



Governance and Moderation Approaches to Politics in Online Communities

 **SNAPSHOT**

SPEAKERS

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Technologies

COMPETENCIES

Policy & Governance

MATURITY PHASES

CMM2, CMM3

TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

We are in unprecedented times. Communities welcome engagement, but with the political climate in the US right now and its far-reaching global ripple effects, community managers are scrambling to understand their role in the governance and moderation of their communities.

1. Interested in strategies to help debate the effectiveness of policies and guidelines? These 4 strategies are a must for these highly charged political times.
2. This one best practice was favorited by participants. Learn how to establish this definitive – yet vague – guideline within your community.
3. Want to change the language of your replies to imprecise response timelines? Participants shared 3 new and improved phrases that will buy you time without making an actual time commitment.

OVERVIEW

- **Background – Kirsten Laaspere** Kirsten works for Akamai Technologies. They have several internal communities around the globe with approximately 6500 people.
- - Until recently moderation wasn't a problem, even with people encouraged to voice their opinions within communities. That has changed post-election 2016.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Debate the Effectiveness of Policies and Guidelines as a Strategy:** Kirsten stated that they consciously did not create policies and guidelines for their communities, but they are now debating whether or not this strategy would help in these highly charged political times.
 - **“Do Not Debate” Guideline:** *“We do not debate politics or personal beliefs.”* This guideline helps pull back those questionable conversations and deters arguments.
 - **Three Strike Rule:** Privately describe the behavior that needs to change, give an example of more positive behavior and give notice that if the member doesn’t change the behavior his/her account will be deactivated after 3 warnings.
 - **Deter Discussions that Don’t Contribute to the Business:** Discourage those discussions that do not positively contribute to the organization’s business goals.
 - **Promote Positive Interpersonal Relationships:** If/when conversations predictably and consistently go against this guideline, this gives the business recourse.
- **Establish “Do’s and Don’ts Best Practices:**
 - Don’t be too specific; it leaves too much wiggle room.
 - Don’t be an “asshole” and/or “Don’t be “that” guy.”
 - Google phrases it as “Don’t be evil”.
 - Participants liked this best practice. Basically, if someone needs help, help them. If you don’t know, find someone who does know. Be respectful of others and their opinions.
- **Be Honest:** Most people respond well to honesty. When you aren’t sure about how to respond to something, let people know that you are trying to figure it out and ask them to work with you to help the group as a whole. People get that we are in uncharted waters.

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- **Involve Others in the Decision Making Process for Defining Abuse:** Participants shared who they work with to guide them through difficult decisions of reported abuse:
 - ***Steering Committee:*** One participant has a committee consisting of contacts in employee relations, their culture team, legal, employment law and HR.
 - It is particularly helpful to have HR involved in those situations where an employee is skillful at inciting others. It takes the onus off community managers.
- **Flag Posts and Key Words:** Most platforms have the ability to flag posts using a fault tolerance, i.e. action is taken after a set number of people flag a post.
 - Train users on using set criteria for flagging a post. Helps members to know when and when not to flag a post.
 - Key words can be set to alert moderators, such as bad language. Moderators can read the text and decide on its appropriateness.
- **Use Language Like “Our Goal” or “Our Intention” for Vague Responses:** Sometimes there isn’t an immediate answer to a post because research and/or decisions need to be made to close the loop. Better responses to “soon” are “Our goal” or “Our intention” and/or “My hope”, i.e. “Our goal is to get back to you by the end of the quarter.” You have given a positive response without committing to a time.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Be careful of statements that could be interpreted as the organization taking sides. For example, formal statements from the executive on the immigration ban due to staff who reside outside of the US. Even vanilla statements can cause negative discourse.
- Kirsten asked how others handle situations in which a policy or guideline doesn't exist and/or if there isn't any HR backing.
 - One participant acknowledged that this is a difficult situation because there is so much behavior that can't be encoded into guidelines.
 - Another member added that sometimes power users who have been with the community for a while step in and help.
 - This same member advised to stay on top of conversations in private groups. This helps him to gauge the public arena.
- Chat with certain users offline. Reaching out to a person can often have a positive effect on defining desired behavior because the moderator and member have entered into a relationship.