

Dr. Scott Samuelson – Philosophy & Religious Studies
Extension & Outreach: Civic Engagement Team

Civility, Difficult Discussions, and Working with the Public

ISAC Spring Conference

Political Polarization

Social Media & Anonymity

Erosion of Trust in
Institutions

Decline in Face-to-Face
Communication

Increased Public Outbursts

It's an old story . . .

Incivility



The Plan for this Presentation

What is civility?

How can we model civility?

How can we create the conditions of civility?

How should we deal with incivility?

Big Point #1

Civility is more than just being nice!

What is civility?

Civility is **NOT**
avoiding conflict at all costs
or just being polite.



Civility is

honoring our shared humanity, particularly in the context of living together;

tolerating others, including those who disagree with us;

respecting others, including those who disagree with us.



Big Point #2

Focus on modeling the civility you believe in.

Dichotomy of Control

WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Thoughts – Responses – Focus – Actions

WHAT YOU CAN'T CONTROL

Everything else!

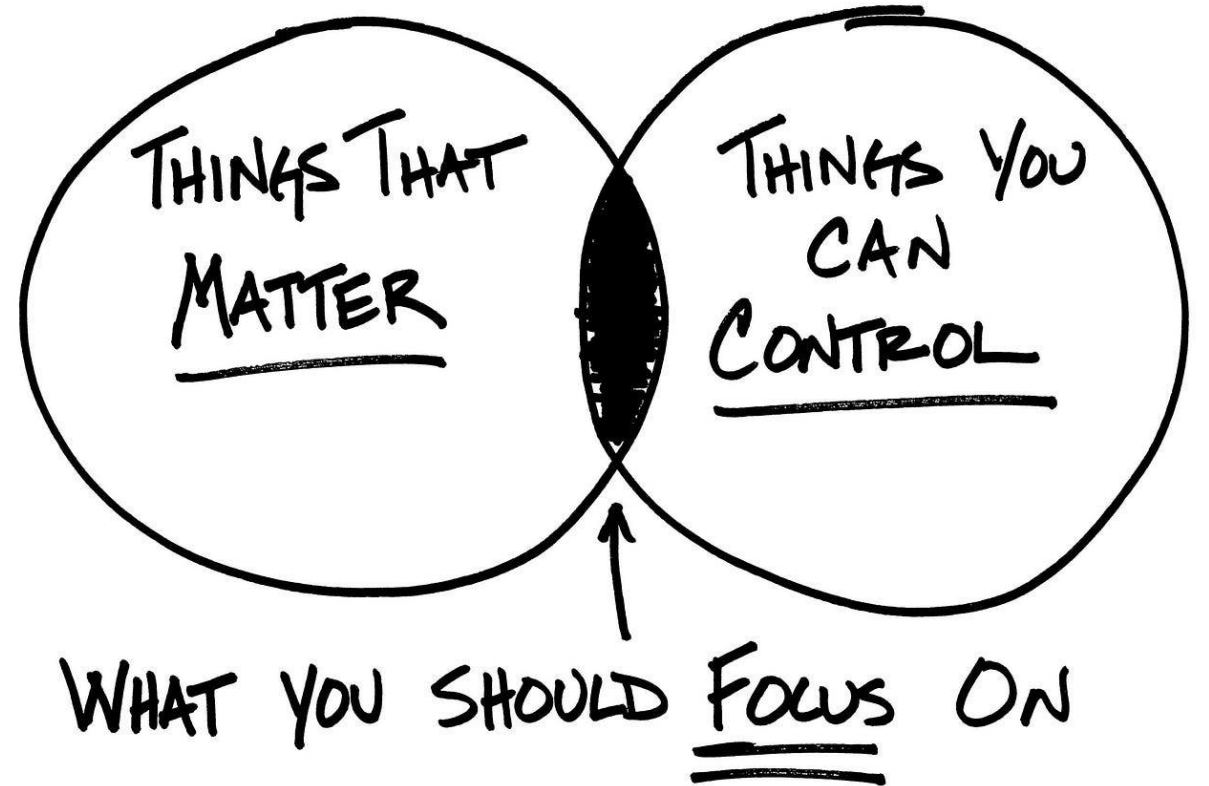
CONTROLLING WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL =

A recipe for happiness and positive change

TRYING TO CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN'T =

A recipe for stress, anger, and negativity

Give us courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what can not be helped, and insight to know the one from the other.



BEHAVIOR GAP

WHAT YOU CAN'T CONTROL

I can't change all at once society's incivility problems.

I can't prevent all instances of incivility where I live and work.

I can't really control anyone else.

WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

I can work on cultivating civility in myself.

I can try to influence my community positively.

I can choose to respond to incivility in ways that I can feel good about.

How do I cultivate civility in myself?

There must be more to life than just agreement or war.

Seek to understand – not just to be understood.

Unbundle people.

Find common values.

Reach out and build new relationships.

Big Point #3

Use your influence to make civil environments.

Creating the Conditions of Civility

Make non-negotiables clear.

Solicit people's voices.

Don't assume everyone agrees.

