

Commentary...

Civility and Socrates

By Bruce Rognlien
Guest Columnist

I am involved with the Citizens4Civility (C4C) non-profit here in Sisters Country. For about 18 months we have been hosting quarterly Civility Project/Speak Your Peace meetings to share ideas and techniques for how we can all be more respectful with each other. We have been focusing on nine core tenets of civility.

I've noticed the word "civility" sometimes gets a bad rap as an antiquated, puritanical or heavy-handed concept — one that will quash debate or somehow curtail the human spirit. In today's culture it's often considered more "cool" (and entertaining) to be an impassioned disrupter or sarcastic critic.

Throughout history, though, civil discourse has been considered very hip by many leaders and scholarly thinkers. Included among these is the 5th century B.C. philosopher Socrates. The "Socratic Method" named for him argues that disciplined, civil discussion (i.e., civility) is key to productive debates; and this type of communication enhances understanding and advances — rather than curtails — the human spirit.

Wikipedia defines the

Socratic Method as: "a cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and draw out ideas and underlying presumptions."

The ground rules are that a topic is selected by a group to discuss. (To put it into Sisters Country context, topics could be the roundabout, hiking trails, local economic growth, etc.) The purpose of the discussion is to hear differing viewpoints and offer participants opportunities to better explain their perspectives — without quarreling.

A key to a Socratic discussion is there are no winners or losers. Because of the format, the participants in a Socratic discussion know they will not be personally attacked. They are therefore more able to engage in a free flow of ideas and positions. The goal is a healthy, fun and intellectually vigorous discussion. Everyone goes home better informed about other points of view; and everyone gains more knowledge about the meeting's topic.

Civility is important to all of us. And hopefully, in Sisters, it will always be considered on trend and "cool." Indeed, C4C's

community-wide, quarterly meetings are often as entertaining as they are informative.

C4C encourages using the Civility Project/Speak Your Peace tenets throughout Sisters Country — at City Hall, in HOA settings, etc. — wherever citizens gather to address local issues and develop effective solutions. I suggest using the Socratic Method of discussion also could enhance local discussions, especially when we need to learn more about a subject before deciding on a course of action.

Socrates is credited by his student Plato as saying: "Life without examination (dialogue) is not worth living." I don't know about that, but certainly we need to look at our community and enter into healthy Socratic discussions (without arguing). This better informs us all; and it encourages all of us to "speak our peace" in a cooperative manner that promotes safety.

Try a Socratic discussion with your friends. See how it works — but remember the ground rules!

Registration opens for trail volunteer training

Registration is currently open for volunteers interested in an annual training weekend focused on developing skills to perform trail maintenance on the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests.

Each year the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests, The Pacific Crest Trail Association, and the High Cascades Forest Volunteers host trainings, called Trail Skills Colleges, which train and certify volunteers to do trail work.

The sessions are designed to train both new and returning volunteers and to allow them to meet other volunteers who work to provide quality recreation experiences for forest visitors. Learning trail stewardship will enhance your trail experience and help make the trails we enjoy better for all.

Class offerings include Chainsaw and Crosscut certification, Introduction to Trail Maintenance, Trail Design, Wildland Restoration, Drainage Design and Drain Dips, Working with Packers and Pack Stock, and many others.

The training is free of charge and volunteers may attend the full weekend or only portions of the training. In Sisters Country, training is available at Allingham Guard Station near Camp Sherman June 1-4. Registration for Allingham closes May 15.

For more information and to register visit: <http://www.highcascadesvolunteers.com/Training/SpringTraining.html>. For more information contact Joe Welke, Deschutes National Forest trails volunteer coordinator, at 541-383-4040.

Classifieds are online at **NuggetNews.com**

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