saying. Think about your body language, your tone and your facial expressions. All of this matters if you're trying to find common ground. (Slide)**

This time with your partner, you will each have 30 seconds to make your final claims and statements. Using the understanding you have of the other persons perspective, remember to also use appropriate body language (eye contact, respectful tone of voice, open posture and stance, etc.) and to really listen to what the other person is saying, not just thinking of how you'll respond. Take some time to think for a moment what your closing message will be.

*Allow some time for reflection.*

Is everyone ready? Okay, go! *(Slide)*

*30 sec. then (Slide) switch (Slide), and time for another 30 sec. After each partner has shared, call the group back together.*

4. Make the argument if you can.



KARL PERKINS

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KARL PERKINS

30

KARL PERKINS

20/50

## Changing our Minds

*Discuss the following Questions:*

1. Was your mind changed or swayed by the end of your disagreement?
2. If you didn't change your mind, what did you learn something new?
3. What would it have taken to change your mind?

KIM PAUL DE CROM

*Have you ever had your mind changed?*



KIM PAUL DE CROM

Now you have had an opportunity to practice “disagreeing” productively, in our pairs, let’s take some time to discuss and reflect on the following questions *(Slide)*:

Was your mind changed or swayed by the end of your disagreement?

If you didn’t change your mind, did you learn something new? What was it?

What would it have taken to change your mind or challenge your perspective?

*Allow for discussion for 3-5 minutes, then call back together.*

Let’s discuss how we responded to these questions, would anyone like to share something they, or their partner said?

*Solicit responses.*

*(Slide)* If not today, have you ever experienced a time when you disagreed and then after discussing the topic, gained new insight or changed your mind?

Take a moment and think of a personal experience in which you started a conversation on one side, but after discussion or giving it some thought, you changed your mind or gained a new insight.

When you are ready, with your same partner from before, discuss how and why your way of thinking was changed or redirected.

*Allow for some time for partner sharing Approx. 5 min. then wrap up discussion.*

Would anyone like to share an example they have or heard from their partner?

*Allow for some time for response and provide appropriate feedback.*

Either today, or in the personal example you shared, you may notice some commonalities. What does it take to get you to reconsider your stance or change your mind, is it the information you received? Maybe it’s how the other person in the conversation handled themselves and how they communicated.

What are some examples of what it would take for you to question your stance, or change your mind?

*Solicit responses. Some examples may include:*

- to overcome a certain fear or hang ups
- time to give the new idea thorough thought
- a real life example or evidence-based statements
- to try it
- a judgement free zone



Ultimately we each have a core set of beliefs we live and make decisions by. When someone speaks to us in a way that is considerate of our needs and ideals, the information feels more personalized and easier to comprehend. We feel better informed and more capable of communicating, because we can understand both sides. Let's revisit an example topic we came up with earlier.

I may feel that the drinking age should be lowered to 18 as opposed to 21. On one hand, it would more closely align with the other rights and privileges of being an adult. It would also likely result in less chapter conduct issues 😊 On the other side of the coin, it would cause a lot of havoc on our current system. It also would mean less maturity that the three extra years can bring.

To disagree well, you must understand well. While we each hold our own opinions, the purpose of having them is not to separate them from facts, but to use facts as a tool to support our ideas and build a bridge to the "truth". *(Slide)*

Take for example, Manhattan, you can arrive to it by many routes. Each bridge, and some tunnels, being its own unique path. The "truth", which is large, can be reached by many different bridges with completely different designs and ideas.

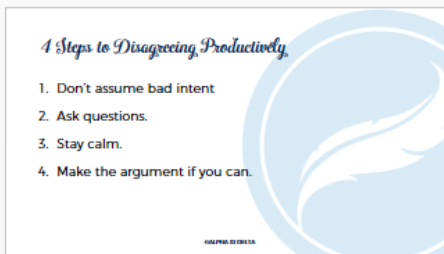
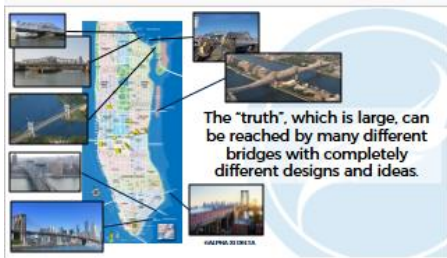
Using facts, take time to listen and understand. Think about your spoken and unspoken language, are you raising your voice? Is your body tense and unapproachable? These cues can affect your attitude and disposition, impacting how others receive you and your ideas. Open your body language and your mind to entertain unpopular ideas. Give others respect or sympathy, the goal of disagreeing is not to change each other's mind. The goal is to better connect and understand. No agreement necessary. *(Slide)*

5/55

## Closing

Thank you so much for taking the time to share and to "disagree" with us today. *(Slide)* As we close I want reiterate the 4 steps to disagreeing productively. *(Slide)*

1. Don't assume bad intent  
Just because something is different, doesn't mean it's bad or wrong. *(Slide)*
2. Ask questions.  
Find the "Why" behind the other person's ideas. *(Slide)*
3. Stay calm.  
Treat the other person as you want to be treated. *(Slide)*



4. Make the argument if you can.  
When it's appropriate, or opportunity allows you to argue your point respectfully, you create a space for progressive and constructive discussion.

Remember, the goal is not to convince someone or to come to an agreement. We won't always agree, but that's okay, neither did Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, or Galileo. Their disagreements made for vital change and progress in society. There is always something to learn from the perspective of others, even when it's uncomfortable or different. When we close ourselves off, we end up making assumptions that perpetuate and deepen misunderstandings, further generating resentment. But what if a person you're speaking or interacting with is making statements that are harmful or impose on your rights? Then you have every right to walk away. You do not have to engage with every person that comes your way. Your wellbeing and who you choose to challenge (or not), listen to (or not), and give your time to (or not) is completely up to you. If a conversation is, or is perceived to be harmful, you don't have to feel pressure to engage in it. However, if you choose to, you now have some tools in your back pocket for navigating the conversation.

So, we challenge you to seek out people that are different, exercise patience, and to keep an open mind that your perspective can change. When we can properly navigate conflict, everyone (including ourselves) is able to do their best thinking. To be more familiar with what we disagree on, is to better understand what we support. **(Slide)**  
Don't you agree?

