



Disagreements Bring Balance: When Silence Isn't Peace

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Why do people stay silent in disagreement? Many avoid disagreement due to empathy, anxiety, or flawed logic.

This is the 7th article in our Peacemaking Series. The previous article: [The Complex Art of Christian Kindness: Building Bridges](#)

I don't agree, but I'm not saying anything.

I'm going to keep my opinion to myself. I don't want to rock the boat. I'm just trying to avoid contention; I don't want to argue or start a fight. I want to maintain the peace, get along, and play well with others. If I say something, it's a party foul: nobody likes a party-pooper, buzzkill, debbie-downer, wet blanket, tight-wad, stickler, contrarian, Nazi, one-upper, smart-aleck, know-it-all, skeptic, cynic, nay-sayer, zealot, fanatic, troublemaker, right-winger, left-

winger, fence-sitter anyways! There's a lot of pressure to *choose a side* and *be a team player*. It takes less effort to go *with the flow, blend in, keep my head down, and roll with the punches*. Right now, *I'm being selfish*: I need to *let others have their turn*. It's important to *listen to those you disagree with, be open-minded, and have diversity of thought*. If things get *out of hand*, then *the system will correct itself*. Plus, *it's not like they'd listen anyways...right?*

There are so many “good” reasons to stay quiet.

Many haven't had effective communication patterns modeled for them. Online, clickbait writing and algorithms tend to exploit extreme opinions and communication tactics, promoting the most extreme and loudest “shouted” opinions because it maximizes engagement. For the same reasons, so many movie conflicts get “resolved” by shouting matches, fist-fights, gun-fights, building smashings, battles, death, and war. Not to say these problems are new; they're only the most recent evolution in [negative gossip](#) and tall tales. We are saturated with extreme portrayals of what disagreements can lead to.

But disagreeing is so important. I'm sure we've all felt the crushing blow of accountability when hearing variations of the quote, “Bad men need no better opportunity than when good men look on and do nothing” ([Mill](#)). But realistically, not all disagreements are good versus evil; rather, they distinguish among variants of “good, better, best” ([Oaks](#)). Unilaterally shared information, collaboration, and perceptive participation are necessary in resolving such issues.

The seventh of its kind, the following article is a compilation of research used when creating a video for The Skyline Institute's playful yet informative videos on conflict resolution called the *Peacemaking* series. This month's video, “[Disagreements Bring Balance](#),” teaches the value of and tactics for voicing one's opinion, even when disagreeing.

Our intent is to help people embrace vocal disagreement through an empathetic framework that can align actions with beliefs. There are several contributing factors affecting one's ability to disagree effectively, such as personality, emotions, and verbal tactics.

What Makes Me So Special?

It is clear our genetics—as much as how we were raised—have a significant influence on our personalities. Psychologists often use the Big Five personality traits—or Five Factor Model (FFM)—to describe our natural tendencies. The traits are Openness (to new experiences), Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—often remembered by the acronym OCEAN. For our purposes, Agreeableness is most relevant. Agreeableness describes the tendency to be compassionate, cooperative, and trusting in social interactions. Individuals high in agreeableness are typically described as friendly, patient, and often prioritizing the needs of others—seeking to maintain positive relationships. Personalities oriented toward agreeableness are just going to have a harder time finding the internal motivation to disagree. Those who score low in agreeableness (or high in disagreeableness, depending on how you wish to phrase it) will find the motivation to disagree easier. However, they will find it harder than agreeable people to express their disagreements in a socially effective way.

Consider the irony of staying silent because of wanting to respect and not contradict someone else's opinion. It's almost as if saying, *Their opinion is important, they should share it, and I should listen to it. In fact, everyone's opinion is important, everyone should share, and we all should listen. Except for my opinion, I will not share it, and therefore, no one can listen to it.* When stated in this way, the illogic is exposed.

As an example of this same sort of illogic, one co-author of this current video works as a mental health professional at an OCD clinic and interacts with clients who have determined they are unworthy of God's forgiveness, often diagnosed as scrupulosity. When he asks them, "Who is God willing to forgive?" They reply, "Well, everyone." He then, smiling, gently asks them, "So what makes you so special?" To which they often chuckle, recognizing their own mistaken perception of themselves. So for those of us who don't share our opinions out loud for fear of whatever reason, consider: What makes *me* so special that I'm the only exception to the rule 'every voice matters', or 'two heads are better than one'? We invite you to consider yourself responsible for voicing your perspective; every voice matters.

Brene Brown's research on these ideas clarifies [the power of vulnerability](#). Vulnerability is a social currency that strengthens and deepens relationships. Relationships die when only one side is vulnerable. Internally, if I consistently diminish and disregard my own voice by not sharing my opinions out loud, I reinforce a negative perception of my own thoughts and ideas or a negative perception of other people's opinions about my

thoughts and ideas; and, repetitive silence can lead to resentment and **emotion bottling**. Externally, it will eventually impact my relationships with others “because, as it turns out, we can’t practice compassion with other people if we can’t treat ourselves kindly” (**Brown**). Instantly obliging without voicing one’s opinion excludes the other participants from the opportunity of increased perspective and possible collaboration (to be explored more in an upcoming article). *Intrapersonally* and *interpersonally*, a deep sense of connection can only come from authenticity: letting go of who one thinks *they should be* in order to be who *they are*. The principle of sharing isn’t just for kindergarten. To truly connect with others, we also have to share our honest thoughts and feelings—starting with ourselves.

