



SHRM GEORGIA CIVIL UNDERSTANDING PROJECT (“CUP”)

WHAT? A civic awareness and citizen building program offered through SHRM Georgia and its individual chapters involving civil and meaningful discussion of high-profile issues confronting the workplace.

WHY? Various competing groups now champion answers to cultural and life-defining questions. An inability to receive, consider, and rationally respond to a competing idea interferes with the formulation of solutions that best serve America’s interests.

This pattern of unilateral positioning threatens our legislative process. Bills championed by a political party face immediate criticism and sabotage from the other party. Promises of bi-partisan progress generate sarcastic laughter from a disbelieving public. The absence of civil discussion results in the enactment of shortsighted laws.

Most US venues discredit civil vetting of an idea, opting instead for one-sided monologues or grandstanding shouting matches. Organizations that once stood for open and rational thought have lost the trust of a public indoctrinated with shock television, 10-minutes-of-fame, Internet video clips, and agenda-driven columnists.

Many Americans question their role in governing our country. The founders of the Constitution formulated a civil experiment in which each citizen would take responsibility for self-governing. As the world became more complex and as competition for attention grew, the individual felt a loss of significance and retreated into anonymity. Citizens relinquished to “experts-of-the-day” the responsibility of governing. Hence, finger-pointing became a habit of many Americans when facing a national issue.

SHRM Georgia’s Civil Understanding Project (“CUP”) produces rational discussion of socially complex questions:

- 1) To assist in formulating the best answers;
- 2) To infuse directly into local HR professionals and indirectly in the surrounding communities a respect for and an ability to engage in meaningful civil discourse;
- 3) To provide an issue-vetting model for other organizations and communities facing the same or similar societal-altering questions; and



4) To reconfirm and reinvigorate the American ideal of self-governance through a free, informed, accountable, and caring citizenry.

HOW?

SHRM Georgia's HR professionals are uniquely positioned as a socially centrist organization of business men and women. The involvement of a SHRM worker does not signal a bias or attitude of a left or right, Democrat or Republican, employer or employee, or other competing social groups. At the same time, SHRM Georgia's melting-pot values reflect the diverseness of its members who represent every political party, national origin, religious sect, and other workplace category. When championing a process of civil understanding, SHRM Georgia should avoid the type of skepticism shown to most organizations who proclaim an unbiased agenda.

Each SHRM Georgia Governmental Affairs Chair ("GAC") serves as a conduit between a local chapter and the surrounding community's state and federal legislators. This cultivated access to America's leaders and thinkers provides a local chapter with access to our country's most challenging workplace problems.

The mission of each local SHRM chapter necessarily attracts well-regarded advocates of competing ideas and programs. These advocates present arguments that advance their respective positions to the chapter's members in regularly scheduled chapter meetings ("Forums").

As a condition to appearing as a Forum presenter, each advocate must agree to respect basic rules of civil discourse derived from traditional American manners and values.

To preserve an environment that models and encourages inter-personal respect and responsibility, each chapter's GAC and participating officers will learn or relearn the basic civil understanding principles of 1) pursuit of truth and 2) respect for human dignity. This core group of SHRM officers will carry these principles to the chapter's membership and elicit from each member a commitment to abide by the principles during a chapter Forum.

Encased in an environment of civility and courage, each chapter Forum will vet workplace issues through "expert" presenters representing competing positions. The HR audience, committed to civil understanding, will demand accountability from presenters who proceed through moderated and alternating argument, and end with follow-up questions from the chapter members. The HR audience, in turn, must evaluate the validity of the presenter's positions.

A local chapter may select an issue for further analysis. Whether assigned to a volunteer team of HR professionals, presented to a nearby school or university, or contracted to other professionals, a vetted issue may result in a



chapter solution or opinion. Consistent with national SHRM guidelines, the local chapter may accept requests for issue analysis from local, state or national sources.

SHRM Georgia's Civil Understanding Project seeks to impact the civic awareness of the local community. Each local chapter will develop methods to share with the surrounding workplaces and citizenry a Forum's commitment to and the principles of civil understanding. Inviting a high school civics class, an editor of the town newspaper, or Rotary Club to observe the chapter's monthly civil discussions may cause someone to believe that a community is best served when an idea receives the honest and respectful scrutiny of multiple perspectives. If Georgia can point to 20 communities (chapters) with a growing group of citizens who recognize the need for citizen-lead, civil understanding, could Georgia's experiment be duplicated in other states and communities?

IF AN INDIVIDUAL CAN TEACH SOMEONE HOW TO RESPOND TO A NEW IDEA, A LOCAL CHAPTER CAN INSTILL IN A COMMUNITY A RESPONSIBILITY TO PURSUE TRUTH THROUGH A RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY. WHAT BETTER PROOF OF THE AMERICAN IDEAL?