

## Poles Apart? 3 Questions To Ask Someone You Disagree With

By Anna Shields, Consensio, 30 January 2024

It's likely to be another polarising year, with elections in the US and UK. The US presidential election process is in full swing, with candidates exchanging opposing views on key issues and sparring in front of the media. In the workplace, there are bound to be issues on which co-workers will disagree, either work-related or inspired by broader world events. On opposing sides of an argument, there's a tendency to fall back on habitual patterns of attack and defense, which can sometimes lead to deep divisions and conflict. However, a different approach can help foster meaningful debate and strengthen relationships, even if disagreement remains. Here are three questions to ask someone when you don't agree.

### 1. What led you to that point of view?

This first question helps steer the focus away from the rights and wrongs of an argument. It seeks to explore the background of someone's viewpoint which helps to build understanding and context. The question also demonstrates active interest and the desire to understand the other point of view more deeply. It may even prompt the question in return. In most conversations, people have an underlying need to feel heard; simply exchanging opposing views doesn't leave much room for that.

### 2. How does this situation make you feel?

During disagreements, emotions can run high. This second question allows those feelings to be aired. Being able to understand and reflect on the feelings of someone else builds empathy, which helps to defuse tension. It also demonstrates care, showing that the other person is respected and valued. This question can often reveal the personal impact of a situation, which can be a basis for connection, even if people have opposing views.

### 3. What would you like to see happen?

Having gained a deeper understanding of the background to someone's point of view, and recognized the emotions, this third query helps to move thoughts to the future. It can be tempting to rush to this too soon, but if different perspectives haven't been explored or feelings voiced, it can leave people feeling unheard or dismissed. Answering this question can also reveal others' hopes and aspirations; people can often identify with the intent of another person, even if they disagree on what should happen or how to get there.

### Beyond questions

The three questions above can be powerful in navigating differences of opinion. Here are a few other considerations that can support your conversation:

- Think about how your questions will be received and how you want to come across.
- Be aware of where the conversation is taking place. If you are discussing an emotive or delicate subject, do it in private or over a cup of tea, not in front of others.
- Be present. Give your full attention, use open body language, and listen deeply.

- After listening, reflect back what you've heard. This demonstrates you've been listening and are trying to understand.

- Consider your aim. Do you want to explore someone's views, or win hearts and minds?

- And remember, the other person believes they are as right as you think you are.

Whether you're at polar opposites, or debating the details, constructive discussions can help relationships grow. Whether supporting Democrats or Republicans, Conservative or Labour, there will always be topics that generate contrasting opinions and strong emotions. Approaching discussions with curiosity, especially at work, will go a long way in your political capital.