



# BEING RELATIONAL

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## I Can Relate!

The monthly missalette on Relational Practice

### **Being Relational: Paying it Forward; To Vote or Not to Vote, That is the Question**

Whether you read this on the eve of a general election or in consideration of upcoming elections, midterm election season is upon us in towns and cities across the US. Consider the right to vote. It's a radical relational right. It's a relational right because it is both self and other motivated, intended to foster individual expression and well-being for the whole. It is an individual right of autonomy intended to be integrated in responsiveness to a larger society.

Everything about voting is relational. Consider what happens when you exercise your right to vote.

The very act of making sure you are registered to vote is both an act of personal strength and a belief that your vote matters (it does) as well as an act of *humility* that there is something larger than just you (there is) that you can help shape (personal strength) and that shapes you (interaction with others). Being included in society is relational. Your vote says I am included. I am a part of what happens. I have capacity. I have efficacy. The radical relational right to vote is much more than a system for winning or losing, much more than supporting a favorite candidate or slate. It's about empowerment and responsiveness.

And if you are not able to vote for one reason or the other, then talk with and convince someone else who does have the privilege of voting to exercise it.

Why is voting relational? Because it is all about a way of being that promotes well-being, that gives us the choice to be included and engaged or to bow out, to disenfranchise ourselves. It may seem paradoxical but the choice NOT to vote because it "doesn't matter" or because "it won't make a difference" is a highly transactional choice, maximizing self-interest (don't feel like it, too hard, poor me, doesn't matter, don't like anybody) at the expense of others. Why at the expense of others? Because candidates will be elected on small numbers of turnout, and that damages society.

But to vote, oh that glorious right to vote, the relational right to vote, to go to your nearest polling station and to get in line to do so, now that is a radical relational act. That you care enough about society to engage and be counted. And our country's laws give you the privacy of your voting booth because your society *believes in you and your good judgment*, and you show up because you believe your vote counts. That is an exquisite relational interaction and system.

Yes, civil engagement is at the heart of every civilized society. Each voter is a strong and peaceful demonstrator. Each voter chooses to engage in differences in a relational way. Our democracy is premised on the right to vote for its very identity, existence and sustenance. We as US citizens need the right to vote, and society needs us to exercise it.

But what about the “My vote doesn’t really count” view? The “Why vote? the person I want to win will likely lose.” While we cast a vote with the hope that the candidate of our choice wins, the act of voting itself, and the *outcome* from the pure act of casting our ballots is much deeper and broader than our favorite candidate winning. The exercise of free speech is a sacred and radical relational right.

The well-being of the whole benefits the more people exercise the right to vote. *You want to inspire even those who have different views than yours to vote.* Because regardless if others vote the same way you do, the more people show up to vote, the higher the likelihood for winners to emerge who reflect the greater whole. That is good for our states. That is good for collegiality and policy making in Congress.

We can use our power relationally to mobilize others to vote. You can use your *communication power* and your *persuasion power* to instill a *relational motivation* in all your friends, children, family members, clients, and those you meet to be engaged and vote. You can be open and non-judgmental but still have an opinion as you encourage all you talk with to vote for candidates they each believe will lead in ways that can benefit the balance and well-being of the system. Relational approaches such as these increase the likelihood they will show up at the polls to vote, freely and thoughtfully.

And if we model relational discourse in our political discussions where there are differences and we remain open and curious about differences, willing to be shaped differently in our views or more expansively in our views, we also create more relational outcomes. That will require each of us to be aware of not falling into the trap of our own **Tribe Think**. Our homes, our workplaces, our lunch counters, our society are more energized and alive when we have civic engagement. We have more thoughtful discourse when we *relationally* discuss politics. So whether it’s over a meal with a colleague, or the dinner table with family, or in line at the polls and casting our ballots in the booths, we can be both strong for own view and still engaged in an open society with a belief that the greater good will always emerge when each of us stays engaged and grounded in relational ways.

The potential to win is exciting, but it’s the discourse and the voting itself that is the radical relational act.

Each of our votes is a showing up. An “I am here”. An “I want to be counted” (by you). An expression of “I matter”, and an act of “I care” (about you) (about my state) (about my country) (about the world). And every vote that is filtered through a relational lens for candidates who are bold and brave enough to speak relationally is a vote that also boldly and with humility says: “I care about issues larger than just the ones that impact me directly today. I care about issues that are part of the larger system I live in with others. I care about issues that impact others I do not know. I care about quality of life for the next generation. I care about our future.” To vote is part of paying it forward.

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