

Speak your Peace

The Civility Project

VISION STATEMENT

“Three things in human life are important: The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind.” —Henry James

The best way to determine what a community wants is to listen to what its people have to say. This is a fundamental principle of democracy. Disagreements can lead to healthy debate, which brings new information and ideas to light.

When a particular issue strikes at the fundamental beliefs of a group or individual, the debate can be especially fierce. In these situations, it becomes more important than ever to practice civility.

The purpose of the *Speak Your Peace Civility Project* is to urge the citizens of the Duluth/Superior area to communicate in a more respectful and effective way. This is not a campaign to end disagreements. It is a campaign to improve public discourse by simply reminding ourselves of the very basic principles of respect.

By elevating our level of communication and avoiding personal attacks and general stubbornness, we can avoid unhealthy debate. This will lead to a more effective democracy, and help maintain our sense of community by increasing civic participation.

We hope to reach not only elected officials and political groups but also regular people, like neighborhood organizations, church groups and even the parents on the sidelines of youth athletic contests. We are not just targeting those who are uncivil, but those who allow uncivilized behavior to happen.

Our key message is to promote nine simple tools for practicing civility, taken from P. M. Forni's book *Choosing Civility*.

Pay Attention. Be aware and attend to the world and the people around you.

Listen. Focus on others in order to better understand their points of view.

Be Inclusive. Welcome all groups of citizens working for the greater good of the community.

Don't Gossip. And don't accept when others choose to do so.

Show Respect. Honor other people and their opinions, especially in the midst of a disagreement.

Be Agreeable. Look for opportunities to agree; don't contradict just to do so.

Apologize. Be sincere and repair damaged relationships.

Give Constructive Criticism. When disagreeing, stick to the issues and don't make a personal attack.

Take Responsibility. Don't shift responsibility and blame onto others; share disagreements publicly.

In his visit to the Duluth/Superior area in the spring of 2001, Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, noted that the area is above the national average when it comes to “social capital,” or civic participation by its citizens. In order to harness that passion toward useful ends, it is important, then, to communicate in a more civil, productive way.

The Millennium Group's *Speak Your Peace Civility Project* is a project of the Duluth-Superior Area Community Foundation.