

Stephen Says



Dear Stephen,

FROM: *Two faces Too many in Chicago!*

What's the protocol on talking politics at work or with clients? I know the Presidential election is not until November, but it seems to be the only thing everyone is talking about. At first it seemed like all the talk was about Donald Trump, and how he was never going to make it that far. And when this started, very few people had even heard of Bernie Sanders. Now between all the SNL skits and the narrowed down field, I almost can't log on to Facebook without seeing my friends, family and even people I work with, yammering away about their candidate. Everyone has a opinion. I am a manufactures rep for a carpet manufacturer. It's a company where we say a small prayer before every sales meeting. It is a privately owned company, and I once heard the owner say: "If I am paying you're praying" (Yes that is a quote). I am paid well, and have no problem with my boss's religiosity, even though I am Jewish. I'm easy-going and willing to do whatever is best for me in my professional life. I have another friend who works for a major furniture manufacture and when she flies to Grand Rapids, she flies into Gerald Ford Airport, and well her company is... shall we say, RED, yet our A&D clients are BLUE and quite openly talk about Hillary and Bernie. I am an independent and undecided about who I'll be supporting. Here's the question, though: is it OK to pretend I agree with whoever I am with at any given moment? My A&D clients are for Hillary, my bosses love the establishment Republicans, and then I have dealers and even friends who love Trump! I want to make them all happy when I do business with them! Is that so wrong?

Stephen:

Remember that old saying about keeping religion and politics out of dinner and the workplace? This is a golden rule of mine! Not everyone agrees with me, but this is my column, and in this column we avoid politics at all costs! I have the same problems as you do; I have clients in Iowa, North Carolina, Grand Rapids, and NYC. I work closely with people who span the whole political spectrum and aren't even the smallest bit shy

to share their thoughts. I watch my own Facebook filled with friends, co-workers, and clients who are gushing about candidates from one extreme to the other. I just want to please everyone too, and I feel anti-intellectual by admitting I do not feel guilty about not having a strong opinion yet. I also have to confess that although I am a Headhunter, I moonlight on TV, and live in NYC, so I am a longtime friend of Donald Trump. We are even next door neighbors. Now that does not mean I am a supporter, but just serves to illustrate how deeply ingrained politics are in my life and how hard it is to escape it, especially in a year like this where it's impossible to escape the news cycle! Ultimately, I think that there is nothing wrong with playing along to help out your business. Here we go back to the golden rule, though. Never bring up politics yourself, especially if you're just trying to make small talk! You are all but guaranteed to get yourself in a place you don't want to be. For example, I was talking to a client last week, and I accidentally mentioned one of the debates. My client ended up telling me a twenty minute story about how he went to college with one of the candidates (not telling which one) and how he (there's a hint, at least) got very drunk one night and ended up tied to a tree. This client then went on yelling at me for another fifteen minutes about his candidate of choice. Needless to say, those are thirty-five minutes of my life that I'll never get back. These conversations should be avoided or shortened at all costs. So if smiling and agreeing does the trick, that's what you should do! If you really believe in one candidate, I still would never bring that candidate up, even if a co-worker is trashing her or him. Anyone who is bringing up a candidate in a work conversation is not going to be convinced to change their mind, so the question becomes is it worth losing business for nothing? I bet the answer is no, at least nine times out of ten.

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You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at:

StephenSays@bellow.press.

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.