Be in Good Voice

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Adequate preparation for being a good citizen with a voice is based on a number of key factors, which include knowledge, respect, composure, and most importantly, an open mind. As Aristotle suggested, “It is not always the same thing to be a good man and a good citizen” (Aristotle III.1276b34). In order to be a good citizen, one must be informed, recognize and understand opposing points-of-view and be able to articulate one’s perspective.

Prepare

Being sufficiently prepared for being a good citizen with a voice is vital. According to Francis Bacon, “nam et ipsa scientia potestas est” or for those not fluent in Latin “knowledge is power” (Bartlett, 206). In the realm of developing a good citizen voice, knowledge truly is power and establishes the cornerstone for formulating and expressing one’s opinion. Building a solid database of facts on all sides of an issue is the key to developing a clear picture of the situation. Often, in-depth research into all available information on the topic is required to achieve this objective. Cursory accumulation of information is not sufficient for developing good comprehension of the facets involved on many controversial issues. Furthermore, facts must be explored and validated in order to assure that they are, indeed, facts and not suppositions or assumptions. Only through a solid and well-rounded knowledge base, can a citizen generate a valid position and clearly express his or her views adequately.

Since issues are often intertwined and have overlapping ramifications, the best preparation for a citizen advocate is to constantly be informed about current events and topics on many levels from local to international. A good citizen must read a number of newspapers with different editorial perspectives, watch and listen to news media broadcasts, monitor internet and other social media sources, attend community forums, and stay abreast of current events and
discussions. It is equally important to participate actively in community and national organizations that provide information on issues, debates and problems.

Understand

Even as a citizen develops his own point of view on an issue, it is very important that he understand the opposition's stand and thoughts. Without a perspective of the opposing view, he may not fully understand his own position. Moreover, data gathering at this stage dictates the exploration of new ideas. In addition, he will be better prepared to rebut opponents' viewpoints if he is fully informed. Ample preparation is essential for being a high-quality resident with a voice.

In order to present a logical argument, a good citizen must be prepared to put emotion aside. Mutual respect and a sense of fairness and honesty can further a cause far more than a loud uncompromising stance. Keeping a cool head will allow the advocate to listen better and understand the concerns of others. A supporter needs to understand others with his head but let his heart be open to their concerns. People with dissimilar views are generally well-meaning individuals who just happen to see things a little bit differently. A good citizen will also seek compromise on some facets of the discussion, because cooperation can develop programs and projects that might otherwise languish.

A good listener can learn a great deal from hearing and observing others. It is fine to have the courage of your convictions but it is equally important to also take the opportunity to listen. Winston Churchill expressed it well when he said, "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen" (Churchill). By listening, a responsible citizen can develop new and interesting ideas, have eureka moments of enlightenment, and may discover facts that strengthen his ability to communicate his own position.
“Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story” (Ehrmann 4-8).

Present

Having collected facts, listened to views, and formulated a position, it is very important for the citizen advocate to clearly and succinctly present his or her ideas. The most important aspect of good citizenship is becoming involved and expressing one’s ideas. A responsible constituent should not be afraid to share her opinions. One right as a citizen is “freedom of speech” so all are empowered to say what they wish. Charles Eliot Norton reminds us that “… it is the duty of the good citizen not to be silent” (Bartlett, 728). Moreover, a thoughtful person should not be intimidated by the opposition. If she is knowledgeable and has developed a sustentative position with an open mind after considering the facts, the next step is to speak loudly and clearly. Some basic practice in order to be well prepared to develop ideas can be an excellent part of the preparation. If public speaking makes her nervous, a speaker can visit the venue in advance so that she is comfortable and familiar with the layout and equipment, if any. Even a first-time proponent should not be afraid to be himself; he can be confident that he is well prepared. When speaking, the supporter should focus on doing so in a concise and clear manner along with providing supporting data to validate her opinions and further her points. In order to communicate his opinion most effectively, a good citizen will remember that not everyone responds to the same types of information transfer. He will utilize written and visual documentation as well as oral discussion while assuring that all modes of presentation are concise and clear.
Works Cited


