Civility Matters: A Toolkit
What Stage are You In?

- Identify the problem
- Get Started
- Host a Conversation
- Move Into Action
• Ask someone from a neighboring League to facilitate!
• Small conversation at your local League
  – What’s the problem? What is happening?
  – What are you seeing? Reading in the local paper?
  – Ideas for taking action
• Dot-vote on it
Get Started: Research, Awareness, Outreach

- Google it!
  - Studies, surveys by other organizations; seeing what other communities have experienced validates your observations; check the LWV web site

- Reach out to potential partners in town
  - Churches, businesses, the schools
  - Lions club, local democratic/republican committees?

- Develop a relationship with the local press
  - Write letters to the editor; respond to fractiousness; offer information on what other communities have done

- Put signals out in the community
  - Personal Handouts/bookmarks
  - An email address

- Look outside the community
  - UMASS, other local colleges

To join the Harvard League of Women Voters’ campaign to enhance the quality of public discourse in Harvard, send an email to: harvardcivility@gmail.com
Get Started: Get Organized

- Learn Google Docs or Wikispaces
- Keep a Record
- Be able to tell the story
- Create a calendar: leverage town and community events

Civility Matters Project Plan
1. Statement of Problem
2. Goal of the project
3. Scope of the project
4. Key Collaborators
5. Plan of Action
6. Funding Options
7. Critical Paths (Needed for Success)
8. Short Term To-Dos
We Have a Complete History
Hosting Conversations
World Café: Principles

1. Set the Context
2. Create Hospitable Space
3. Explore Questions that Matter
4. Encourage Everyone's Contribution
5. Connect Diverse Perspectives
6. Listen together for Patterns and Insights
7. Share Collective Discoveries
Questions that Matter

Town Questions...

- What do we value?
- What have we observed?
- What is the impact?
- What is possible?
A Café is a Series of Conversations

1. Talk & Listen
2. Synthesize Key Themes
3. Report out/Share “Harvest”
Engage People with the Questions
Capture the Conversation
November 13, 2013

CIVILITY MATTERS
in HARVARD

What do We Value?
- Small get to know each other easily
- We value open space & conservation land
- Individuals can make a difference
- Open-town meeting
- High quality of citizenry
- Strong education system
- Anybody can participate
- Connected to past & good steward of historic resources
- We have a Pub!
- Sense of volunteerism
- Welcoming
- People contribute skills, expertise
- Non-professional govt. Volunteer

What Have We Observed?
- Egos getting in the way of common good
- We are effective but experiencing aberrant behavior
- We lack more partisan and fractured than past
- Less talk, more bullying
- Labeling and assuming others positions
- Willingness to attack & belittle

What is the IMPACT?
- Not checking each other
- Nuclear norms
- Selfish behaviors
- Low trust
- Delayed responses
- When we don’t resolve current issues it gets harder to solve future issues
- Fewer volunteers & voices
- Inability undermines collaboration
- Don’t move forward
- Values clash
- What’s the effect on kids?
- People get left out of the discourse
- Preservation is suffering

What Would We Like to See?
- Guideline/rules - play a card when things get heated
- FACTS
- Begin with the end in mind - goal is also civil behavior
- Best civil guidelines
- Self-policing don’t make only leader do it
- What are the Compromises?
- Openly discuss values & LISTEN to each other
- Process and outcome focus - More reflection!
- Majority rules, respect the minority

What’s Possible?
- OK to apologize

Amy Gilroy
Generate Opportunities for Action

- What's Possible? What can we do now?
- See a league of Voters
- Shift focus - what's good for the community not just individual good - how does a strong community benefit me?
- Learn how to share different perspectives more community dialog
- Broaden the conversation to those that think differently
- Visual - Communication - Civility Values
  - All perspectives are valuable
  - Talking about values is complex - how can we work together regardless of values?
  - What would it take to feel comfortable talking about loaded issues?
- How to have meaningful discussion in a 'twitter' world?
- Need more venues to hear perspectives
- More dialog, across town, not late at night
- Tenets, principles are adopted by individuals
  - How we interact, not what the issue is
Open Space: Conversations to Focus on Action

The Four Principles

- Whoever comes is the right people.
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
- Whenever it starts is the right time.
- When it is over it is over.
Action Toolkit for You

You already know how to:

- Host “How to Run for Office” forums
- Guidelines for public officials

You might want to read up on:

- Civility Projects
- World Café & Open Space

Your ideas?

