PDD March 20, 2015 Civility Roundtable Discussions – SJCC and EVC

Both colleges provided a Roundtable session to discussion several questions about civility, created and conducted by members of the SJECCD C3 Civility Task Force. Below are selected questions with combined summarized comments from the colleges. Sessions were facilitated by Merylee Shelton, Sam Ho and Judy Rookstool at SJCC and by Sam Ho and Judy Rookstool at EVC.

What is the responsibility of an individual in the shared public sphere? How is this related to integrity?

You bring who you are to the college. You can’t be one person at home and one at work. There must be consistency in Who I Am. One’s core values should include integrity. When one examines the District’s Civility Statement, some values not well used by some.

As we see colleges and universities not exemplifying respect, perhaps it is not being taught as a core value to young people -- all the more reason to demonstrate respect and civility in our college/District.

We need to be role models for students and colleagues to show civility and respect. We need both give and take, especially because of our diversity.

An example is what is taught in cosmetology – what you do at home should stay at home.

An example from Work Experience: An objective for students is to keep positive, even in a negative environment and use “I” messages to respond to negativity. There is an economic dimension to civility. One must be civil to keep a job.

We mustn’t take our jobs for granted. Many of our students would want a job at the college. If we are negative, or have been here for so long it is not fun, then why not leave and let someone positive have the job? Or, if you are always negative, have the courage to go back and re-build your attitude.

We have an implied social contract. If we benefit from society, we owe the group for the privilege of our well-being in that society.

We respond to the humanity in others.

Live each day as if it is your last because you may be right.

How we communicate as individuals is essential. Disagreement is OK, but we have to really listen to The Other – not just, “Yes, but…..” We can hear another’s opinion and restrain our emotions; they have a right to their opinion, and we need to respect their right to express it. Sometimes a third person can provide “witness.”

It is easy to misinterpret, so it is important to clarify and not to make assumptions. We can have different perceptions and see through different lenses. When listening, try to use a clear lens to accurately receive information. We’re not even always aware of what “colors” our lens and gives an automatic interpretation: gender, race, age, religion, expectations, mood, etc.

Keep your eye on the goal -- then individual conflict is not as important. Keep it simple to minimize conflict.
Once called “active listening,” a better term is “mindful listening.” This includes the spirit one brings to the listening process. Try to place yourself aside and be willing to understand. You are not listening only to formulate a response but to hear what the person is really saying. One needs to be truly present.

A related idea is that in mindful listening, one must be comfortable with the silence that accompanies thoughtful response. Push your own “pause button” and consider the overall goal of communication with another.

An example is to write a letter (not sent) to a person with whom you have a communication problem, thus using real life experience to practice gathering and understanding their point of view.

Right to free speech does not mean right to insult another. We should not have blanket permission to say whatever we want. Being in a community implies caring about the humanity of another. We have a responsibility to others. Constraint is an important self-discipline.

Every religion has tenets about respecting others in communication. You have to decide how you are going to treat people.

**What is the best mechanism for discussion about civility and civil discourse in our District? How can all constituencies, including those at the highest level, be included?**

It is essential that new hires receive an orientation on the culture of civility in our District. This is more than handing out the Civility Statement.

There should be a revolving workshop for small groups, similar to the workshops used to prepare for the interview of hiring candidates. This would promote the idea civility applies to everyone. No more: “Not me; I don’t need civility.”

We need a periodic Civility Tune-Up.

With regard to dealing with others, an example of a civility strategy is to promote respect as a core value. This means calmly listening to a complaint, then determining what is the immediate need expressed. (You can always gripe to your friend later.)

Be sensitive to others when you communicate your point of view.

You can’t make people be civil; you can only model it.

If everyone has some small practice of civility, we can make it a community of civility.

**How can we incorporate a sense of respect and value for all staff, each of whom is vital to the overall mission of the District?**

Express appreciation to others for assistance and for a job well done. Praise those who exhibit civility.
IDEA: Make available thank-you notes which staff can use to thank others. Receiving a thank you note is extremely meaningful.

The work of all should be valued.

Confront unnecessary hierarchy. The very word, “subordinate,” carries an implication.

There is some frustration with administrators.

We have layers of staff, but it should not mean that some groups tell others to stop what they are doing and pay attention to me.

Example from A&R for uncivil students: If a student/person is yelling; keep calm and listen. Respond with an “I” message; lower your voice so they have to stop and calm down to listen to you, and then provide a detailed information on the situation/question. Active listening is/was the most used strategy. If necessary, walk away.

For new hires, civility orientation is important for all staff.

Note that sometimes ideas about status might be cultural.

Often we don’t understand the work that others do.

IDEA: Faculty “shadow” a classified staff member to better understand the nature of their work and visa versa.

In a classroom setting, students seem ready to engage with one another despite their status. Would that be possible if we were all that comfortable with one another?

A word about cell phones: Texting and phone talking can make face-to-face more difficult. Those who constantly text say they are multi-tasking, but what is the quality of their attentiveness? Ubiquitous use of phones is somewhat generational; there must be understanding on both sides of the divide.

Communication acknowledges the existence of others.

Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can also hurt.

Summary by J. Rookstool, Consultant

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