

October 10, 2018

Turnaround Plan Required - Political Conversations in Business

BUSINESS ADVISORS, BUSINESS RESTRUCTURING
BY SCHNEIDER DOWNS PROFESSIONAL

The current political environment has become a daily part of many conversations. With the polarized political environment in the U.S., and individuals holding dramatically differing political viewpoints, politics is now inherently embedded in my business day.

This makes for a very tricky situation that one must carefully navigate, since a poorly worded email or an "off the cuff" comment can immediately evoke emotional reaction and might negatively affect a deal.

Business and politics do not mix. What happens when they do?

Historically, at least as I have experienced it, there was a general rule that business and politics do not mix. But today, I find that it is on the forefront of many conversations, jokes and minds. It's hard to escape. So, what communication strategies can navigate around politically sensitive topics while remaining focused on the business task?

As a certified turnaround professional my work involves assisting organizations through corporate renewal. I generally find that the support will be either a distressed situation or an interaction to enable further growth and profitability. From that perspective, I know that simple plans can serve you well in politically charged situations. These simple tips can help you avoid pitfalls in most business interactions.

How to avoid a deal-stopping political discussion.

First, the silent plan. The goal of which is to remain as quiet and silent as possible regarding your political leanings. When creating profiles and communications on professional networking websites such as LinkedIn or personal social media platforms like Facebook, keeping political perspectives out of all types of communication is a helpful step to keeping politics separate from business. It will increase your odds of not alienating customers.

Your odds of guessing someone's political views is about 50/50. Professional gamblers prefer odds significantly greater than 50/50. It's probably best not to risk losing a customer or damaging your organization's brand on a non-essential gamble that doesn't add value to the business at hand.

Walk into any meeting with a neutral topic that might interest others in your back pocket to share.

Second, the Teflon move. Allegedly nothing sticks to Teflon. So, although my wife will disagree based on my cooking abilities, I try not to rely on “being the Teflon don.”

Stickiness aside, the goal is to divert any conversations to other topics, with efforts to focus the conversation on the desired business message. Try to slip and slide away from risky conversation. All communication paths should lead back to the business task, void of any “left” or “right” perspectives.

Third, the listening path to neutral. You should know yourself and know your company. It’s important to understand any gaps between you personally and the organization you represent in business.

Embrace your organization’s value statement, since it will serve as the basis for neutrality. Most organizations will have a value statement that includes words like: *respect, ethical, integrity, and balance.*

The value statement may include sayings like: “do the right thing”, “always respect everyone”, “work and family communities are important”, “accept people for who they are” and similar calls for respect of others.

Listen well and leverage the positivity.

In sensitive situations, listen well and reiterate your organization’s values and your clients’ organizations’ values—since most tend to project positive behaviors: leverage the positivity accordingly.

Overall, be prepared, as one never knows what the situation may call for. While there is no one clear path to ensure success, there are often little paths, including preparation, which can help minimize any potential downside.

Recognize there may be a time and place when a stand must be made, but at the simplest level, the message of being respectful of people in all aspects with an empathic ear will serve you well.

By having thought about the challenge of business and politics, and by at least having a plan or mindset ready to go – even if is as simple as the three concepts above – you can help advance business objectives.

As a turnaround consultant, I have to extract value out of volatile situations.

Turnaround consulting is unique, as one meets people under intense circumstances that many have never encountered before. It requires the ability to know when to stop and when to start a fire to achieve a business end.

But more importantly, it requires that you recognize when you can bring value. But with politics evoking emotion, any statement can be a potential fire-starter that can quickly escalate out of control.

So have a plan to prevent political sparks from becoming a barrier to business. Since no matter if your interaction is turnaround situation or just a regular

business interaction you need to improve your odds of making a positive connection to better than 50/50.

You've heard our thoughts... We'd like to hear yours

The Schneider Downs Our Thoughts On blog exists to create a dialogue on issues that are important to organizations and individuals. While we enjoy sharing our ideas and insights, we're especially interested in what you may have to say. If you have a question or a comment about this article – or any article from the Our Thoughts On blog – we hope you'll share it with us. After all, a dialogue is an exchange of ideas, and we'd like to hear from you. Email us at contactSD@schneiderdowns.com.

Material discussed is meant for informational purposes only, and it is not to be construed as investment, tax, or legal advice. Please note that individual situations can vary. Therefore, this information should be relied upon when coordinated with individual professional advice.

© 2024 Schneider Downs. All rights-reserved. All content on this site is property of Schneider Downs unless otherwise noted and should not be used without [written permission](#).