

Leader Guide:

Leading During an Election Year



Audience

Managers

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to help managers apply REAL, authentic leadership (using Respect, Empathy, Accountability and Learning) to support employees in navigating what will likely be a polarizing election season. This guide gives you the tools to effectively balance differing political views with maintaining an inclusive and respectful workplace.

Why REAL Leadership Matters

Election years can be tense, and this one is especially unique. As a manager, your team looks to you to provide stability and calm during turbulent times. So, how can you support and empower your team when political tensions rise?

Politics can be deeply personal and polarizing—especially in the workplace. And we can no longer say, “keep politics out of the workplace,” because they surround our daily lives in 24-hour news cycles and on social media threads—in a world where work and life have merged. Employees need REAL leadership, support and resources to navigate election season. It’s important to create a safe environment where team members can share their thoughts and feelings, yet remain respectful of and professional toward others’ opinions.

Respect: “I welcome your individuality. I will listen to your ideas and value your perspective.”

- Recognize your team members are individuals with varying political beliefs and opinions. Instead of banning political discussions, establish ground rules that encourage open communication and emphasize mutual respect and professionalism.
- Create a safe and non-judgmental space for your employees to share political views without being afraid of retribution.
- Avoid taking sides or making assumptions about individual beliefs.
- Listen actively to understand the concerns and perspectives of every employee.
- If needed, provide guidance on how to respectfully disagree. Hot tempers and harsh words can impact team dynamics and workplace productivity.

Empathy: “I support your wellbeing. I will recognize your challenges and care about your life.”

- Election season can cause anxiety, stress, frustration and fear. Support your team members' overall wellbeing during this challenging and emotionally charged time.
- Allow team members to talk about their feelings, acknowledging and accepting them.
- Listen with compassion and understanding, without judgment.
- Pay attention to fears and how your team members perceive election results may impact their lives.
- Promote self-care to help manage stress and anxiety.
- Offer mental health resources and clear information about company policies.

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Accountability: “I champion your success. I will give you clear expectations and share honest feedback.”

- Lead by example. Your words and actions set the tone for how inclusion and respect of varying political perspectives are perceived and addressed within your team and the broader organization.
- Avoid letting the political news of the day—particularly around the election—take over your team’s focus on their work. When an issue arises, address it and re-focus your team on their unifying purpose.
- Avoid using language or making assumptions that might be perceived as biased or discriminatory.
- Encourage teamwork and collaboration across departments to promote a sense of unity and shared purpose.
- Encourage your team members to remain focused on shared goals and objectives, rather than personal beliefs or opinions.

Learning: “I encourage your growth. I will maximize your strengths and support your aspirations.”

Election season is an opportunity to help your team learn how to welcome differing perspectives respectfully and constructively. Though it’s important that employees review your company’s policies on discrimination, harassment and personal conduct, respect and inclusion can’t be learned with just annual compliance training. They’re skills that needs to be continuously built and practiced.

- Increase self-awareness with unconscious or implicit bias tests and training. These are great tools to help you and your employees become more aware of your thoughts, behaviors and actions, and there are several options available online for free.
- Encourage employees to explore the topic of inclusion however resonates most with them—workshops, speaker panels, books, articles, videos, webinars, or social media.
- Connect your employees with your organization’s employee resource groups to learn more about their peers’ diverse backgrounds, perspectives and life experiences.

Resources to Have Available for Your Team

- You. As their leader, be there to listen, talk through their overall wellbeing, fears, concerns, workload, work-life balance, etc.
- Contact information for mental and emotional wellbeing programs, like your company’s Employee Assistance Program, mindfulness tools and employee resource groups.
- Company policies that outline prohibited behavior (wearing political attire, soliciting, campaigning, etc.), harassment or discrimination based on political beliefs.
- An employee handbook updated with very clear social media guidelines about what’s allowed and prohibited for both personal and professional accounts.

As a manager, REAL leadership will help your team navigate the challenges of an election year with mutual trust, respect and inclusion. By using these suggestions, you can create a supportive environment in which your employees feel seen, heard, valued and safe.