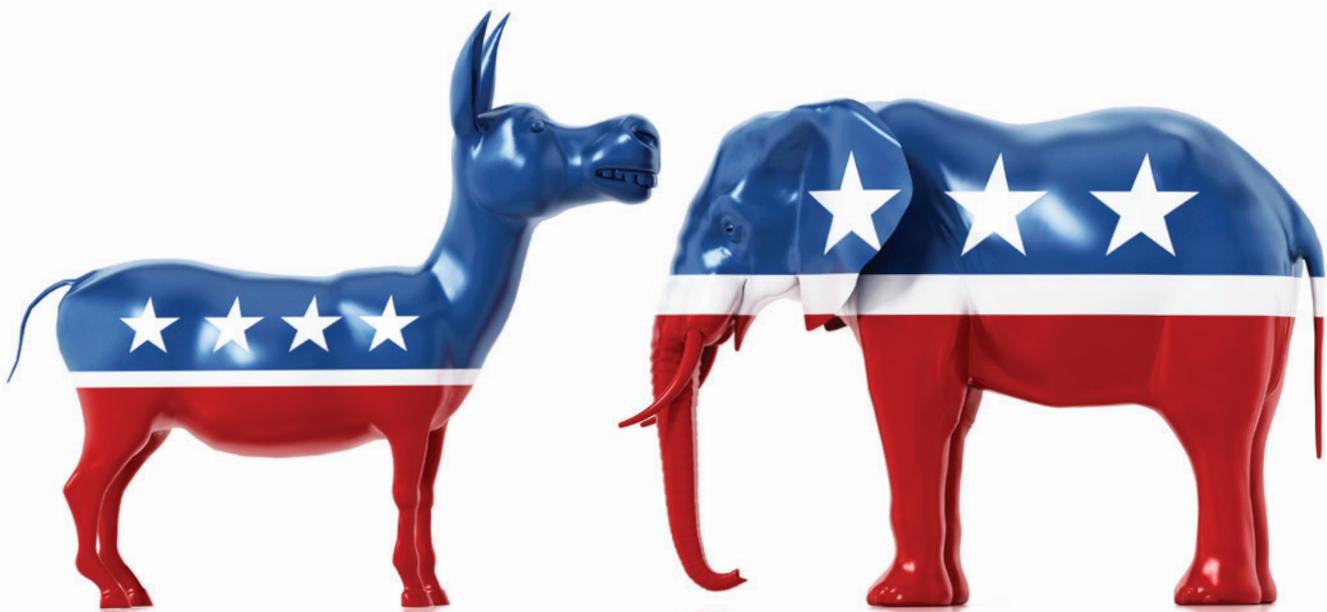




## When Opposing Political Views Interrupt the Workplace and What To Do About It



**M**y sister and I couldn't be any farther apart in our ideologies and political views. A few years back, during a snarky discussion, it didn't take very long for her and I to realize that if we didn't have boundaries for our differences it wouldn't help our lifelong relationship one bit.

The agreement we settled on brought instant understanding, peace and a truce. It went something like this: Our relationship, history, loyalty and love for each other were deeper than any social differences and we weren't willing to jeopardize years of sibling friendship for the sake of our political perspectives. Therefore, those

were matters we wouldn't discuss. Another way to say it is simply "agree to disagree agreeably." Since we were passionately as committed to our own viewpoints as the other, it came down to an issue of courtesy and respect for the right to have a different conviction. And that was a relationship saver.

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### A Political Example of Opposing Views

Supreme Court Justice Ginsberg/Scalia (Supreme Court Judges)—These Judges couldn't have a more opposite and contrasting ideology, yet they maintained a very close relationship professionally and personally, both individually and as families for years. When asked how he could remain so close he replied, "she is just so much fun." On another occasion she told him she completely disagreed with his stance on a decision, "but you explain your wrong view in such a professional and smooth way."

We have all heard the old adage that when family or friends gather for a meal or event, the two subjects we don't go near or discuss, especially if there are deep rifts of disagreement present are "religion and politics."

