

Devotion

September 24, 2020



*On Tuesday we learned about the THINK Model of responding and interacting on social media, becoming aware of our minds, motives, and passions alongside healthy ways to interact with others. The following excerpts are taken from a helpful online resource for best practices in reacting to social media when the THINK model is not quite enough.*

*Our reactions online and in person say just as much about us and our faith as it does for the one who is posting. Our responses matter, in other words. So first we engage our minds. Then we engage what Freud would call our “ego”- the part of our mind that is responsible for interacting with the real world around us!*

Ever wonder why people bother arguing on forums, blogs, or social media? If you’ve witnessed or been a part of one of these heated debates, you probably noticed that in the end no one ever changes their mind. The only change that occurs is when bystanders on either side choose to block their controversial friends from their feed. If you’re truly passionate about a cause or viewpoint, there’s nothing wrong with expressing it. But many people tend to rely on emotion rather than fact to make their point. Becoming a master of online debate is an art, and crafting a reply that can turn the negativity into something beneficial for your platform takes true poise. At times some events and incidents unfold and spin out of control. It can result in negativity that can affect your reputation in many ways and at various levels. Whether you deserve those negative comments or not can be a different point altogether. The bottom line is that it can do harm to your carefully developed online reputation. So here are a few tips to guide our personal responses when we disagree with something online.

### **1. Stay calm. DON’T USE CAPS LOCK. And avoid strong punctuation!!!**

Using ALL CAPS if you are communicating digitally is considered rude. Imagine receiving an email in all caps containing offensive and harsh language to go with it. It’s an immature way to communicate. Understanding online communication etiquette is important. Caps lock and multiple exclamation points only show that you’re letting your emotions get the best of you. You may think you’re emphasizing a strong point, but to the outside world, you appear unstable and dramatic. Just delete, take a deep breath, wait a few hours to respond and then respond rationally.

### **2. Use the Care Bear Stare**

The Care Bear Stare is a method that allows you to approach an upset commenter and turn the relationship around. It’s just like the saying *Kill them with kindness*.

If you respond in a way that defends your belief but also compliments the commenter or their beliefs, you’ll find their next response to be much more kind. You might even win an apology out of it. One example might be, “I can see your experience is much different than mine. I am

concerned because....”. Find something you both can agree on to build a conversation out of instead of poking the bear of difference!

### **3. State the facts**

Never rely on your opinion to get your point across. Stick to the facts. This may mean acknowledging facts that favor the opposition, and that’s okay. At least you’ll show that you’ve considered both sides of the debate, which will make you more credible to bystanders. Remember that your chances to win the aggressive commenter’s approval are negligible, so your priority should be to save face with bystanders. Nine out of ten people will read a negative post. Your response only has the power to repair the damage the negativity has done. Replying the right way shows you care about the person enough to discuss it in public.

### **4. Reference your work**

Sometimes an angry comment will come from someone who only read the opening paragraph and failed to read any further. Their argument then backs up the exact points you made. Some people find it hard to resist calling this commenter an idiot when in fact their comment is a good thing. Just politely address where you agreed with his/her points in the original piece and move on.

### **5. Respect their opinion**

Show respect for other people’s opinions. Acknowledge that there are always several sides to any debate and that you appreciate them bringing a different perspective. You may disagree with their opinion, but as long as you’ve followed the tips above, you’ll still have credibility.

### **6. Keep Your Responses Crisp and Positively Worded**

Don’t make your response a long-winded and wordy one. The rule of thumb is to keep it crisp. Cover your response in three to four sentences at most.

You might be itching to counter the negativity, more so if it’s unfair and unjust, with some solid counter-arguments. But the urge to defend every point must be resisted. You might prove your case but it makes bad sense. Did you consider that long-winded responses can actually give the complaint a shade of legitimacy?

Experts opine that going into details of the issue in the comment could make you sound defensive and put you on the back foot. The same stands for follow up questions on the issue.

### **7. Know when to stop**

Sometimes it’s best to agree to disagree. If you find yourself needing to repeat statements you’ve already made, it’s time to walk away from the conversation.

Nothing good can come from a constant circle of arguments. Once again, you’ll be more respected for handling a situation with the maturity to walk away.

### **8. Apologize when needed**

This is a hard one but everyone makes mistakes. Everyone falls prey at some time or another of saying something on the screen that we would never say in person. Everyone forgets to be nice sometimes! If you find yourself either as a posting person or a responding person getting caught up in the negative blame game or feeling defensive, it is entirely possible that an apology is the right way to go. If your comment intentionally threw someone under the bus, then an apology is the only way to build back that relationship. If your comment is broad and encompassing and uses “they or them” mentality, then you likely need to apologize. Jesus didn’t hang on the cross saying “I’m too proud to forgive these people”. He uttered “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”. Sometimes, neither do we.

This can be a harsh world we are living in right now. And politically speaking it will probably not look any better soon. We are compounded by the fact that we cannot be face to face with each other to “work out our differences” or to remember the central point of why we are in relationship in the first place, because God called EACH of us to this place. But we all have choices, nonetheless. In your choices online and in person, our call is to remember that God is at work in each of us and no matter what our opinions, we each belong to God. Let us respond accordingly. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.relevance.com/blog/rude-best-ways-respond-negative-comments/>