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Worksheet for Arthur Brooks | How Loving Your Enemies Can Save America (Episode 211)

In this episode, bestselling author and social scientist Arthur Brooks joins us to talk about his latest book, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt*.

If you care about how and why discourse in politics and America have changed, and how and why media figures and political pundits are using some pretty morally bankrupt tricks to get us to divide further apart and view one another with contempt, here are some practical ways to make a change for the better.

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Five Rules for Subverting the Culture of Contempt

According to Arthur, the population of the United States is more divided over politics than it's been since The Civil War. 20 years ago, only six percent cared if their adult child married someone from the opposing political party. Now, it's 40 percent.

And while we're all screaming at each other over the angry maw of this division and feeding what Arthur calls a Culture of Contempt, the overwhelming majority of us don't desire this self-perpetuating rift or benefit from it. Most of us want a return to civility in our discourse, but our collective sense of direction has been thrown off by a small percentage of the population benefiting from our confusion.

Arthur presents us with these five rules for subverting the Culture of Contempt as a gentle compass to guide us toward understanding — and loving — the people whom a malevolent few would have us believe are our enemies.

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Rule 1: Refuse to Be Used by the Powerful

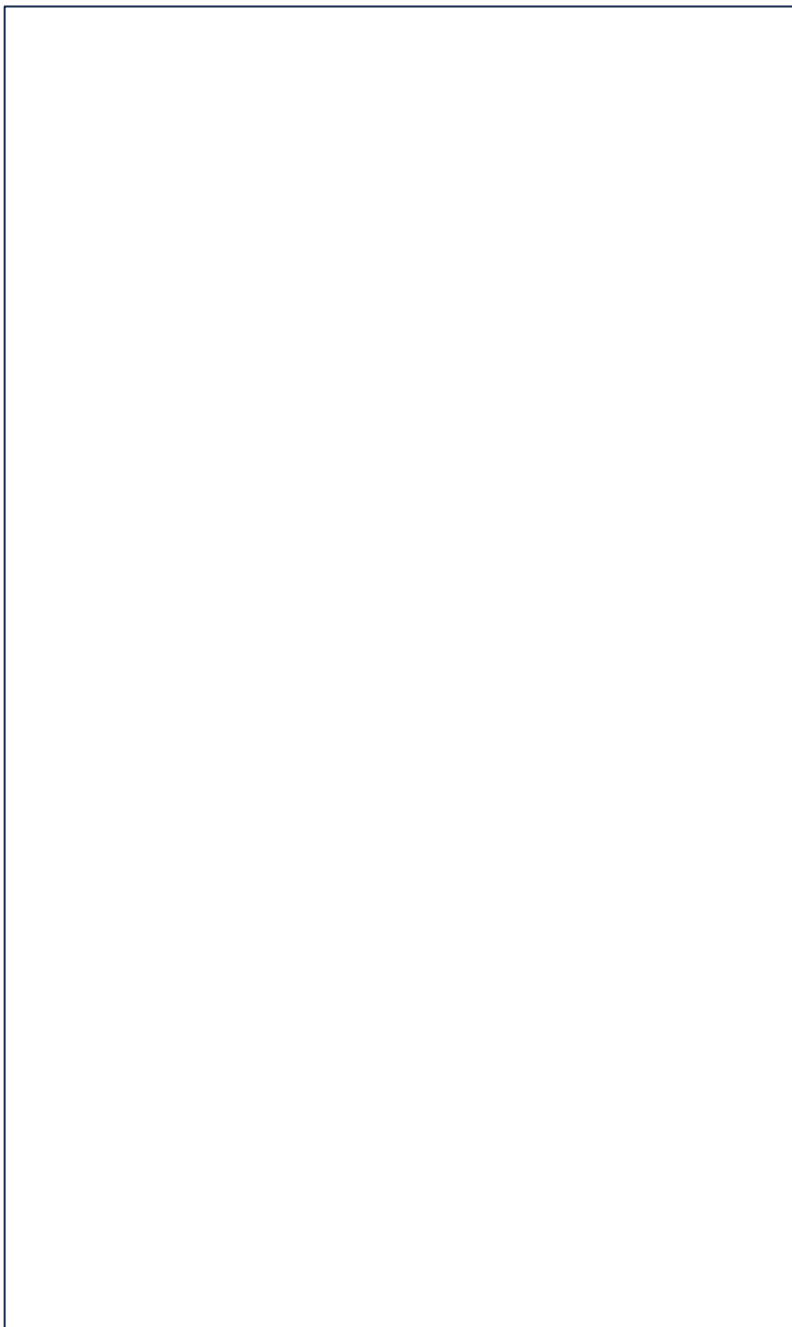
“People are getting rich and powerful and famous — or simply getting satisfaction and followers — by setting people against each other,” says Arthur. “For fuel, they rely on you and me playing along...the left and right both do it.”

