

5 Ways to Not Let Politics Ruin Thanksgiving

Political divisions are ugly, and those divisions have spilled over onto the Thanksgiving table. [One study found](#) that “partisan differences cost American families 62 million person-hours of Thanksgiving time.” Presumably those same differences are impacting the quality of family time throughout the year.

Time to count our blessings has become another opportunity to count our grievances.

Here are five suggestions to help bring harmony to your Thanksgiving table.

1. Begin with your purpose in mind

Our mind selectively interprets our experience, in part, based upon where our attention is focused.

When our purpose at the dinner table is clouded by wishes to feel superior to a relative who “just doesn’t get it” we are setting ourselves up for an unhappy Thanksgiving. Since our attention is directed by our purpose, our mind will jump on every shred of evidence to confirm that our relative is a “problem.”

By allowing our mind to gnaw on irritations and grievances, we have made harmony dependent upon others behaving as we think they should. Notice, as details of our complaints fill our mind, we suffer more.

We can lead by going first; we can find our higher purpose for this year’s Thanksgiving gathering. As we take our attention off disagreements with others, we can watch the quality of conversation change.

2. Ask yourself: Would I rather be right or be happy?

Is it important to have an opinion about everything? How often do we look for a pause in the conversation so we can tell others why they are wrong?

When we express an opinion that doesn't need to be expressed, we are saying to the other person: *My function is to correct you, and your function is to accept my correction.* Should we be surprised if others resist us?

Ryan Holiday, author of several books on Stoicism, [writes](#) of the price we pay for our opinions:

"If you were to think of the worst punishment you could inflict on a person it would be to cast a spell on them that says, 'You will now have a strong opinion on everything you see and hear.' Why? Because inevitably they find that much of what happens to them is disagreeable to that opinion, and worse, they will find themselves in many pointless disagreements with other people about those opinions."

Here is the good news. We can be grateful for our opinionated relatives; they provide us an opportunity to practice not having to always be right. We can choose, instead, to be curious about the opinions of others.

3. Practice Ben Franklin's humility rule

In [his autobiography](#), Ben Franklin writes of learning of a flaw in his own character revealed to him by a friend: "I was generally thought proud, that my pride showed itself frequently in conversation, that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any point, but was overbearing and rather insolent."

Franklin realized he was lacking in humility and, despite practice, he could not "boast of much success in acquiring the reality of this virtue." So, Franklin added a rule to his

life:

"I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive assertion of my own. I even forbid myself, the use of every word or expression in the language that imported a fixed opinion, such as certainly, undoubtedly, etc., and I adopted, instead of them, I conceive, I apprehend, or I imagine a thing to be so or so, or it so appears to me at present."

Franklin noticed how contradicting others gave him pleasure: "When another asserted something that I thought an error, I denied myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly, and of showing immediately some absurdity in his proposition."

This Thanksgiving, we can practice denying ourselves the "pleasure" of contradicting others.

4. Understand the nature of feelings

We believe that the intensity of our feelings is a signal that we are right and others are wrong. Upset feelings are a guide to the quality of our thinking and not the correctness of our position. When we experience intense emotions, we commonly attribute our emotions to what is external. We are certain that "obnoxious" Uncle Joe has caused our discomfort by expressing his flawed opinions.

Full stop! Being irritated, being annoyed, being angry are pre-existing qualities in us and are not caused by Uncle Joe. Our reaction to Uncle Joe reveals to us a flaw in our own character.

Instead of irritation, we can cultivate gratitude by remembering how the sacrifices of the family members sitting at our table have improved our lives.

5. Reflect on our shared human experience

Politics is divisive, but all human experiences have common elements.

Viktor Frankl, the famed psychiatrist and author of [*Man's Search for Meaning*](#) also wrote [*The Will to Meaning*](#). In it he describes a “tragic triad” of human experiences. He observed, “There is no human being who may say that he has not failed, that he does not suffer, and that he will not die.”

Before a cosmic moment has gone by, everyone at our Thanksgiving tables will experience Frankl's “tragic triad.”

We can look at the faces around the table and let our hearts melt with the truth of our common journey.

When we focus on what we share, and not what divides us, Love comes to the forefront of our experience.

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