

Legislative Staff Model Code of Conduct (...and ethics and civility)

Mark Quiner



“THE COMPASS: NAVIGATING ETHICS FOR LEGISLATIVE STAFF,”
IS DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION AMONG STAFF
ABOUT ETHICS IN THE LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTION.

THE VIDEO CONTAINS INTERVIEWS WITH
NONPARTISAN AND PARTISAN STATE LEGISLATIVE STAFF
FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY,
WHO SERVE IN VARIOUS CAPACITIES.

IT IS PRODUCED BY
THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES
CENTER FOR ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT.

Compass Video

- Please place in the chat what aspect of the video stood out to you? And what is glaringly absent from the code?
- **Sample quotes:**
 - Hard to explain what I do as a legislative staffer
 - Ethics – what you do when no one's watching
 - Middle of a compass
 - System of moral principles
 - Not always clear what the answer is
 - No clear standards of conduct
 - Recognize roles and responsibilities with which you are entrusted
 - Work honestly/diligently behind the scenes
 - Be fair to both parties/sides

Respectful Legislature

A respectful legislature is one where all legislators, legislative staffs, constituents and others involved with legislative business are treated **fairly**, **difference** is acknowledged and valued, **communication** is open and civil, conflict is addressed early and there is a culture of **cooperation**.

Ethics & Values

- Principles: integrity, trust & honesty; doing the right thing
- Professional and personal standards of conduct
- A system of moral principles

Two Types of Ethics

- Law-based ethics (little e)
 - Right versus wrong
 - Laws, rules, policies, guidelines
 - What *must* we do?
 - Why do good people still make bad choices?
- Value-based ethics (Big E)
 - Right versus right
 - No formal guidance—values or principles
 - What *should* we do?
 - Gray areas—can be confusing





- **Character Vs. Reputation**

Breakout Groups: Your Work Environment

- Identify top ethical value as a legislative staff.
- Identify top ethical value for your office.
- How do you apply these values in your job?
- Are these values ever in conflict?

Model Code of Conduct for Legislative Staff

- Model Code of Conduct
 - Public Servant – assist state legislature
 - Loyalty to legislative branch
 - Duty to act in such a way that makes you worthy of trust and confidence

Model Code of Conduct

- Duties to legislators, other staff and the public:
 - Honest, discreet and candid
 - Objective, competent, diligent, fair
 - Respectful and supportive
 - Courteous and law-abiding

Honesty

Diligent

- Maintain high standard of honesty
 - No – property for personal use
 - No – employment for personal gain
 - Give full effort for pay received (not a joke)
 - Tell the truth
 - Be honest in all aspects of your life
-
- Give 100% effort on every task
 - Use time productively and efficiently
 - Complete work in a timely fashion
 - Inform legislators of reasonable expectations

Video on
honesty



Video

- <https://youtu.be/fBHa5woNUok>

Fair

Respect

- Treat all legislators with equal respect
- Provide equal quality work for all legislators to whom responsible
- Don't diminish effort because of legislator's political or religious beliefs, race, etc.

- Treat all legislators/colleagues with respect
- Provide equal quality work for all legislators to whom responsible
- Don't diminish effort because of legislators' political/religious beliefs, race, etc.
- Understand the pressure of their work
- Practice consideration

Supportive

- Support the efforts of fellow staff members
- Be willing to work as a team
- Don't seek to harm another's reputation even when working opposite sides of an issue.

Courtesy

Law abiding

- Treat members of the public and lobbyists with courtesy
 - Respect the need for those outside the legislature
 - Provide help even when you don't have the information they are seeking.
-
- Obey the law
 - Encourage lawfulness in the legislative process
 - Pursue appropriate channels if you have knowledge of unlawful activities

POLL

- Poll Question: Which element of the Model Code resonates the most with you?
 - Honest, discreet & candid
 - Objective, competent, diligent, fair
 - Respectful & supportive
 - Courteous & law-abiding

Breakout Group

- Which Model Code element did you select as the one which resonates with you?
- Which element presents the largest challenge to you? (opportunity for growth)
- How will you address that in the future?

What's
important to
you?

- Keep your eye on the big picture (what helps the institution)?
- Be stridently non-partisan
- Zealously work for each legislator
- Use common sense and experience

Ethical issues
come without
warning

- Political world but must be neutral
- Working in committees
- Answering questions quickly without research
- Multi-tasking
- Working with the media
- Conflicts between principles and goals

How do you
create it?

