



Civility on Social Media
*Responding to the Concern, Not the
Insult*

What Civility Is and Is Not

Civility is respectful engagement, especially when we disagree.

Civility is not:

- Agreement
- Avoiding difficult issues
- Surrendering your position
- Tolerating abuse

Civility is:

- Challenging ideas without attacking people
- Listening for the concern beneath the words
- Communicating in a way that keeps dialogue possible
- Representing our values under pressure
- Partial agreement

Your Response Is Bigger Than the Comment

When you respond online, you are speaking to:

- The person who commented
- The people silently watching
- Current and potential members
- The reputation of The American Legion

Bottom line:

Your response becomes evidence of who we are.

The Trap Our Brains Create

We explain our behavior by our circumstances.

- “I reacted because I was frustrated.”

We explain their behavior by their character.

- “They reacted because they are disrespectful.”

Position vs. Underlying Concern

What is the position?	What is the concern underneath?
“The Legion doesn’t care about younger veterans.”	Belonging and representation
“You never tell members what is happening.”	Transparency and access
“Leadership has already made up its mind.”	Voice and influence
“That program is a waste of money.”	Stewardship and accountability

Key Question to Ask

What is this person trying to protect, change, or be heard about?

The PIAA Response Framework

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P
PAUSE



Respond to serve the mission, not release emotion.

I
IDENTIFY



Find the concern beneath the words.

A
ACKNOWLEDGE



Show that you heard the concern without conceding the claim.

A
ADVANCE



Answer, correct, ask, redirect, set a boundary, or end.

Understand what is happening. Decide what you want to accomplish. Then respond.

From Reactive to Constructive

Comment: “The American Legion doesn’t care about younger veterans. It’s just the same people doing the same things.”

- Reactive response: “That’s completely false. You obviously don’t know everything we do.”
- Constructive response: “It sounds like you haven’t seen younger veterans meaningfully included in your local Post. That concern is worth discussing. What would meaningful involvement look like to you?”
- Then add facts or action: “We also have several programs focused on engaging younger veterans. I’d be glad to share them or connect you with someone who can help.”

Know When Civility Means Ending the Conversation

Civility does not require unlimited access.

Respond when someone is:

- Asking a sincere question
- Expressing frustration
- Sharing a negative experience
- Challenging a decision or position
- Sharing information that is false or libelous about the organization, or its members.

Disengage, hide, or moderate when someone is:

- Threatening or harassing
- Using hate speech
- Sharing private information
- Spamming or repeatedly disrupting
- Refusing any good-faith conversation

Before You Post, Ask Three Questions

Will my response:

- Lower the temperature?
- Address the real concern?
- Represent The American Legion well to everyone watching?

Closing Thoughts

We do not control what people post about us. We do control whether our response adds heat or creates a path forward.



QUESTIONS?