Civility Requires Seeking Out the Truth

Civility really begins with each of us choosing that course of action. The Door County Civility Project has provided each of us with nine communication tools based on “Choosing Civility by P.M. Forni. These tools are Pay Attention, Listen, Be Inclusive, Not Gossip, Show Respect, Be Agreeable, Apologize, Give Constructive Criticism, Take Responsibility. We have spoken to many public and private organizations and businesses to help them better understand each of these tools. Many of these have chosen to place posters naming these tools in their windows or on their walls as a reminder to their employees and the public that civility is spoken here. There are also wallet size tools cards so you can carry them around as a helpful reminder to yourself.

Still as the steering committee continues to promote civility in our community, we have learned more about what is needed to remain civil. For instance determining what is “Truth”. As usual I first went to my old dictionary and then the internet. My dictionary had an a. and b. definition. A. was “honesty, constancy, the body of real things, events, facts, actuality” and b. judgment, proposition, or idea that is true or accepted true”. On the internet truth was “that which is true or in accordance with fact or reality, a fact or belief that is accepted as true. One other choice I could select was the “Difference between truth and fact which stated” “Fact is something that cannot be combated with reason, for it is logic itself. But truth is something which depends on a person’s perspective and experience”.

I think that most of our growing up experiences have considered that truth is fact. Our parents tell us to always tell the truth. Honesty is the best policy. Courts ask us to swear to tell the whole truth. While I am sure that there are truths that are facts, I expect that most the truths that we consider facts are in reality our own version of truth. Let’s just look at a few examples. Is a glass half full or half empty? Wisconsin residents believe that the Packers are the best professional football team ever, while those is Illinois would say it is the Bears. Often when my sister and I talk about our childhood, we have a very different account of what happened. Consider how many calls by referees at sporting events have been questioned by fans and coaches. We have different forms of government, religion, frames of reference, preferences, etc. Our own beliefs are truths to us.

I have suggestions to help you seek the truth that is fact and better understand the truth that is someone’s personal perspective. This will not be an easy task as it needs to be a constant vigil in all areas of your live. Seeking the truth will assist you in using the tools of civility at all times.

As we are shortly approaching another national election and are constantly being bombarded by all kinds of statements about the candidates, I know it is very confusing to determine what is factual truth and what is prospective truth. First you need to review your opinions, attitudes, and beliefs, where these come from and, determine if any our factual. This scrutiny will help you to determine which political mind you are and where on the continuum. Still the candidates of each party needs to be researched to have an accurate description of their background which helps you to understand their perspective and how they will do their job serving all the people.

Now comes the hard part, trying to make any sense out the massive contradictory information we are receiving. It is so important to remember that many of the messages we see every day are not from the candidates but special interest groups. The name of the group appears at the end of the advertisement. You need to get the name and research the group’s agenda. Further you have to extract was is true, and what is partially so because relevant facts have been left out. A fact may be stated but then speculations are made of what that statement means which is not factual. Claims of accomplishment need to be checked for accuracy as well as the accusations that candidates make about the other. Lastly in prospective truth, extreme statements are usually falsehoods.

Once you have a better sense of the factual truth and prospective true, you can then better understand what truths the candidate will be using to make decisions. That will help you to choose for whom you will cast your vote.

Please take these steps and then cast your vote for every election. In doing so civility will continue to grow.

Orlaine I. Gabert, Door County Civility Project