

Nonpartisan Leadership in a Politically Polarized World

Author : Margaret Henderson

Categories : [Collaborative Leadership](#), [Leadership Development](#)

Tagged as : [collaborative leaders](#), [community](#), [diversity](#), [local government](#), [non partisan: leadership](#)

Date : November 14, 2016

Here we are, one week past a particularly difficult election season, with some races still unresolved.

Most of the readers of this blog are people who hold governmental positions that require non-partisanship behavior. Others are people who got where they are, at least in part, due to their affiliation with one political party. Still others might be nonprofit leaders whose primary allegiance might be to a specific mission or particular client group, independent of political affiliation.

We are all in public service. We are all operating in a politically polarized country. We are all regaining our balance after an election that revealed deep divisions and generates passionate discussion.

How does a non-partisan leader move through this with integrity? Given that any response could present a target for criticism, the temptation might be to lay low and stay quiet. Tempting...but not effective in terms of addressing distress from any source, healing the divisions among us, and figuring out a new way forward together.

One of the better ideas generated this week comes from the author Elizabeth Gilbert. She suggests we reflect and respond to the question **“How do I want to be in this situation?”** None of us can fully control the situation, but all of us can make choices about how we respond.

We can create opportunities to have these discussions in the workplace, first taking care to ensure that participants are willing to model mutual respect and held accountable for doing so. This is also a good time for any organization or community to restate and reaffirm its values; they may well be put to the test later on.

As for me – today – how I choose to respond is to listen deeply, with patience, to everyone. Not just *even* when I disagree with their votes, but *especially* when I disagree.

How do you want to be in this situation?