Both you and I have seen so many deep relationships at home and at work go down in flames because of the pushiness and/or unwillingness of others with different worldviews to accept or much less even hear another viewpoint without judgment and hostility.

People can successfully have friends and family members with wildly different identities and beliefs IF they are not forced to adhere to something they don't agree with. But for depth to take place in any organization or relationship that kind of courtesy has to cut in both directions or the friendship ends there, so it seems.



The company discouraged co-workers from talking politics.

Clearly, one of the traits of an unsafe relationship is being forced to accept another's opposing views or not being given the respect for the right to own a differing opinion.

### Validating Another When You Don't Agree

Validating another viewpoint at work that you can hardly tolerate takes maturity, professionalism, and at least an understanding as to how they arrived there. Although these kinds of discussions at work can be morale sappers and rip the company off from labor hours for which we are paid, the need to understand different perspectives can stop chaos and interpersonal warring.

We don't have to agree with someone's perspective in order to validate them, but it does help to understand how they got there.

Below I have highlighted a couple of workplace misconceptions in terms of what employers can or can't allow at work as well as principles to follow for employers.

### Two Workplace Misconceptions About Political Views

#### 1. Employees have a constitutional right to talk politics at work.

**Wrong!** Employees, as well as many employers, commonly but mistakenly believe that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees "freedom of speech" at work. In fact, the First Amendment applies only to government action and neither limits the rights of private employers to regulate employees' communications nor provides any constitutional right for those workers to express thoughts or opinions at work. As a result, there is no constitutionally protected right of "free speech" in the offices and factories of private employers. Although employees may be entitled to express their views freely on their own time or on a soapbox in the park, they have no such wide-ranging constitutional rights at work. Absent rights provided by one of the limited exceptions discussed below, there are no legal protections for political activities in the workplace, so private employers generally may refuse to hire, adjust

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pay/benefits and even discharge "at will" employees because of their political views. In short, "political discrimination" often is not unlawful discrimination...

### 2. Employees Must Always be Allowed to Display and Distribute Political Materials and "Campaign" in the Workplace.

**Wrong again!** Employers generally have the right to adopt and enforce non-discriminatory rules prohibiting non-work-related activities in their workplaces, including "purely political" activities. For example, employers may ban employees from displaying or distributing materials that are purely political in nature; soliciting co-workers or customers to support purely political causes; using the employer's computer and email systems to engage in purely political communications; or wearing buttons, shirts or other items of clothing with purely political messages. Such activities are not protected by the NLRA. In addition, employees who engage in such activities in violation of the employer's published policies may be lawfully disciplined or discharged...

"Employers need not lose control of their workplaces during post elections or any other time. A carefully crafted and uniformly enforced policy that limits political activities and "free speech" will lower the risk of employee claims while increasing worker productivity."

For further steps and ideas based on your state for employers follow link at <https://www.bkclaw.com/en/insights/publications/2016/07/politics-in-the-workplace-what-must-employers-allow>.

### Conclusion: Perspective on a Country's Leadership Whether You Agree or Not.

The best advice I have heard about supporting leadership you may or may not agree with is the same...

*"I urge, that first of all that prayers and petitions... Pray this way for Kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives... This is good and pleases God... I want people everywhere to with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy"*  
(1 Timothy 2:1-3, 8).

The point seems to be the only way to accept what you may not agree with either way is to pray for and respect the position of the leaders of our country regardless of your view of the person. If you are able to place a higher priority on the key relationships in your life, like Justices Ginsberg and Scalia and myself and my sister, then perhaps you can also enjoy a rich and long professional and family relationship despite your political differences!

*Information contained in this alert is for the general education and knowledge of our readers. It is not designed to be, and should not be used as, the sole source of information when analyzing and resolving a legal problem. Moreover, the laws of each jurisdiction are different and are constantly changing. If you have specific questions regarding a particular fact situation, we urge you to consult competent legal counsel. Excerpts taken from Holland & Knight.*

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Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.