

The power of our words – a few lessons from the Tucson shooting

The speculation has begun on whether political rhetoric played a part in the shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords and nineteen others on January 8.

Since the question has been raised, this tragic event provides us with another reason to think about the power of our words. Without pointing blame on one political party, candidate, or news organization, we can all reflect upon a few questions.

- **How do we handle those who disagree with us?**

It is wonderful to be passionate about a cause. Where we go wrong is when our passion blinds us into believing that our cause is the only one that is worth fighting for. Remember, you can treat other people with respect without having to respect their opinions. Check out one of blog posts from last year on disagreeing peacefully.

- **Do we contribute to inflammatory rhetoric by passing it along?**

Maybe you've heard the joke – "If it is on the internet, then it must be true". In other words, don't believe everything you read (or hear). Media has always allowed us to be a participant in the news by our ability to spread it along. Before we pass along any information, take a moment to consider the source, do a little research, and make sure it is worthy of your endorsement.

▪ **Can we all get better at speaking with compassion and thoughtfulness?**

Of course we can all do more to be kind, compassionate, and promote civil discussion. In his book, *Choosing Civility*, Dr. PM Forni writes, "Speaking with consideration and kindness is at the heart of civil behavior. To speak kindly you need to be aware constantly that you are speaking to living, breathing, vulnerable human beings. Don't discount the power of your words." Always consider how quickly your words can tear another down. Dr. Forni continues, "Resist the temptation to think of [those we disagree with] as faceless, nameless agents of the 'wrong side'."

As the new week begins, lets start it by remembering the power of our voice.

Our deepest sympathies to the victims and the families of the January 8 shooting in Tucson.