Arthur calls these malicious puppet masters The Outrage Industrial Complex, and the first way to break the cycle is by taking inventory of the people influencing your life from a remote location — columnists, talk show hosts, and loudmouth pundits, for example — and tune them out if they’re not somehow expanding your worldview or body of knowledge. If you just find yourself agreeing with everything they have to say, you’re being manipulated. Stop reading those columns and watching or listening to those shows.

The second way to break the cycle: Stand up to people on your own side who are telling you to hate. It’s easy to exchange barbs with the people you see as the opposition, but far more productive to fix problems on the home front.

What mentally nutritionless influences can you safely shut off from your own life, and who among your allies can you influence toward positive discourse over divisive one-upmanship?

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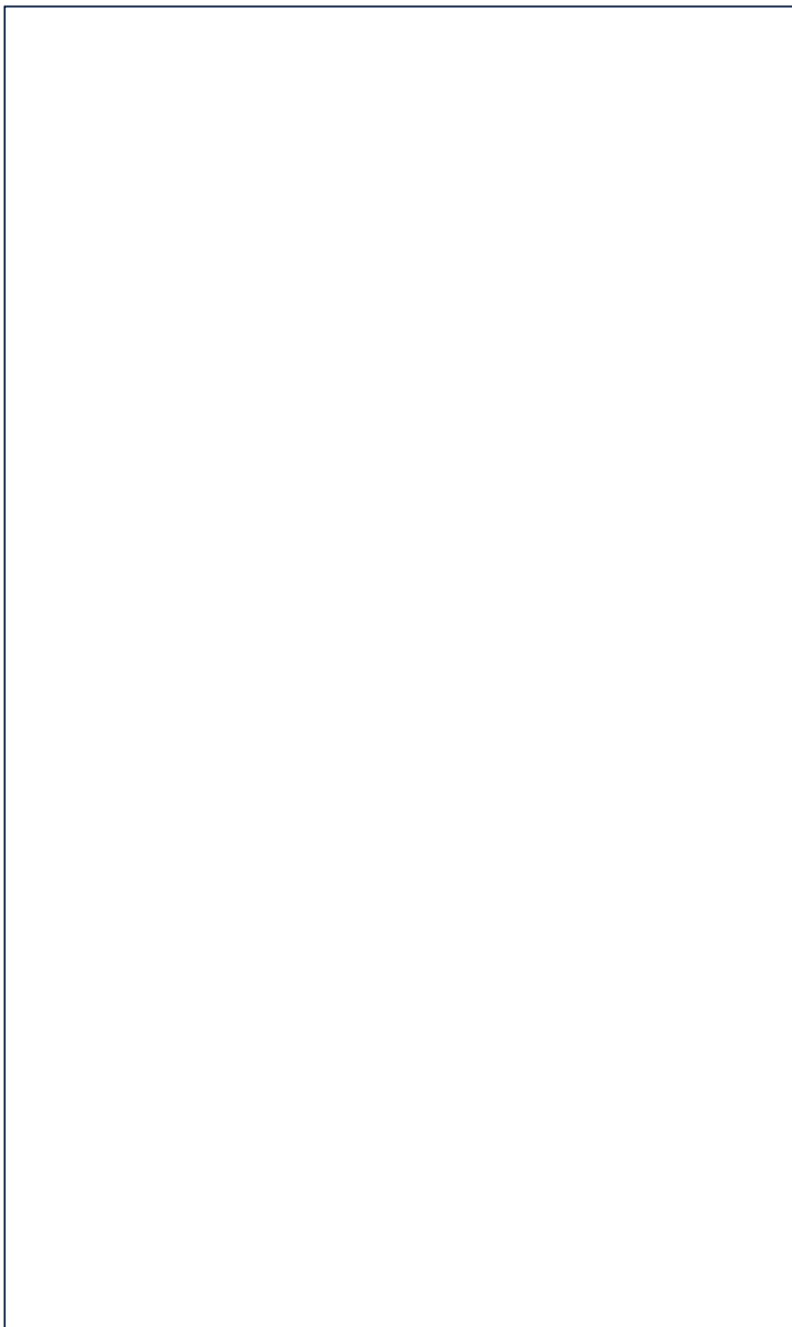
Rule 2. Escape Your Bubble

The Culture of Contempt is exacerbated by social media algorithms that pack us into bubbles with the like-minded and reflect the beliefs we already hold dear back to us. This fosters the illusion that what exists in your bubble is reality, making people with other beliefs in other bubbles irrelevant and irrational.

