Toastmasters' Five Tips for Mastering Controversial Holiday Conversations

ENGLEWOOD, Colo., Dec. 8, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- Like most things in 2020, the holidays will look much different this year. Whether you're planning to host or attend a small get-together or large virtual gathering this holiday season, some topics—like mask-wearing, social justice, and politics—might be difficult to avoid.

Toastmasters International, the world's leading organization devoted to communication and leadership skills development, offers these tips for balancing opinion and civility in volatile times.

1. **Do a Cost-Benefit Analysis.** Ask yourself if it's even worth it to engage in a conversation that might cause others to feel uncomfortable or escalate to a level you didn't anticipate. You might want to weigh in on a topic you feel strongly about, but try to refrain from initiating a lengthy debate.
2. **Set a Goal.** If you do engage in a conversation on hot-button topics, you should have a good idea of what you want to get out of it. Do you want to feel heard? To share your view? While some people may reconsider their own opinion, it's more likely that somebody who has a differing viewpoint won't change their mind, so set your expectations accordingly.
3. **Be Prepared.** It's smart to think ahead and prepare for possible responses. Not only does that keep you on topic, it removes the heated feelings that can arise when a subject takes you by surprise. You should also arm yourself with relevant facts since it never hurts to prepare yourself with credible information on a topic that might come up in conversation.
4. **Listen.** One of the most fundamental human desires is the desire to be heard. No matter how heated a topic, recognizing the other person's humanity and really listening to what they have to say go a long way toward de-escalating any potential conflict.
5. **Make It Personal.** While facts can be helpful in tense conversations, they can also be countered or ignored altogether. Experts say sharing a personal experience is more helpful in bringing things back to the human level and can even evoke empathy.

For more holiday conversation advice and tips, read Greg Glasgow's 'Mastering Controversial Conversations" in the *Toastmaster* magazine.

To find a local Toastmasters club where you can practice and develop one-on-one communication, go to www.toastmasters.org/find.

About Toastmasters International
Toastmasters International is a worldwide nonprofit educational organization that empowers individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders. Headquartered in Englewood, Colo., the organization's membership exceeds 364,000 in more than 16,200 clubs in 145 countries. Since 1924, Toastmasters International has helped people from diverse backgrounds become more confident speakers, communicators, and leaders. For information about local Toastmasters clubs, please visit www.toastmasters.org. Follow @Toastmasters on Twitter.

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