See the Resources handout!
Lessons Learned: What Worked

• Bookmarks, small signals
  – Awareness gives people permission to speak
• Branding: Clear name, clear message
• Marilyn!
  – Leverage your League Connections
• Having at least one person on the planning team who is not identified with the League or “liberal politics”
• Reaching outside of our local network for resources (UMASS Boston/MOPC) and leveraging those connections
• GoogleDocs
• Oshkosh!
Lessons Learned: What Didn’t Work

• Relying on a single thread of action following the November 10 meeting – if people are ready to act, *let them*:
  – Be willing to let others take the lead for a particular action item
  – Think about a “matrix management” approach that allows for multiple individuals to take action & be supported w/out the LWV traditional leaders being “in charge”

• Not understanding the potential $$ costs up front so that we could find partners
Lessons Learned: What We Might Do Differently

• Tackle a specific issue
  – Work with MOPC to frame an issue
  – Drive this as an example for civility

• Work harder at getting partners from the very beginning
Let’s Keep the Conversation Going

• Harvard League
  – Patti Anklam: patti@byeday.net
  – Sharon McCarthy: sharonmn@verizon.net

• MA League Group:
  – lwvma-leaders@googlegroups.com
Those of us enforcing recycling rules at the transfer station are just doing our job

Friday, September 13, 2013

“It’s people like you who are the problem around here!”

And with that the speaker turned tail and stomped off, leaving me totally perplexed and flabbergasted. What had I done to generate such a vitriolic response? I had politely and quietly asked him to remember in the future that the transfer station cannot accept plastic bags in the recycle bin.

Yes, I am one of those volunteers who staff the transfer station to try to keep contraband out of the recycle bins. I also help oversee the TIOLI (“Take it or leave it”) tables.

I’ve been doing this for several years, and that type of response is unfortunately not that unusual for me, despite trying my utmost to be polite and nonconfrontational.

With these experiences, I have read with great interest yet dismay the multitude of civility problems being encountered by town board volunteer members trying to do their jobs. I just do not understand why we have come to this point, where board members are resigning because they are tired of the anger, and I am questioning my sanity in persisting in standing in the cold rain and hot sun and driving snow to help the cause of sustainability in my own little way only to have residents give me a piece of their minds. I would like to think that the people of Harvard will rise above this pettiness. I would hate to think that we are stuck in the same rut as our Congress. I would also ask that the good citizens of Harvard stop yelling at me when I remind them of the recycling rules.

Judy Wong
Still River
Welcome Back... What Now?

by Jonathan Gilburg

Thinking about the recent national challenges in finding common ground, I wonder what the lesson is for leaders at every level. I know there are tremendous political and ideological chasms right now in this country and the mere mention of one political party or another can create immediate barriers to productive discussion. “We’ have done a nice job of creating demons and villains out of the opposition, and yet where does that leave us? What is the impact? More importantly, what is the end game? Endless battles where there is a winner and a loser and uncountable causalities along the way? Are these the only rules we can play by?

I want to propose another way forward, not for political leaders; I don’t begin to see myself as a political strategist, and in my opinion the rules of the current political system are set up as a zero sum game: one winner, one loser and endless cycles of retributive gamesmanship. Rather, I’m referring to a way forward for the leaders of organizations and communities that find themselves facing large systemic challenges where the path forward is not clear. For the leader, influencer and/or group who are committed to finding the greatest good for the greatest number of people—my suggestion to you is to stop trying to solve all the problems... by yourself.

The way forward, in my opinion, begins with some honest discussions—conversations that value deep listening to the many voices in the system (organization, community, etc.). The conversations cannot begin with, “What do we do to solve the problem?” This initial line of inquiry sets up people to choose their camps, to settle into their positional debates. And “the problem” itself may not even be that clear. We’ve got to back up the lines of inquiry and start with:

- “What is really important here?
- What is valuable about this organization, community, etc.?
- What stake do I/we have in this issue/organization/community?”
April 2012 – Candidate Debate

Finally, on recent acrimony between the Selectmen it was important for boards to respect one another, "sometimes you get where you need to go by disagreeing." But, she added, "We have to listen carefully and do it respectfully."

Whatever motivated the debate sponsors to place this issue on its list, she said, "There is clearly a sense that the Board of Selectmen is not functioning optimally."

Wallace noted that comments on a recent survey by the Master Plan Steering Committee suggested that residents "are disapproving of the way the board is behaving." As a case in point, she cited a split decision by the Selectmen to appoint a volunteer to the Historical Commission without waiting to hear the recommendations of the commission chairwoman, as the Board of Selectmen's own policy recommends. That decision led the then-chair and a former chair of the Historic Commission to resign The way the matter was handled by the Selectmen "led to a lot of discomfort and anger in town," Wallace said.

Sprague said there were "two sides" to the story and that while the outcome was "unfortunate," it was time to move on.

Later during a period of open questioning, Billy Salter of Elm Street asked Sprague if she thought the Selectmen had handled the appointment properly.

"The fact that there are two sides to the story makes it more contentious," he said. "You're running to be on the Board of Selectmen, so I have a simple question: Do you think the selectmen handled that properly?"

"I'm really not going to judge them," said Sprague. "I can't. They did what they thought was right. I'd love to just put it behind us."