

Interrupting the bad news with kindness

 americansofconscience.com/bad-news-kindness/

By Jen Hofmann

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A Democrat and a Republican were on a plane

It sounds like a set up to a political joke, doesn't it?

It's actually real. On a recent four hour-flight to Chicago, my seatmate and I enjoyed something that has become rare in these times: a civil exchange of ideas and a surprising consensus. He was from rural Oregon, a gun owner, and a Republican. I'm from "the valley," a moderate Democrat, and very concerned about gun violence in our country.

Had we followed the script, we might have eyed each other suspiciously, muttered insults under our breath, and tuned each other out with the in-flight entertainment. Instead, he asked about my work, and I shared how I created the Americans of Conscience Checklist.

"Oh, wow," he said. "That sounds really great."

"It's non-partisan and meant to engage all people in their democracy by speaking up for our shared values. I really think our nation needs more listening and better collaboration." He looked thoughtful and then nodded in agreement.

Taking a courageous risk

When I asked his views on the increasing gun violence, he surprised me by saying, "I believe people should have to get trained and pass a test—just like a drivers license—before they can own a firearm. There's no good reason to oppose this."

"I'm surprised," I confessed. "That's not what I expected you to say." He grinned at me.

We'd found common ground. Our conversation was a humbling reminder that our neighbors—red, blue, and green Americans—are more than the labels we put on them. I could have smugly written him off with misinformed biases, but he wasn't a caricature. He was a real person with values, cares, and concerns just like me. In listening deeply, I came to understand this person and appreciate his thoughtful, nuanced views.

As we landed, I thanked him for sharing so openly with me about a contentious issue. He thanked me for being curious and listening despite our differences. We agreed our country would be better if everyone showed respect to one another, even when we don't see eye to eye. I got off the plane feeling more hopeful than I had in weeks.

The value of choosing kindness, even now

When I started the AoC Checklist three years ago, my vision was—and remains—to *create a kind and thriving nation*. This worthwhile effort can take many forms and many small steps to achieve, but it's fundamentally grounded in hope.

Despite evidence to the contrary, *kindness* is part of the fabric of our nation. You need only peruse our Good News section in each issue to find generous souls and organizations doing good because they can. Although we may temporarily forget this kinder nature in the rising tide of hate and fear, it's still there waiting when tragedy strikes and we decide to be part of the solutions. Kindness isn't magic; it comes down to making a choice.

Thriving means much more than having a good leader in the White House. In a thriving nation, every person enjoys dignity and respect, health and happiness. That's why, week after week, our Checklist offers ways for all Americans—red and blue and green—to steer our nation in the direction of a healthy democracy that represents all its people. Every time you take an action, you help create this.

The future is up to us

Feeling discouraged is normal. Our team feels it. I feel it. Everywhere you look there is so much to fix, the project seems impossible. If you notice this discouragement too, here's a reminder that if a conservative and liberal on a plane can talk civilly, respectfully, and meaningfully about a hard topic (and come out smiling!), maybe all isn't lost just yet.

That's why Americans of Conscience Checklist is still here, keeping the flame lit and held high. We believe that a brighter future is possible, no matter how bleak things may seem at the moment. It won't be easy create the kind and thriving nation of our vision. It will take listening and advocacy. It will require tenacity and generosity. And. Every time you and I show up with courage and compassion—every time we take small but meaningful actions, we say YES to that brighter, flourishing future.

We create that vision by choosing it. If you need a place to start (or re-start), [join us in creating a kinder, thriving nation this week.](#)

Warmly,
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