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Election Etiquette: Five Tips to Help Managers Keep the Peace During A Passionate Race of Ideas

Coral Gables, FL - October 13, 2008 - With 61% of the of the voters indicating that they are actively following this year's Presidential election, sometimes it is impossible to leave politics at the workplace door.

So what's a manager do to when political leanings take the focus away from everyday productivity? Dale Webb, director and founding partner of The Protocol Centre™ in Coral Gables, Florida, advises professionals on matters of business etiquette and protocol, guiding them on everything from table settings to managing their Blackberrys.

On the issue of keeping partisan peace at work, Webb offers these five tips to managers at all levels:

- **Set an example by keeping your own leanings off-limits:** Webb surveyed some of her clients and found that the consensus is that managers themselves should remain neutral and restrained in their demonstration of political ideals. "The manager has to set the tone for their workplace," Webb said. "They cannot let their own preferences be a point of contention for others."
- **Encourage 'respectful' discussions:** Since political conversations are hard to avoid, they should be respectful. "If a conversation is overheard that demonstrates bi-partisanship, the manager should applaud it. Professional behavior should be outwardly acknowledged and rewarded," Webb said. "Managers can say or e-mail something like, 'I appreciate the fact that you are open to the other person's viewpoint.'"
- **With clients and donors, remind employees that the job is #1:** During the Elian Gonzalez crisis of 2000, Webb was Vice President of University Advancement for Florida International University in Miami, and feelings on both sides of the issue were raw. She did not discuss her feelings with school staff or donors, cognizant that it was not in the best interest of her position to speak out. "Employees should be reminded that they do not work for the Republican or Democratic campaign; they work for the



- company, and the company serves the client - regardless of politics,” she said.
- **If conversations veer into sensitive HR territory, address it quickly:** In this race, political comments can touch on issues of gender, race and ageism. If the tone turns nasty, managers should have a one-on-one discussion with the commenter on what’s at stake - their performance and that of the company, Webb said. “Insensitive and volatile remarks should not be tolerated, but addressed in a confidential and professional manner,” she said.
 - **Acknowledge that any display can present an issue:** One office volunteer built a ‘shrine’ to her candidate in her cube and didn’t see it as a problem because she didn’t deal with the public, Webb said. But even a button on a lapel sends a message. “When you put it out there, it can get in the way of a relationship. In the workplace, anything you put in the middle of a relationship -- a tattoo, nose ring, a button -- does say something about the professional presence that you are creating. Even in a casual environment, like a hair salon or auto shop, it is still a workplace. Wear your campaign T-shirt on the weekend.”

The Protocol Centre™ provides seminars on Business Etiquette, Dining Protocols and International Briefings for corporations, educational institutions, government and individuals. Each seminar is designed and customized for clients and are structured to provide completely up-to-date information on 21st century business etiquette and dining protocol.

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