**“VALUES ARE LIKE FINGERPRINTS. NOBODY’S
ARE THE SAME, BUT YOU LEAVE THEM ALL OVER
EVERYTHING YOU DO.”**

ELVIS PRESLEY

Poll: What do you see?



Poll

- Do you see a:
- Woman's face?
- Saxophone player?

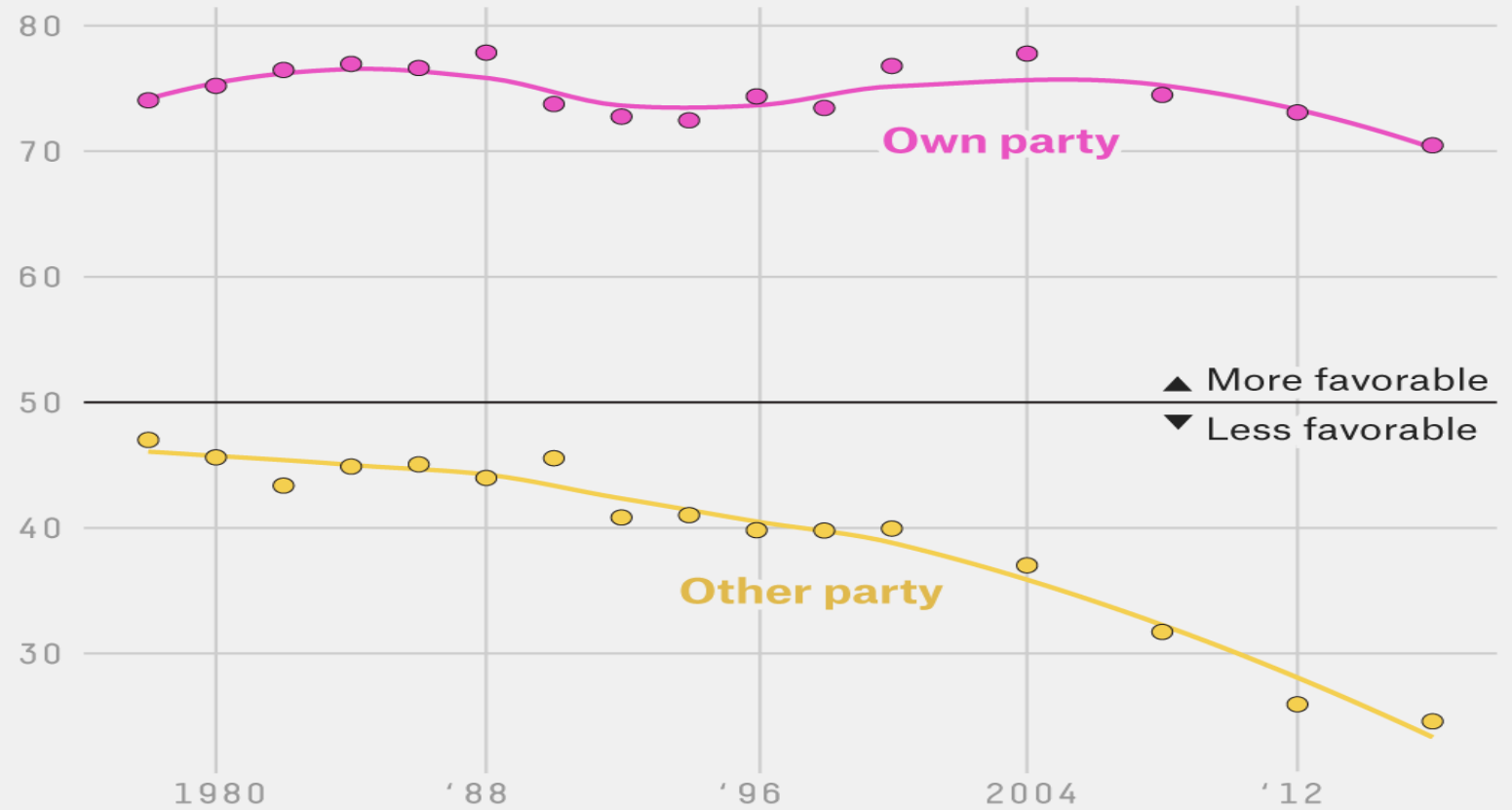
Civility

93%

Civility has reached crisis levels

Americans really don't like the other party

How "favorable and warm" respondents rated their feelings toward their own and the other political party, on a scale of 0 to 100



Respondents who identified as members of neither party were not included in the average.

Civility

- Treat each other with respect, even the other party
- Follow the decorum in the Chambers; it's a process developed through tradition
- Never impugn someone else's motive
- **ALWAYS** keep your word

- Peggy Kerns, former Colorado House Minority Leader, former Director of Center for Ethics in Govt.