But if we want to heal division, we should seek to understand what's going on in the bubbles of others and introduce others to our own. Here's what one of Arthur's heroes, the Dalai Lama, has to say on the matter: "I'm Tibetan, I'm Buddhist, and I'm the Dalai Lama, but if I emphasize these differences, it sets me apart and raises barriers with other people. What we need to do is to pay more attention to the ways in which we are the same as other people."

Take a step outside of your own bubble and take a walk in someone else's. If you consider yourself on the conservative side of things, eschew Fox News for a bit and give NPR a listen. If you're more liberal, try the opposite. Do you have personal friendships with people who do not share your politics? Make an ideologically wider social circle your project for this year.

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Rule 3. Treat Others with Love and Respect, Even When It's Difficult

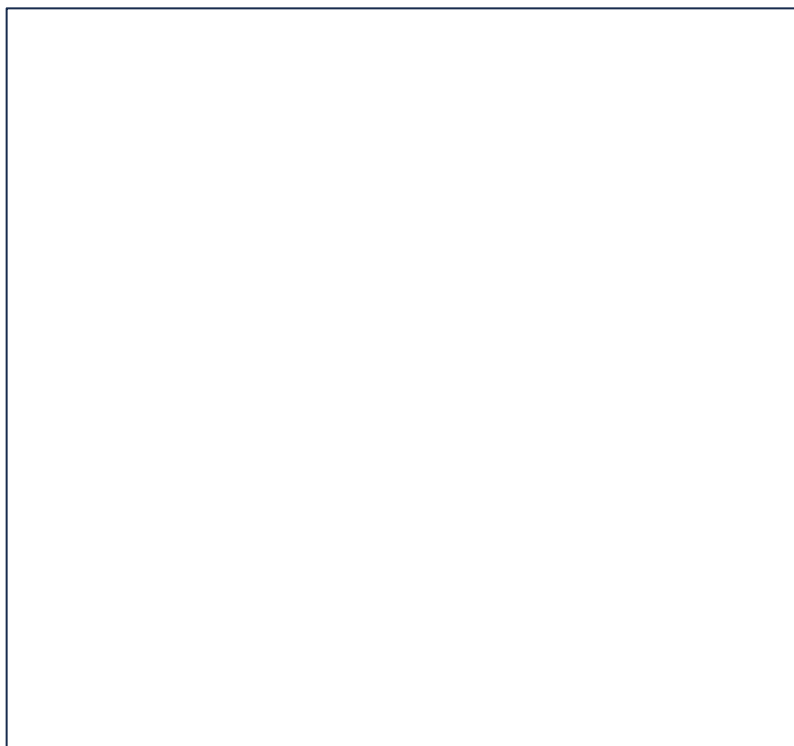
The Culture of Contempt thrives on division not only because it keeps us busy and distracted while we're going for each other's throats, but because it renders the environment for mind-changing persuasion moot. As Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed out, loving your enemies is a more effective way to influence them than hating them.

Rather than seeing someone who holds beliefs in opposition to your own as somehow immoral, try understanding that they're just programmed to see the world differently than you do — and realize that they don't automatically hate you for your beliefs. In the end, we're all striving for compassion and fairness, albeit through differing opinions of how to arrive there.

“Let's adjudicate the fact that people on the left tend to be more redistributive in their fairness,” says Arthur. “People on the right tend to be more meritocratic in their fairness. Let's find where we are in the middle of that and make some compromises. That's what a great society's able to do.”

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If you feel contempt toward someone for their views, try to foster a discussion that focuses on the destination you'd both like to see in a more ideal future over the road that takes you there. When someone is contemptuous toward you, take it as an opportunity to adjust your own settings and respond with good humor instead of lashing out from behind a bruised ego. For lapses in the past, consider apologizing like so: "I know we don't agree, but you are more important to me than our disagreement. Sorry I let our disagreement mess up our relationship."



