

Managing Sensitive News Topics at Work



Workplace

During uncertain times, it can be easy to blame someone or something for issues that are out of our control. When we see current topics in the news—such as gun control, immigration and racial tension, it can be hard to sidestep difficult conversations at work.

Workplace Policies and Sensitive Topics

Having a diverse workforce can bring many different stances and opinions together. Generally, it is not a good idea to talk about religion or politics in the workplace. If you choose to share your opinion on a current issue, make sure to check with your human resources (HR) department on your workplace policies so you know what topics are allowed (and not allowed) to be discussed at work.

What Are Sensitive Topics?

The following topics are considered to be sensitive topics:

- Politics
- Diversity, including race, gender and religion
- Finances
- International events, controversies or scandals

Identifying and Expressing Personal Opinions on Sensitive Topics

Take a moment to think about your personal opinions and stances on some of the sensitive topics above. Remember that it's highly unlikely that you're going to convince your co-workers to switch political parties—or even their position on an issue—in a 30-minute conversation over lunch, so avoid launching in to anything that could resemble a lecture or debate.

Here are some tips on how to appropriately identify and express your personal opinions:

- **Identify and challenge your own biases.** Never spread rumors or participate in conversations that perpetuate stereotypes. Find common interests to gain perspective instead of starting with differences.
- **See each person as an individual.** Do not attribute the actions of a few people to an entire race, religion or group

of people, and avoid commenting on the culture, ethnic or racial background or sexual orientation of anyone in the workplace.

- **Keep an open mind.** Learn more about people of other cultures, religions and ideologies. Develop ways to incorporate awareness of diversity into your regular routine by researching timely topics, attending trainings and asking questions.
- **Listen.** Actively listen to what's being said and pay attention to others when in the middle of a discussion. Look out for the visual cues that indicate how well the exchange is going. Be sure to avoid casual off-color comments or jokes that might be offensive or poke fun at others. Try to think about the joke and the perception others might have before saying it out loud.
- **Respect opinions that are different than your own.** Agree to disagree. In the workplace, it helps to have multiple viewpoints to solve problems creatively.

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If at any point in a conversation, you think that things are becoming too heated, walk away or quickly change topics. You will have to see your co-workers every day, so it is best that you don't say something that you may regret later.

Managing Your Emotions

The following tips can help you take care of yourself when you are upset about an event or situation in the news:

- **Continue normal activities.** Retaining a sense of control over your life when it feels out of control can help you fight feelings of stress and helplessness. Schedule a “detox” for yourself by limiting how much time you watch the news, read articles online and debate with others both in person and on social media.
- **Stay away from drugs and alcohol.** Drugs and alcohol can accentuate strong emotions while diminishing the ability to make good decisions. This is a dangerous combination, particularly when strong, varied opinions are already causing conflict in homes and communities.
- **Help others.** There are many people and organizations that can use help in time of crisis. Contact a local school, military base, blood donation center or community center and see how you can help.
- **Talk about your feelings with friends or family members.** If you don't happen to agree, respect their right to their opinion and remain calm and accepting. Feeling angry is a normal response, but acting on that anger with violence or hostility is never appropriate.
- **Document any incidents of discrimination.** If you are a victim of discrimination, document the incident and immediately report it to local authorities or if it is in the workplace, your employer's HR Department.

Note: If you have trouble coping with your anger, or if any powerful emotions affect your day to day life, contact BHS today. We are here to help.