Have the difficult discussions.

Find the positive core.

Where possible, break out of us-them dynamics.

Respect fair processes for decision-making.

Six Habits of Lyceum Conversation

Read our neighbor's words in the best light.

Talk for the sake of truth and understanding, not victory.

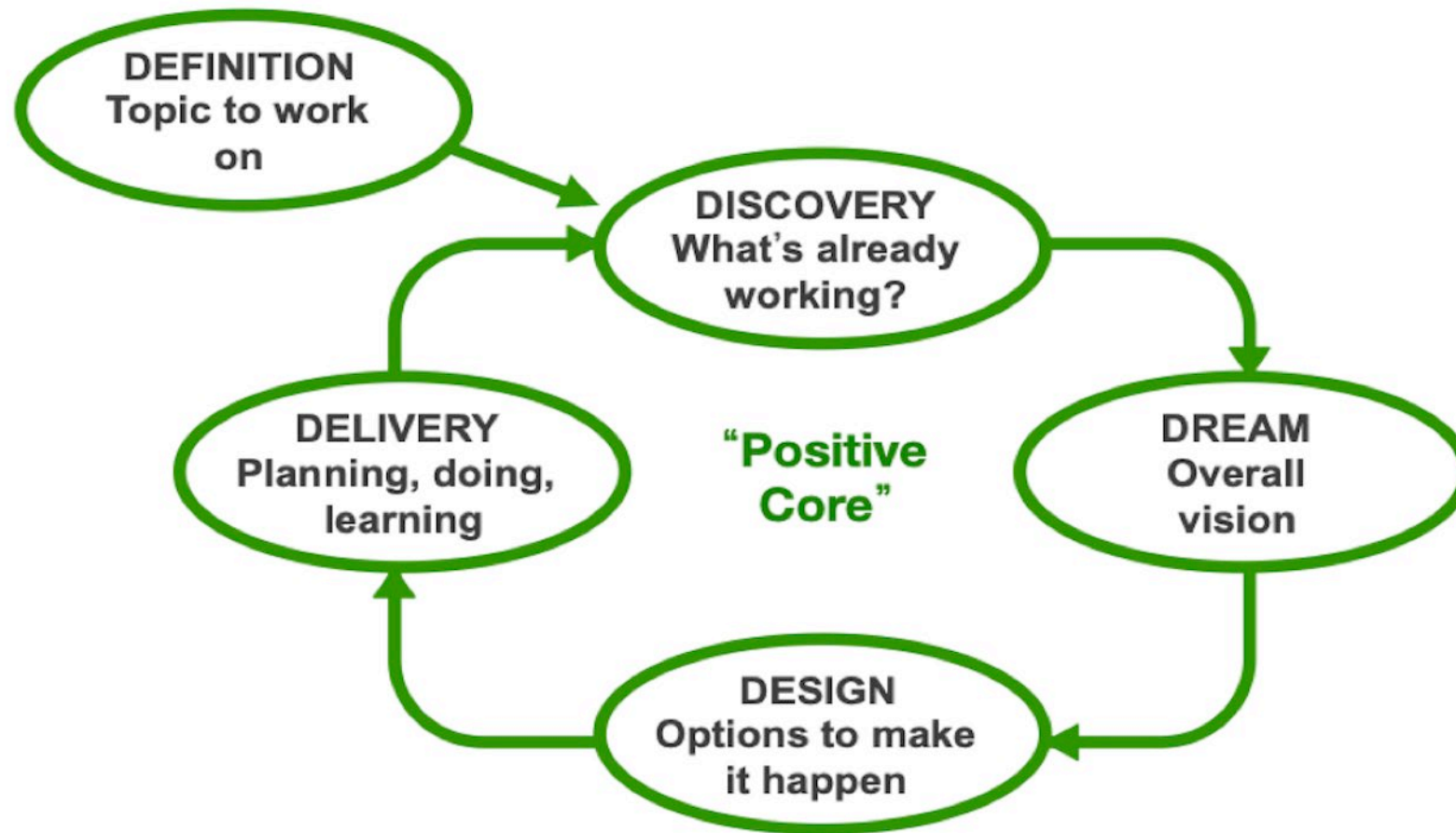
See ourselves as on the same team, even with those who disagree.

Acknowledge what we don't yet know.

Talk for the sake of building up community.

Look for something to love in every person.

A Tool for (Difficult) Conversation: Appreciative Inquiry



Big Point #4

Plan for incivility.

Dealing with Incivility

Hard to do on the fly!

Have a plan for common disruptive behaviors (sidebar conversations, monopolization of discussion, interrupting, lack of participation by a few, lack of participation by most).

Have a plan for dealing with incivility (“I want to hear from you, but you need to be respectful”).

Why care about civility?

Promotes constructive dialogue

Strengthens community

Allows for open-minded exploration

Increases happiness

Is essential for democracy

Big Points

Civility is more than just being nice: it involves standards of respect even in disagreement.

Focus on modeling civility.

Use influence to make civil environments.

Plan how we to deal with incivility.

Make a difference in small ways –that's how difference is made.