Sophisticated Debates

The object of this exercise is to have some interesting group discussions so the actual topic of discussion is not the main focus. The purpose of this activity is to practice ***expressing your opinion effectively***
It is a key skill to learn how to express yourself to others effectively without triggering an unnecessary fight or argument.

Five quick tips for effectively expressing your viewpoint or opinion:

1. **Build your viewpoint on facts –** Anyone can have an opinion, however if you can base your views on credible facts and information it will be a lot more solid. Think of expressing your viewpoint like building a wall with each fact like a brick in the wall. The more bricks you have the more sturdy the wall. Building fact upon fact can be even more effective than scattering a bunch of information randomly

2. *Nonverbal communication* – Your volume, your tone, eye contact, posture and hand gestures can help make your opinion easier to follow and more persuasive if used correctly. Try to exhibit **poise.**
(Poise - *a dignified, self-confident manner: composure, stability)*

3. **Avoid absolutes –** Words like "never" or always" can ruin the credibility of the point you may be trying to make. It is good to be specific rather than make sweeping generalizations

4. **Respect** – Avoid being offensive or insulting. Usually once you insult the person you are expressing yourself too that usually shuts down any hope of coming to an understanding.

5. **Focus on building up rather than only tearing down** – It can be useful to point out some reasons why you disagree with a belief or viewpoint. However, if all that you can bring to the table are reasons why you feel that other viewpoints are wrong but you cannot make a positive case as to what is good about your viewpoint then you really don't have a leg to stand on. For example if you were in a discussion about why you thought one sports team was better than the other you need to be able to explain why you believe your team is good instead of only bringing out why you think the other team stinks.

The Exercise: Sophisticated Debates

Directions: Try to have some interesting group discussions (without arguing or conflicts) while practicing the 5 tips for effective expression in the box above. Some topics are provided (or come up with your own) -

∗ Is abstinence the only true path to lasting recovery?
∗ Social media – helpful or harmful overall for society
∗ Is it OK to be rich if you stepped on, hurt, or took advantage of others to get there?
∗ Torture for national security – Yes or no?
∗ Scientific testing on animals for the betterment of humans overall?
∗ Is a hot dog a sandwich?
∗ What is the best genre of music?
∗ Your friends significant other hits on you, tell or don't tell?
∗ DC or Marvel
∗ Star Wars or Star Trek
∗ Would you rather get beat up in a fight and no one knows or not get beat up but everyone thinks you did?
∗ Have a lifetime of true love or a lifetime of financial security?
∗ More important: individual privacy or national security?

* What current musician will stand the test of time and be considered an all-time great?
* Is marriage outdated?
* Death penalty- Acceptable or not?
* Best form of social media?
* Better: Michael Jordan or LeBron James?
* Human cloning – is it ethical?
* Abolish the penny?
* What conspiracy theory is true?
* Pay college athletes?
* Superstores (like Walmart or Amazon) – Good or bad for society?
* Zoos – Good thing or cruel?

Questions for Discussion (When Complete)

1. **If you participated, how do you think that you did when it comes to being an effective communicator?**

2. **Were you tempted to argue? If so what triggered you?**

3. **Who in the group do you believe was persuasive and effective at communicating?**

4. **What are some real life situations where it is important to be an effective communicator?**

5. **What is at least one thing you either learned or will remember from this session?**

6. **How important is it to give respect in order to get respect?**

Treat people how you want to be treated
Speak to people how
you want to be spoken too
...Respect is a two-way street