

words of wisdom

"I'm Just Saying: A Guide to Maintaining Civil Discourse in an Increasingly Divided World."

— By Author Milan Kordestani



In His Book He Details Problems and Solutions

As our society becomes increasingly polarized and divided our personal and professional lives are challenged. Without effective and respectful communication with those whose opinions differ from our own, strife will continue to spur needless discord. Digital media exacerbates issues of discourse and while we can't control the behavior of others, it is possible to handle disagreements using dialogue that will eliminate disrespectful, hurtful language. Challenge is identifying useful discussion and distancing malicious critics.

These 8 Areas undermine communication (listening and talking) at home, work and across social mediums:

Challenge: As a society we are overbooked and overwhelmed which leaves little time to explore how civil discourse has decayed our lives. Reflection is critical in understanding our behavior especially during intense debates or discussions as we uncover harsh truths about ourselves reflected in our interaction with others. **Resolution:** Accepting criticism is part of growth. Reflecting on our thoughts through meditation enables us to examine the challenge and nature of bias. Example: We may begin a discussion with someone assuming they have no knowledge of a topic because they lack a degree, or career experience in that field. Our bias causes us to disregard valid ideas and knowledge a person has to share.

Intention: Are we engaging in conversation to share ideas, learn and benefit all parties, or looking to score points and win no matter the cost? Individuals with poor or ambivalent intentions can disrupt a reasonable conversations with negativity—unaware of their intent or inability to control their tone or content as their mood changes over the course of the discussion. Some mask their intent by taking control of discourse and manipulating its progression. **Resolution:** In a world where 'ill intent' and argumentativeness is encouraged—even rewarded—bring positive purpose to conversations by embracing others to engage in a harmonious debate. Ask yourself: "What is the most optimal outcome that's desired?" Discerning the intentions of others to curb intellectual dishonesty is part of the process. This includes body language, facial expressions, and the verbal cues that can signal intent at a subconscious level. Example: If someone covers their mouth with their hand while listening to you—it might mean that they are holding back something they want to express in the discussion. It's here you consider pausing, then asking the other person if they would like to interject before you continue speaking.

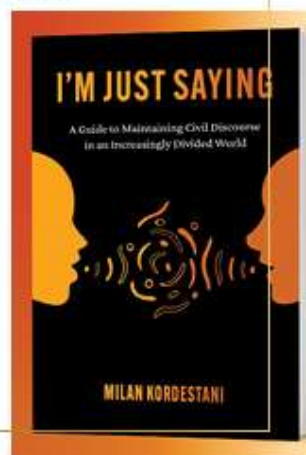
Tone: We use different tones in different circumstances to impart meaning, but often fail to harness this tool to our benefit during discourse. With the wrong tone—even the best intent can be misunderstood, leading to confusion and concern. We are challenged with maintaining a cordial, respectful tone in the face of criticism and argumentation. More than we would like, we lose control of our tone even as we struggle to understand the tone of those we are speaking with—leading to a spiral of unintended meanings and hurt feelings. **Resolution:** Tweaking the trifecta of tone, mood and intention is the tool for better discourse. Pay attention to how your speech affects others relative to volume, pace, inflections and words. Reflect how your tone correlates with your mood and stress levels. Try to be more controlled and intentional—no matter your temperament at the time. Emulate the collaborative, desirable tone of your favorite speakers and leaders professionally trained in the art. Example, watch TED talks by notable experts; listen to how they use a controlled and deliberate tone to share knowledge about their industries and experiences.

Encouraging transparency and appropriately tempered frankness in any discussion will make you a more effective and authentic discussant.

Trust: We live at a time when trust is at an all-time low. We have lost trust in leaders, politicians, and media to be unbiased for our collective societal benefit. The dichotomy of trust and faith are key to regaining trust during civil discourse. Breakdown is caused by societal and personal pressures. **Resolution:** There is ample evidence that humans have a strong desire to embrace respectful dialogue. Example: How racism and bigotry are slowly being overcome through discussion and experiences with oppressed minorities proving that common ground can be achieved across any divide. View yourself and those you speak with as 'peers and equals' on a path to a mutual understanding. Make an effort to ensure that your biases and perceptions don't prompt you to interact differently with diverse parties. Become aware of challenges like 'impostor syndrome' and 'untrustworthy participation' as they undermine the process. Use self-confidence to compensate for difficult collaboration.

Active Listening: It's easy to hear others—but truly listening with attention and care is rare and challenging today. In a time when 'Twitter fingers' respond as soon as possible without truly listening to the perspective of others—our fast-paced, media-oriented society has conditioned us to listen less—reducing our ability to empathize and connect with others. Even when we try to listen we lack the tools to maintain focus or show we are attentively listening. **Resolution:** Simply 'listening to others more' doesn't solve the problem of poor listening skills or discourse.

