

Make Shift Coffee House

Overview



Provided at the Nevola Symposium, Colby College, June 19, 2018

Purpose

The purpose of a Make Shift Coffee House is to understand each other's political views and hang out. It's a face-to-face place where people talk, listen, and better understand where each other is coming from. There's always live music and free food and drinks. All people are always welcome and there is never a charge.

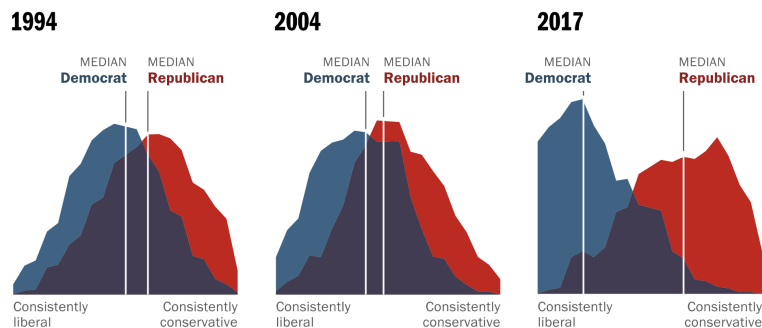
Why It Matters

The political divide in our country is growing along with a dramatic erosion of civility in political conversations. This puts our democracy at risk and moves us towards civil conflict. A well-proven strategy to combat incivility is for people talk face-to-face and better understand each other.

"The partisan divide on political values grows even wider."¹

Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.
Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

An October, 2017 Pew Research Center study and several other polls and studies confirm that we are becoming dramatically more partisan.

The growing political divide combined with growing incivility results in (a) increasing mistrust of the other side and mistrust of government in general, (b) inability to govern efficiently known as gridlock, and (c) conflict escalation including violence.

"Polling confirms the obvious — Extremism proliferates; public figures traffic in rudeness and contempt; loudness and demonization obliterate reason, coarsening our society and poisoning our politics."²

A seminal study by Richard LaPiere proves that "people are more hostile to others in the abstract than when they meet them in person."³ Many other studies back up this conclusion.

Make Shift Coffee House brings politically divided people together in person to not only engage in civil conversation but to demonstrate how it's done and inspire people to carry civil dialogue techniques into other settings. We are providing a proven solution to a deeply concerning threat, and it's catching on.

How They Work

Make Shift Coffee Houses are held in libraries, on college campuses, in grange halls, church halls, in school cafeterias, and many other places. They are always hosted by a local group who provides food and arranges the music. Local hosts also take the lead on publicity and work hard to encourage people with differing opinions to attend. Make Shift Coffee Houses are always moderated by Craig Freshley and each one has a specific topic and a central question. These are carefully chosen by Craig in collaboration with the local host. Each Make Shift Coffee House has informal small conversations and a full group facilitated discussion. And usually the conversations go past closing time, into the parking lot, and on for the following days and weeks!

Facilitation

Craig has professionally facilitated almost 3,000 meetings for almost 1,000 nonprofits and hundreds of governments and corporations of all sizes in all sectors where he has helped groups make good decisions. He is the owner of a Good Group Decisions, Inc. and the author of *The Wisdom of Group Decisions*. Launching Make Shift Coffee House was an act of love and respect for the importance of productive dialogue as a means to bring people together in community in the face of conflict.

Recent Achievements

As of June 2018, we have had twenty Make Shift Coffee Houses in York, Cumberland, Kennebec, Sagadahoc, Waldo, Knox, and Penobscot counties with over 1,000 attendees. An estimated 700 hours have been contributed by Craig, 400 hours contributed by project volunteers, and 400 hours contributed by local hosts. Craig has had two appearances on Maine Calling and there have been several newspaper articles and social media shares. The Resource Page at our website has become very popular with national recognition.

Future Plans & Capacity Needs

Since launching the first Make Shift Coffee House in January 2017, Craig has facilitated and organized all events as a volunteer while managing his own business. Our endgame is to create trainings, materials, and other supports for others to run such events. We expect to serve as a center of excellence and a resource for replication. In order to build upon our early success and manage the enormous interest that has evolved both in Maine and nationally, Make Shift Coffee Houses and its Advisory Board have identified the following financial needs to address capacity:

- Immediate administrative support to expand outreach and event organizing for at least 16 events in 2018;
- Facilitation training for between 20 and 40 community facilitators in 2018/2019;
- Plan and execute a statewide conference to impart skills in how to model and participate in civil discourse;
- Develop and produce a Facilitator and Community Host Toolkit;
- Evaluation: establish metrics of process and participant impact.

How You Can Help: Make a Gift

Checks should be made payable to Friends of the Maine State Library, our 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor. Make a note that your gift is to support Make Shift Coffee House and send to: Friends of the Maine State Library, c/o Maine State Library, 64 SHS, Augusta, ME 04333. Alternatively, you can make a gift online at MakeShiftCoffeeHouse.com

“Like Craig, as an experienced group facilitator, I see firsthand how face-to-face story-telling diffuses conflict. Understanding each other opens the way for creative solutions. Make Shift Coffee House is doing exactly that and is so needed right now!”

- Carol Wishcamper, Donor

“I’m happy to gush about these events as much as possible! Craig’s vision for a world in which we talk to one another about our differences is so needed today. With his Make Shift Coffee Houses, he encourages not just discussion about the things that divide us, but community as well. I hope this model replicates across the country and across the world.”

- Jessica Gorton, Make Shift Coffee House Attendee

Learn More at MakeShiftCoffeeHouse.com

Thank you for your interest and consideration.

¹ Pew Research Center, October, 2017, [The partisan divide on political values grows even wider.](#)

² Richard North Patterson, The Boston Globe, October 23, 2017, commenting on [NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll](#), July, 2017

³ Arthur Brooks, The New York Times, January 21, 2018, commenting on [Richard LaPiere’s 1934 study of attitudes vs. actions.](#)