



From the Editor

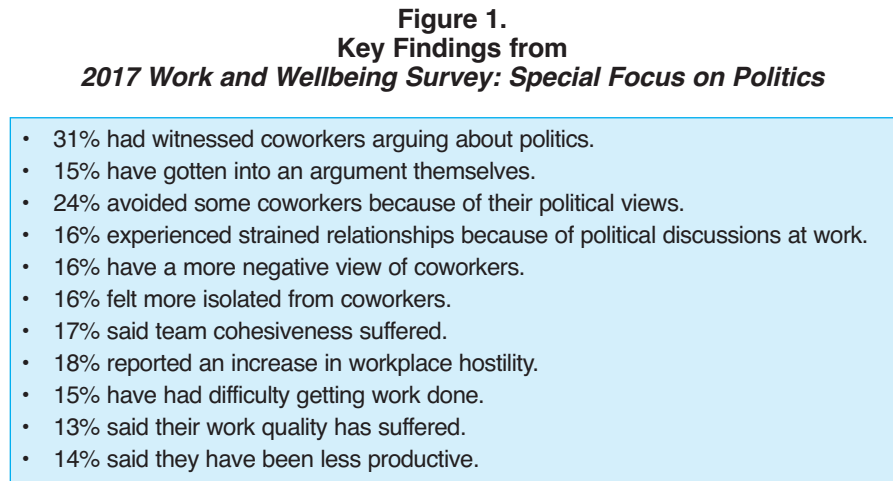
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Politics in the Workplace

Recently, a *Washington Post*-ABC News poll informed me that “Trump’s approval rating takes a hit” (Clement & Balz, 2017, p. A1). His overall approval rating dropped to 36% from 42% in April; his disapproval rating has risen 5 points to 58%. Nearly half of all Americans see the country’s leadership in the world as weaker since Trump was inaugurated. Recent trips overseas confirm to me that indeed, America is losing its moral authority.

Each day brings new revelations. What is the impact of the constant barrage of news, “fake” news, Tweets, crowd-size squabbles, Russian interference, scathing and unending lies, and massive protests? For one thing, there is increased national interest in politics, civic participation, and electoral office. Said Chris Clark, who lives in a mountain village in North Carolina, “All I do is watch TV now. It’s like watching a train wreck, you can’t look away. It’s hard to go to work, really!” (Clark, in Parker, 2017, p. A19).

However, the impact goes beyond too much TV, social media, and other news sources. A recent survey conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA) (2017a) informs us that that our current political climate is having an effect in the workplace. American workers are more likely to report feeling stressed and cynical because of political discussions at work now than before the 2016 presidential election. Among full-time and part-time employed adults, 26% said they felt tense or stressed out because of political discussions at work since the election, an increase from 17% in September 2016 when they were asked about political discussions at work during the election season. More than one in five (21%) reported feeling more cynical and negative during the workday because of politi-



Source: APA, 2017a.

cal talk at work, compared to 15% prior to the election.

Of the 54% of the survey respondents who said they have discussed politics at work since the election, 40% say it has caused at least one negative outcome, such as reduced productivity, poorer work quality, difficulty getting work done, a more negative view of coworkers, feeling tense or stressed out, or increased workplace hostility (APA, 2017a). Prior to the election, only 27% reported at least one negative outcome. See Figure 1 for key findings.

The survey found a difference in the way political discussions since the election are affecting employees based on their political views. Before the election, there were few differences across political party or philosophy on how talk of politics was affecting workers; in the recent survey, self-described liberals are more likely than moderates or conservatives to report feeling tense or stressed (38%, vs. 22% for moderates and 21% for conservatives) and perceive an increase in

workplace hostility (26%, vs. 16% for moderates and 13% for conservatives).

About More Than Winning Or Losing

“The political tensions are about more than who won or lost an election,” said David W. Ballard, PsyD, MBA, director of APA’s Center for Organizational Excellence. “People across the political spectrum have strong feelings about very personal issues that directly affect their lives, including equality, civil liberties, the role of government, social justice, and economic security. Being bombarded with news updates, social media chatter, and arguments with friends and coworkers can reinforce stereotypes about Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, perpetuating an ‘us versus them’ mentality and driving a wedge between people” (APA, 2017b).

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Ballard points out that employers and employees have a shared responsibility to resist denigrating those with different opinions and actively encourage civility, respect, collaboration and trust. Together, a psychologically healthy work environment can be created, which can help diminish the negative consequences of unavoidable political discussions, and serve as a source of stability and support, even during divisive times (APA, 2017b).

Additional Implications For Nurses

Patients and families are part of the workplace environment for most nurses. Already stressed by illness or injury and the healthcare environment, the current political climate can be an additional source of stress for them and affect their behavior. For example, a colleague mentioned that a family member strongly spouted his racial and biased political opinions to her, which she found very upsetting, particularly as she sensed he wanted a response. We need to prepare for the possibility of such incidents so we won't be caught off guard.

There are things we can do individually to help ourselves cope with the stress of the current political climate at work and our everyday lives (APA, 2016):

- *Limit your media consumption if the 24-hour news cycle is causing you stress.* Consume just enough to stay informed and do some things you enjoy.
- *Avoid getting into discussions about the political situation if you think they have the potential to escalate to*

conflict. Be aware of the frequency with which you are having such discussions with friends, family members, or coworkers.

- *Try to maintain a balanced perspective and avoid catastrophizing.* Remember there are state and local elections that prove opportunities for civic involvement where you can channel your concerns to make a positive difference on issues you care about.
- *Vote.* Your voice does matter. Find balanced information to enable you to make wise, informed decisions.

It's a very sad state we find our precious country in today. With a bit of hard work and luck, this too will pass. Meanwhile, we can try to truly listen to each other, and to let kindness, understanding, and respect drive our actions. ■■■

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