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Growth comes from active as opposed to passive listening. If someone is dominating the conversation... in a calm, direct way politely say, "I would appreciate it if I could make my point without interruption." Show others that you are 'attentive' by summarizing points they have made. Active listening also utilizes body language, and technology to communicate with those who are differently labeled or speak another language.

Focus: Bombarded with content while navigating challenge in an increasingly divisive world—people experience anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed. This can cause even civil discussions to bleed into negative conversations. **Resolution:** To master 'focus' draw from Eastern practices used by leading entrepreneurs. Ichigyo Zammai is a Japanese practice that hones focus by simplifying attention; Zen 'mindfulness' helps take charge of your thoughts. During convoluted or challenging discussions practice 'First Principles Thinking' to identify core problems and solutions.

Common Ground: A meeting of minds with those from different backgrounds shares knowledge for mutual benefit—assuming collaborators find a shared connection to serve as the foundation or can trust contentious discussions remain cordial. Polarization of politics and media encourages 'social bubbles' putting less effort into hearing the opinions of those who are different from us which creates difficulty in finding common ground and respecting those we debate. **Resolution:** We accept that others have varied lives, we empathize with their experiences and perspectives so their opinions can be put into context. Find a human connection, be friendly, ask fun questions to break down barriers. Humor reduces tension producing a sense of camaraderie to lighten the mood. Expand your social circle to diverse backgrounds; empathy can bridge the greatest gaps in perspective.

Managing Conflict: Civil discourse is a two-way street; disrespect and hurtful language can always occur. We can't control the behavior or ideas of others, but we can handle disagreements respectfully to avoid poor discourse. The world and Online are haunted by trolls looking to sabotage meaningful dialogue. It's hard to identify bad faith actors from legitimate critics. Identify useful conflict and grow from the discussions. Protect yourself from dishonest or malicious speakers out to hijack civil conversation. **Resolution:** Sharing conflicting perspectives with others for the purpose of growing or engaging in malicious discourse cannot be underestimated. Accept and reflect on constructive criticism by asking others to corroborate and expand on judgments you have received and encourage the provision of substantiating facts. Refine your perception skills to differentiate a valuable critique from belligerent expression. One way to identify bad faith actors as the conversation is occurring—listen to their voice tone, and examine how their discussion positions shift during the conversation. Protect yourself from the double-edged sword of social media when looking through your feeds. Be open to embracing differing opinions and ideas. Reset discourse by taking a step back; disengage, assess your tone, remind yourself of your intention. Modeling positive civil discourse encourages the same from those around you. Compassion for others and acceptance of flaws improves our discourse and we can share our ideas with the world more respectfully. Find Milan's book on Amazon. ■

Presented by Merilee Kern, Founder of The Luxe List, an international brand strategist for innovative ideas and technology. Visit theluxelist.com



4th Annual Teen Cancer America ROCK 'N' POLO

With an outstanding performance by Celebrity Gymnast Nia Dennis and scrumptious Tasting Booth By Celebrity Chef Nate Appleman from his new farm-to-table eatery, Farnesia; live music topped the fun day along with all the cheers for professional Argentine Players Alejandro Nordheimer and Juan Gonzalez. Co-founder of the event



Grace Mellis aka Teen Cancer Ambassador gained her polo skills in England at the prestigious Royal Berkshire and Guards polo fields, where she played alongside Royals and professional players. Also, included were activities for kids including the ever-popular Kids Stick Pony Race, henna hand painting by Neha Assar, puppy petting from A Purposeful Rescue and lessons on how to swing a polo mallet. The mission of Teen Cancer America—founders are Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend (famed music group The Who) is to improve the experience, outcomes and survival of teens and young adults with cancer by providing facilities and programs that have been designed especially for them. ■ Visit: teencanceramerica.org Getty Photos

Local Lutheran Church Opens Playground for Kids Every Saturday Morning

Slide, Climb, Play Basketball, Kick Soccer Balls...you name it! Every Saturday morning the First Lutheran Church of Venice has teamed up with Venice Moms



and Ecole Claire Fontaine and they are inviting children and their caregivers to play and play and play and play some more on their outdoor playground. So parents—get your kids out of the house and onto a playground where they can meet and mingle and have lots of fun. The amazing fun-filled kids space is within the iconic premises of the church and offers kids all the jumping and all the climbing and sandbox playing they need and want. NO charge. 10:00 AM to noon located 815 Venice Blvd, Venice Beach ■