Some might not share because they think other people aren’t worthy of their opinion. It’s worth considering whether that reluctance comes from a place of insecurity masked as arrogance—often, what looks like detachment is a quiet need for compassion.

Tactics for Assertive Communication

With motivation lined up inside of an empathy-oriented framework that is mutual empathy toward self and others, we can move on to verbal strategies that help structure disagreements effectively. **Last month**, we highlighted the importance of curiosity—like asking questions and restating the opposing view *before* expressing disagreement. This month, we share tools for *expressing* disagreement. These help foster “**emotional safety**” in our relationships.

Assertive communication clearly states personal needs with consideration for the needs of others. This is in contrast to passive or aggressive communication. Passive communication is preoccupied with the needs of others, inappropriately apologetic, and timid or silent. Aggressive communication focuses only on personal needs, often with an intensity, blame, or shame at the expense of others. Then, of course, there is that toxic cocktail of passive-aggressive communication that shames others while never clearly expressing personal needs. Just like other problems, the best way to address passive-aggression from others is not to ignore it (that would be passive), or by *attacking it head-on* (that’s aggressive), but by 1. keeping emotions in check, 2. directly addressing the negative behavior, and 3. asking direct questions. For example, you might say calmly, “It looked to me like you rolled your eyes. That makes me feel small and disrespected. I think I’ve upset you—do you want to talk about it?” This is what assertive language

reads like; it clearly states personal needs; it is unambiguous and addresses the actual issue (which is not eye-rolling); and, it creates space for them to express their needs and feelings; also, it doesn't force a conversation. However, even if the language is assertive, but the emotion is uncontrolled, then the communication is no longer assertive: the emotional intensity tips it into aggressive communication. The manner of conduct and the language expressed contribute to the quality of communication, whether it's aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, or assertive.

Communication that is couched in personal experience doesn't shift blame and direct anger toward other people. Instead, it focuses on personal feelings and personal perceptions of the situation. The Gottmans--marriage relationship experts--recommend using "I statements" or "I language" as a technique for verbally structuring disagreements. Begin any statement with an "I," and make sure what follows is factual information from your own perspective. For example, an "I think...", "I feel...", or "I noticed..." are all particularly good ways to generate a "soft start" in a disagreement. This isn't an excuse to say something like, "I think you waste your time on video games." That's still blaming and shaming the other person. Instead, describing without placing judgment, like "I'm worried you're spending too much of your time on video games," would be way better. Better yet, adding "... and I think it could be affecting your grades and relationships. I want to see you succeed and spend more time with you myself. Can you help me understand this from your perspective?" The real concern is addressed, vulnerability is shared, and an abundance of space has been created for the other person to share their feelings. There's a chance the person could be wasting their time, but the latter conversation could foster an environment for the next Shigeru Miyamoto.

Lastly, we offer the tool of talking in parts as a way of exploring and giving voice to the complex array of emotional nuances inside of oneself, especially when in a conflict. This technique draws from therapeutic models like Internal Family Systems (IFS), which recognize that we often have multiple internal perspectives. "Part of me wants to, but another part of me doesn't." One of the benefits is that there's no limit to how many parts of you there are; "Part of me feels angry, but part of me gets where you're coming from, and another part of me doesn't want me to admit that."

Closing Exercises

As our last exercise, let's construct a "soft start" for an argument. Think of the last conflict you had or one that's preoccupying your mind right now. Surely something came up. For the sake of exercise, let's go with it. No scenario works out perfectly, but assuming the best, let's apply the techniques in this article.

1. **What am I feeling?** Emotions—like awkwardness, frustration, or fear—usually pass within 10–90 seconds. Instead of pushing them away, notice what you're feeling and name it. Then choose how to respond. For the sake of the exercise, name the emotion, and accept it. Whether it sticks around depends on how we react to it, our thoughts, and our actions. So, what am I gonna do? Let's decide to say something—which might not be appropriate for every situation (more on that in a future article), but for the sake of the exercise, let's play it out in our mind.

2. **What questions should I ask?** Find my curiosity. Foster a feeling of goodwill. Ask as many clarifying questions as necessary. Do not try to trap or blame, seek understanding. For the sake of the exercise, think of at least 2-3 questions that could help or would have helped.

3. **What is their perspective?** Restate their perspective for them to hear in a way with which they would be completely satisfied and wholeheartedly agree. It is a generous and compassionate perspective of the other person, not some reduced characterization or strawman. We must steelman their argument and maybe even take the time to consider, *Do I really disagree?* At the very least, *what do we agree on?* Vocalize what you agree on. For the sake of the exercise, restate their opinion in the best version you can consider.

4. **Share my perspective.** Use assertive language. State actual needs and feelings. Use "I statements" or talk in "parts" to help. Avoid shame, and seek the deeper connection your vulnerability has enabled. For the sake of the exercise, structure an example of using at least one "I statement" and one talking in "parts".

Depending on the situation, these steps may not always happen in the same order. But generally, understanding the other person (Step 3) follows curiosity (Step 2). And, Step 4 often clarifies Step 1 as we speak out loud.

May you find belonging and a deeper connection, and *make* more peace within yourself and your relationships.

The Peacemaking Series

You can view the rest of the videos in the Peacemaking Series [HERE](#) on YouTube. Each month, a companion article is released with new tools and insights. Next month's topic is Forgiveness. To explore more articles by The Skyline Institute published in Public Square Magazine, visit us [HERE](#). You'll also find our original research supporting The Family Proclamation, along with videos and podcasts, at TheFamilyProclamation.org. Follow us on social media for more.

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