One definition...

“Civility is about more than politeness, although politeness is a necessary first step.

It is about disagreeing without disrespect,

Seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences,

Listening past one’s preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same.

Civility is the hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have a deep-rooted and fierce disagreement.”

Institute for Civility in Government

--

Former Justice

Became close friends

Both loved opera

Comic opera "Scalia/Ginsburg"

Both gone now; their legacy lives on



New Congressional Civility Caucus

- 2 Members of Congress from opposite parties formed the caucus.
- To gain entrance, one must bring a member of the opposite party.
- Trying to “inspire a more civil discourse between the two parties”.

- #1 – It all begins with you!
Lead by example
- #2 – Constructive disagreement.
- #3 – Build a lasting legacy.

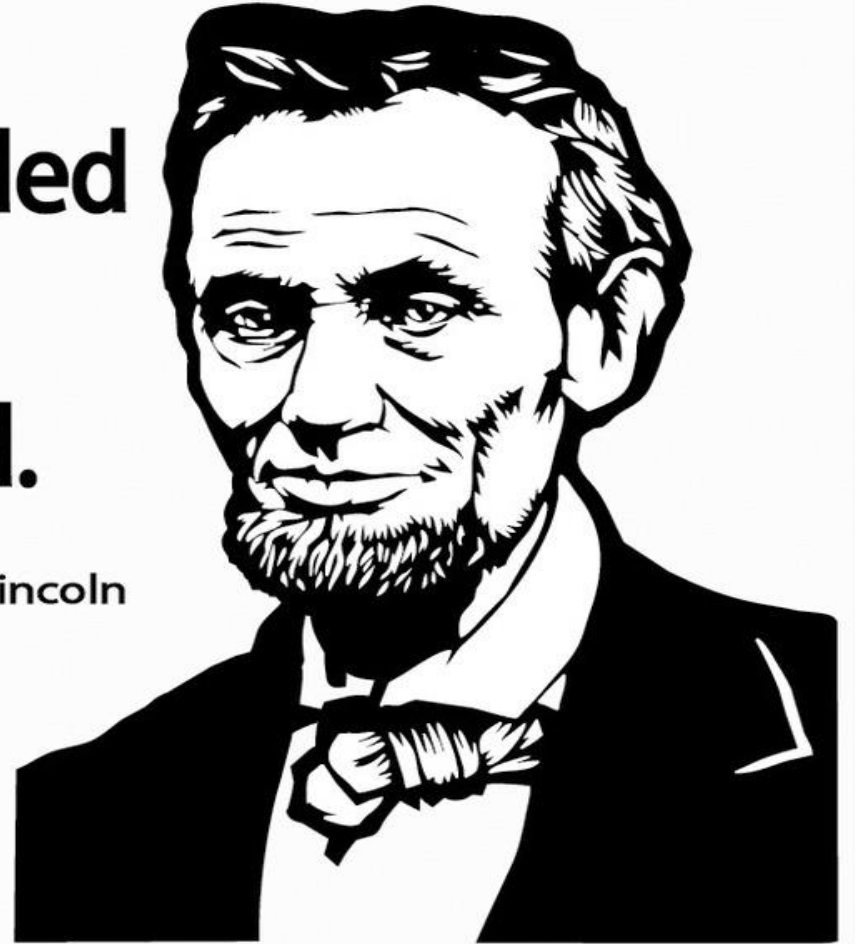
Learn and Commit: One thing you will do to promote civility in your legislature.



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**A house divided
against itself
cannot stand.**

Abraham Lincoln



Civility means
kindness.





Thank you!!!

Donna's legacy

- "I'm deeply grieved that my friend is now gone from this world," Bob says, "but I hope her example of reaching out will challenge others to do the same. I hope it challenges me. I want our commitment to restoring civil dialogue in America to continue as the lasting legacy of the day Donna Red Wing invited me for coffee."

- Bob Vander Platts, The Family Leader

Your Thoughts?

- Think of someone or some group with whom you have a strong disagreement. (who's your Donna or Bob?)
- Write down 2 things you can do to "bridge the gap"
- When will you do that?
- Good luck!

