

LEADERSHIP

Political Correctness Fatigue: Does Irreverence Make Better Leadership?

by David Salisbury



Softened language can often undermine authentic communication.

✔ **INSIGHT** | NOTE 18 Oct 2019

Artist Nick Cave’s **recent quote** about “woke” culture might articulate the growing fatigue and distrust of hardline ideological standards best: “I tend to become uncomfortable around all ideologies that brand themselves as ‘the truth’ or ‘the way’... Regardless of the virtuous intentions of many woke issues, it is its lack of humility and the paternalistic and doctrinal sureness of its claims that repel me.”

From challenging the ethical purity of comedians, fearing the recent Joker movie will inflame alt-right violence (it didn't), to attempting to "cancel" entire careers whether their moral infractions were severe or minor, politically correct (PC) hardliners are ready to shut down perceived ideological enemies often without due process or nuanced discussion. The backlash against such rhetoric is beginning to surface as the centrist public is tired of being pushed to choose one extreme point of view or another. How will this shift affect future dialogue and leadership?

Political Correctness is Unpopular

In 2018, 80% of the American population said that excessive political correctness is a problem, according to a survey conducted by research initiative **More In Common**. With only 25% agreeing with far right arguments and 8% agreeing with the far left, the remaining 67% declared they were an "exhausted majority" who is tired of the most extreme viewpoints dictating the country's political dialogue. Even young people, thought to be the primary culprits of "woke" vs. alt-right sniping online, are tired of the constant divide. Near 75% of ages 24-29 declare exhaustion and almost 80% of ages 24 and below the same.

Even traditionally leftist news sources are reporting exhaustion with PC dogma. According to a **NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll**, 52% of Americans feel the country has become too PC and they resent being told how to speak and express themselves. Only 33% said they were in favor of an even more PC America. This goes to show that even if one agrees with an ideology, nobody enjoys being told how they are supposed to agree with said ideology, with only sanitized rhetoric that is in accordance with a pre-determined ultra-left narrative. Basically, "You're only allowed to agree the way WE say you're allowed to agree."

Irreverence is Attractive

It's likely, if not probable, that this verbal hand slapping from the far left increased the attractiveness of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign amid centrists and right wingers who believed overt political correctness was a major issue plaguing the country. In

fact, a joint **University of Montana and Syracuse University study** found that “support for Donald Trump was in part the result of over-exposure to PC norms.” This explains why with each social faux pas or blatantly disrespectful utterance, his appeal only seemed to grow and solidify with his base. When the rules dictate that only ultra-politeness and hyper-sensitivity will be accepted, a disgusting pig all of a sudden seems “rebellious” and a breath of fresh air for those tired of being told how to communicate.

However, this does not mean that one must be amoral and egomaniacal to attract PC weary minds. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) is a progressive figure in tune with not only the issues most important to young and far-left America, but also executes verbal abandon unafraid to step on toes and egos to fight for her constituency. She grills her fellow politicians and reacts directly to critics with a blend of wit, snark, and facts – more artful and proactive than Trump’s usual verbal assaults and braggadocio at opponents. Earlier this year when detractors tried to publicly smear Ocasio-Cortez as an immature ditz with an unearthed video of her dancing on a roof in college, she responded with a **new video** of her dancing into her newly-elected office in Congress. Both Trump and Ocasio-Cortez enjoy cavalier “tells it like it is” personas because they voice their opinions without reverence to traditional political parameters or kowtowing to critics.

Being Effectively un-PC

In a **new study** from UC Berkeley’s Haas School of Business and Harvard, engaging in political correctness with peers and colleagues gives an air of non-authenticity. In the 5,000 participant study, both right and left identifying individuals said that though political incorrectness decreases the image of kindness and sensitivity around an individual, that individual comes off less calculated and more committed to what they actually believe in. They also felt they could rely on an un-PC speaker to be consistent with their convictions and thus most trustworthy for their behaviors in the future.

How should a leader effectively communicate with subordinates in an un-PC fashion without Trumpian levels of mean spirit and ego? You could take a tip from Ocasio-Cortez or presidential hopeful Beto O’Rourke who connect with the Average Joe with a simple tool: Swear. Beto **raged against the gun lobby** after a mass shooting in West Texas, stating “...

this is f—ed up.” Ocasio-Cortez has **pushed back at her own party’s criticisms**, stating she gives “zero f—s” about their opinions. Both acts connected as authentic expressions of rebellion against the status quo that allows dysfunctional business-as-usual to occur in America.

Another easy and obvious method? Just say exactly what you mean to say! Did you notice me say “Average Joe” in the previous paragraph? I knew there may be some readers who expected me to say “Average Joe OR Jane” to politely include all gender variants. However, I trust that you the reader will know what I mean and not take offense to a classic colloquial term. If you did, I do apologize and hope you know I meant nothing by it. However, I’m trying to get right to my main point and not slow my rhetoric down for meaningless gestures. You can trust the point I’m trying to make is real without calculated attempts to pander to any one group of people. Like how I’ve also used terms like “mean spirited,” “amoral,” and “disgusting pig” to describe Trump. This may offend some readers, or delight others. Either way, you know exactly where I stand and know I’m not mincing words. You simply can’t please them all. So just say what you really mean to say and speak to the base who will understand you.



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