

Restoring Civility in the Workplace

It's May, and the chilly dawn here in Virginia brings singing birds, velvet-soft breezes, and the rich perfume of freshly mown grass and damp earth. I take pleasure and joy in the time I spend on my front porch, sometimes singing a few lines from Louis Armstrong's "It's a Wonderful World."

After a few minutes, I heave myself up from my chair, say aloud, "Well, let's see what's happening in the world," and go to my laptop. There I look at the headlines, opening a few, and reading only one or two of these articles to the end.

Most of these pieces address the same issues every day—the pandemic, riots, cancel culture, transgenderism, or systemic racism—and rarely do any of the writers have much of anything new to say on these topics. A man looking for happiness in these headlines might as well be looking for water in the Sahara.

But there are, thank heavens, exceptions, a fact I realized recently while reading Andrea burg's article "A software company comes up with a brilliant corporate speech policy."

Widburg [reports](#) that Basecamp, a software company specializing in workplace productivity programs, issued a statement forbidding discussions of politics at work. Along with Basecamp partner and founder David Hansson, CEO and founder Jason Fried sent a detailed memorandum to all employees instructing them that henceforth there will be "no more societal and political discussions on our company Basecamp account." The memo ends by noting:

We are not a social impact company. Our impact is contained to what we do and how we do it...We don't have to solve deep social problems, chime in publicly whenever the world requests our

opinion on the major issues of the day, or get behind one movement or another with time or treasure.

Because Basecamp is a private company, the executives have the right to set such policies. Yet despite the measured tone of this directive, about a third of the company's employees are resigning as a result of this change.

Their resignations confuse me. Why wouldn't everyone be happy to avoid such discussions and focus on the work at hand? Scott Adams, creator of the "Dilbert" comic strip and now a popular podcaster, took a lighter approach, writing, "In one of the greatest management moves of all time, Basecamp's CEO persuaded all of his most grindingly annoying employees to resign at once."

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– Scott Adams (@ScottAdamsSays) [May 1, 2021](#)

Now a question: What if all corporations and businesses took this same stance? What if their CEOs and managers told employees to limit their political conversations to their own time?

Coca-Cola recently found itself facing a [backlash](#) after instituting workshops and policies on systemic racism, a plan it hit pause on after a sizable uproar. What if instead of enmeshing itself in cultural and political issues, Coke simply sold its beverages, paid attention to the bottom line, gave its investors healthy dividends, and satisfied its customers?

What if other manufacturers followed the example of Basecamp? "Our goal is simply to bring excellent products to our customers and consumers in a timely and efficient manner," companies might say to their workers. "We are a business, not

an engine of social change, and as a result we may do more good for the world by providing excellent products and services than any number of advocacy groups.”

Such an approach might not end the rancorous divisiveness in our country—the media and our universities are other major contributors to the ugly debates and name-calling of our time, and they are a tougher nut to crack—but it would be a start.

Maybe if, instead of becoming social justice warriors, we focused on our work, built up our families, enjoyed our friends, and quit squabbling about what are often extraneous issues, we might even find some front-porch, springtime happiness and peace again.

We might even hum a few bars of “It’s A Wonderful World.”

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