Maintaining Civility in Local Government

Since the beginning of humankind, the structure and security of a government have ensured law and order, maintained a shaky economy, and looked over public services. Without the services and benefits the government provides, the population would be lost and without order. Though local government is merely an ant to the state or national government, its significance is on par with the two. The first steps taken in maintaining civility in local government start with the leader's ability to connect with their people, then involve public comment, and finally the meeting layout.

Moreover, a leadership position is one of the determining factors in the civility of government. As stated in Western City's article, *Breaking the Cycle: Steps for Reducing Negative Discourse and Incivility in Public Meetings,* "Without high-quality staff, cities will not be able to tackle the range of complex and ever-changing issues facing local government." The need for an influential leader who looks to connect the citizens with the government doesn't go unnoticed and is likely the reason why a town thrives. An example seen in my community is the unending support, acceptance of personal responsibility, shared values, and practice of active listening. My dad, the town chairman, is always going above and beyond to make sure the right steps are being taken to benefit the town. He actively listens to and ignites conversations about improving the town; he is open-minded; he accepts personal responsibility; he demonstrates honesty and integrity; and he focuses on civil discourse. A dilemma he encountered was the need for a new town hall. Without running water, rotting walls, and the building being too old for any community events to take place there, the community came together to form a consensus to build a town hall, despite the downsides of

doing so. Not only was the town hall being built a step in the right direction, but there are also many ways a leader can shape a community through trust and willpower.

Commonly, a leader is not a leader at all without a community supporting him or her and providing them with feedback. It is extremely important for the local government to actively listen and participate, promote transparency, and encourage constructive dialogue. When speaking upon social justice and equity, Western City's article, *Breaking the Cycle: Steps for Reducing Negative Discourse and Incivility in Public Meetings,* states, "By seeking clarity on these complex issues and committing to civility, councils can work together to determine how best to explore these challenging issues productively and respectfully." If the public is unable to voice their opinions, they will feel disconnected, and the community will become dysfunctional. At every monthly meeting held at Lincoln Town Hall, a specified time is placed on the agenda where the public is able to speak up while the town officials actively listen. This small but crucial time in the meeting is when constructive criticism and other techniques are used in the edification of the town. Public comment on the agenda given in that meeting plays a key role in preventing the meeting from being uncivil and unproductive. John F. Kennedy once said, "Let us begin anew, remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness and sincerity is always subject to proof." Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems that divide us." Though this quote has aged, it is still applicable today. Through public forums, community engagement, and conflict resolution strategies, a town and its people are able to grow together.

Likewise, a meeting agenda assists in a meeting staying on track, covering the points that need to be hit, and ensuring time effectiveness. In MIT's department of Human Resources, an article titled *How and Why to Use a Meeting Agenda,* covers why it's important to use a meeting

agenda, thus stating, "Time spent in planning an agenda will likely save time for all meeting participants by providing a clear set of topics, objectives, and time frames." It is not only important to have an agenda for time effectiveness but also the organization and follow-through technique it induces. Being thoughtful, managing expectations, agreeing on a process in advance, and more are all reminders that relationships based on communication are the best relationships. Instead of going into a meeting without knowledge, a plan, or organization, try being open, organized, thought-out, and ready for change.

In the end, the strategies most beneficial to maintaining civility in local government are community engagement, a meeting agenda, and an empowering leader. Through various acts and procedures, the government aims to embody the meaning of peace and harmony in its relationships with citizens. A government is defined as *the governing body of a nation, state, or community.* Trust, harmony, law and order, and more are the building blocks of a strong nation. Local government, state government, and national government all play vital roles, each playing a part in the structure to ensure civility.

Works Cited

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