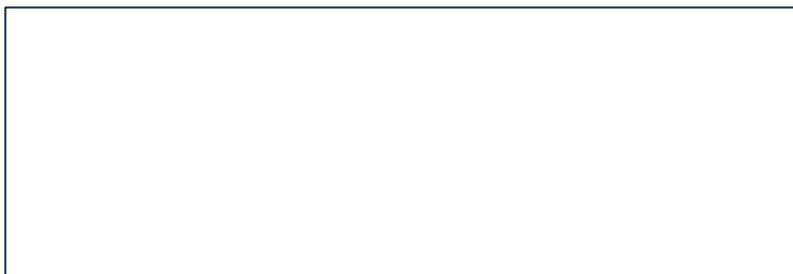
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Rule 4. Be Part of a Healthy Competition of Ideas

Exchanging different ideas hasn't always set the stage for alienating those with whom we disagree. Iron sharpens iron, and in a healthy society that values the differing perspectives offered by a competition of ideas, disagreement is an opportunity to cross-pollinate between the blooming of beautiful — albeit different — minds.

“The single biggest way a subversive can change America is not by disagreeing less, but by disagreeing better — engaging in earnest debate while still treating everyone with love and respect,” says Arthur.

When you find your iron about to cross paths with an “enemy’s” iron, look for ways to turn the resulting conversation into an exchange of ideas rather than a bombastic skirmish. Think of past skirmishes that could have been exchanges and try to imagine how the outcome might have been different if you’d taken this approach.



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Rule 5. Disconnect from Unproductive Debates

In order to vanquish contempt with love, we need to be genuine — to the world around us, and to ourselves. But again, social media amplifies our urge to strike back at those we see as deviant in belief, and tempts us to hide behind anonymity to make a quick attack from relative safety.

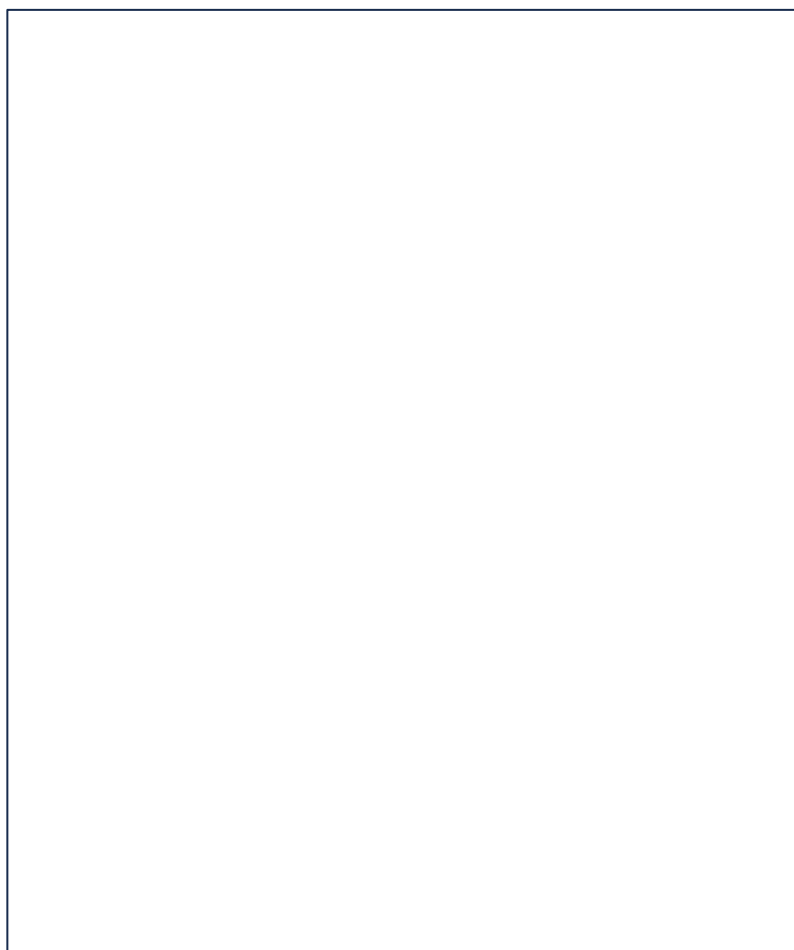
It's a higher road to be seen as kind rather than right. Remember how we said before that you can't change someone's mind with hate? It applies here as well.

Consider this scenario: Some stranger you've never met in real life has responded to your recent tweet by calling you a name and insulting your intelligence.

“What's that guy's objective? It's to poke you — to make you feel bad as a person,” says Arthur. “It's not to change your mind. Everybody knows: nobody in history has ever been convinced with insults.”

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Don't be — or interact with people who hide behind being — anonymous. When you're goaded into responding to some stranger on the Internet, consider what you're trading for whatever momentary satisfaction you might feel from doing so.



Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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