Areas of tension

- Asked to draft a bill on abortion; you have strong feelings about this
- Drafting bill for committee chairman which may conflict with majority of the committee members
- Drafting a bill in a manner which insures its success/failure
- Doing work for a legislator whom you abhor



Rules of Civil Engagement

- Do not interrupt or speak over a colleague when speaking
- Do not allow legitimate critique of policy and practice to become a personal attack
- Recognize that your colleagues were also hired just like you and deserve respect
- Do not ridicule or belittle someone simply because they disagree with you on an issue

Suggestions
from NCSL's
Center for
Ethics in
Government

- Protect the **integrity** of the institution.
- Be **prudent**.
- Be **responsible** for what you say.
- **Respect** the audience.
- Be **authentic**.
- Get a personal board of directors.

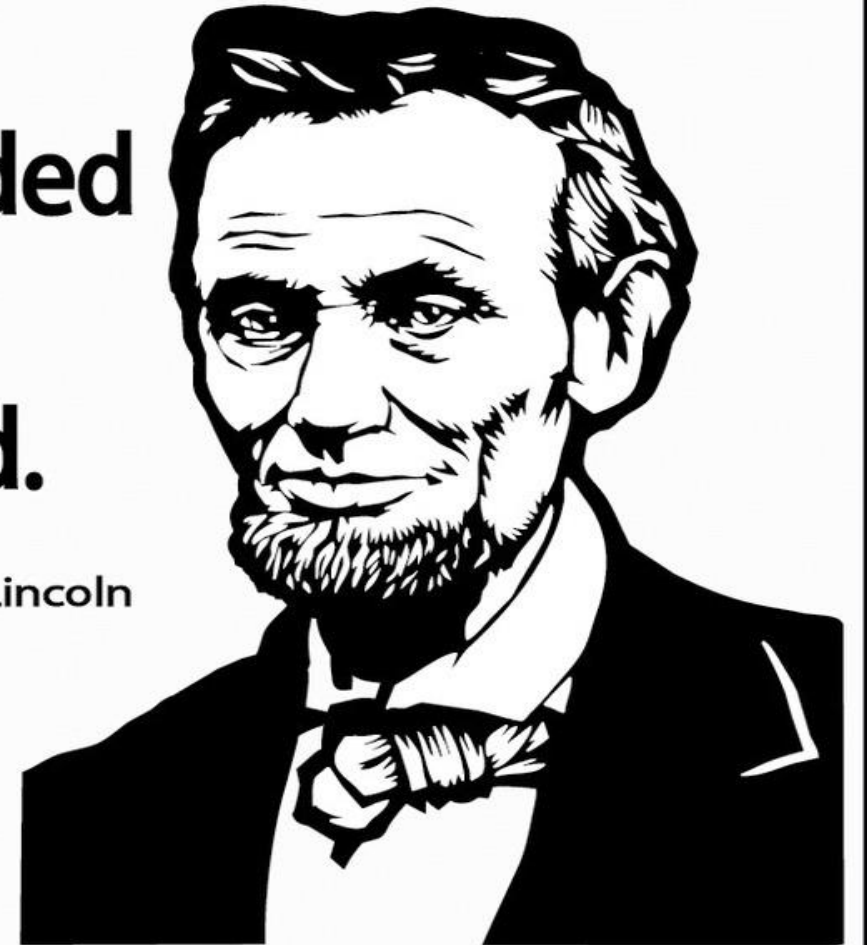
Tips & Advice

- Seize the opportunities that come your way
- Stay humble and teachable
- Your EQ is more important and valued by an employer than your IQ
- Be a good team member, not a superstar
- Look for ways to expand your role in a serving mind-set
- When asked to lead, step up and do so
- Don't seek the limelight, let it seek you!

Civility....
pass it on

**A house divided
against itself
cannot stand.**

Abraham Lincoln



Learn and
Commit: One
thing you will
do to ensure a
values-based
workplace.



COMMITMENT

Do Values
Matter?



Thank You!

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An unlikely
friendship....



An Unlikely Friendship

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dMMCVfKPgs>

Video Quotes

- “What surprised me was his humanity” (D)
- “I have tremendous respect for her as a person” (B)
- “Disagree without being disagreeable” (D)
- “We can fight the good fight in the court of public opinion without hurting each other; when we hurt each other, we hurt ourselves” (D)
- “Didn’t change my beliefs, but did change my approach” (B)

[IOWA, PASSINGS](#)

PASSINGS: Former One Iowa leader Donna Red Wing



Donna's legacy

Watching Red Wing in action, I learned three important lessons.

- First, try to see someone's humanity before you see their identity. The more threatened we feel by others' opposing beliefs, the easier it is to justify treating them badly.
- Second, your political opponent is not your enemy. This is the difference between someone with whom you disagree and someone with whom you are actively hostile.
- Finally, no matter our differences, we can work toward finding common ground.

• Carol Spaulding-Kruse, Des Moines Register