



Establish a 'no jerks' standard so we can start tackling America's real challenges

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In this series, professionals provide advice for the next U.S. president. What do you want POTUS focused on?

Ask any of Panera's 100,000 employees what they like most about our corporate culture and they will undoubtedly reply, "No jerks." Those two words — No. 1 on our list of cultural values — set Panera apart as an enterprise. They ensure that our

relationships with each other and with our guests are based on respect and honesty, and they establish a standard for our conduct.

“No jerks” does not mean we agree on everything. It means we listen, we discuss and debate, we consider different viewpoints, we find common ground and we move forward in a way that benefits our business, which, in turn, benefits all Panera stakeholders.

I knew those words would be powerful in creating a workplace where I and other likeminded people wanted to work. And the more I think about it, the more certain I am that our “No jerks” philosophy has broader applications for our country. Indeed, I think that our next president needs to embrace and enforce a “No jerks” policy of sorts as the first step toward moving our country past the gridlock that has gripped it for too many years and toward a place that we are all proud to call home.

Put another way, Job No. 1 for the next president is to pull the American people back together. Let me stress that I’m not talking about a 1960’s inspired moment of idyllic love, peace and happiness; I’m talking about putting an end to the divisiveness and incivility that has invaded our public discourse, stalls our legislative process and quashes patriotism.

We need a leader who, through example, respects and tolerates our differences in opinion — a right guaranteed in the First Amendment. We need a leader who views conversation and compromise not as weaknesses, but as strengths that build consensus and resolve. And we need a leader who values unity, one who recognizes that unearthing and building upon our common interests is the only way to move our country forward.

The goal of pulling Americans together is more than a nicety and more than a means to get our government working for us again. It's crucial to our country's future. In business, if you spend all of your time and energy on infighting, you are not spending time honing and executing your strategy to win. Similarly, we cannot prepare America to compete with the world, if our focus is only on competing with each other. Our next president needs to eliminate our pettiness and shift our focus outward, so we can get to the harder and more important job of preparing for and tackling the challenges that lie ahead.

Ron Shaich is founder, chairman and CEO of Panera.