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Listen to someone you disagree with!

In the recent past, politics has descended into polarised confrontation, often laced with outright lies, either in support of someone's opinion or in disparagement of the opposing view. The Internet, and especially social media, has become a tool for justification, where we search for views that make us feel right and justified; seldom do we explore the other side to see if there's any value in different perspectives.

This exercise is important in that it will help you to be less entrenched and righteous in your views – a tendency that is driving the whole world into more conflict and less understanding. It will also open the door to learning, which is far less likely if we simply dismiss anyone who disagrees with us.

Barack Obama said: "I will listen to you, especially when we disagree." Try this for yourself, even if you disagree with his politics!



Exercise #1: How to listen to someone you disagree with!

1. Listen to someone you disagree with, first using the media, where there's less direct connection, so the practice feels safer.
2. Become interested in views you disagree with, and listen from a position of curiosity: how is it these people believe these things?
3. Can you understand why they might think that?
4. Is there anything of value in this view for you?

As you move through life and meet people, cultivate that listening position of curiosity. It will help negate two of my seven deadly sins of communication: judgmentalism and dogmatism, and it will open the door to growth and learning.

I am not suggesting you become gullible or start accepting the unacceptable. Some people's views are clearly wrong, wicked or even evil judged by the commonly accepted standards of civilised society. By all means do be discerning, but at the same time be interested and attempt to understand why or how opposing views came about. In most cases you'll learn something, even if it's to avoid certain people or situations.