



Company Culture: Do Political Discussions Fit in Your Workplace?

Let's be honest... election time can bring out the best and sometimes the worst in people. Then add the volatility of the 2016 American election. There are many things we can say about the 2016 American Election, but that would make this blog too long. So let's just say the 2016 American Election seems to be causing Americans to question the future of being an American citizen, concerned about the future of the American political system, taxes, healthcare, jobs and there seems to be an overall feeling of tension and disgust when the topic of the election comes up.

You have a right to your opinion, but so does your coworker. Hillary Clinton **vs.** Donald Trump conversations are coming up daily all over social media and in the workplace.

Economic and security woes rock the world, the marketplace—and your workforce. For private employers, how do you maintain productivity amid strong political opinions?

Public and private employers face different challenges and have different liberties. While government employers walk fine lines regarding free speech, private employers have more room to maintain—or dismiss—political dialogue. Even with greater capability to influence the political opinion in your company, it is important to consider how that fits with your company culture.

Tips for handling politics on the job

Handling workplace politics means deciding how to meet challenges before they arise.

- Does your company identify strongly with one platform?
- Is workplace neutrality a strong plank of your own company culture?
- Do you provide a well-written employee handbook and training to help workers understand what is expected of them AND most importantly, let your employees know it's ok to ask questions but being inappropriate just because someone has a different political belief can be grounds for disciplinary action.

From the outset, these questions drive how you respond to election tension inside, and outside, your organization. Consider these tips for keeping a cool and productive workplace even as election season heats up:

- **Managing a neutral message:** For companies wishing to maintain productivity, team relationships, and economic competitiveness, maintaining respect in the workplace is critical.

It is not possible to police public opinion outside your work environment. It is possible to write guidance into your company handbook about respect/sensitivity/tolerance in the workplace, and require workers who wish to exchange strong political opinions to do so appropriately and if they are not able to “keep a cool demeanor” while at work, they may want to wait until they are off company time to share their political opinions.

The best way to manage message neutrality in the workplace is for HR and managers to model respectful communication that relates to company matters and steers clear of political engagement.

- **Support the process:** Some employers choose to support the election process rather than a party or candidate. Provide information on the election process in your state and be generous with paid time off to vote.
- **Use caution:** Issues like immigration, racial tension, and sexual orientation are in the news. Ensure your employees understand what is considered inappropriate behaviors that could be considered abusive, discriminatory, or harassing to protected classes.

On the flipside, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) protects the rights of employees to discuss workplace conditions. Be sure you, and your managers, understand the distinctions—and that your employee handbook and ongoing training addresses it clearly for workers.

When you have questions about political discussions, EEOC, or other Human Resources issues, contact McCloskey Partners, LLC.

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