

Rationally Speaking

"It's very important to know when you're in a pissing match. And it's very important to get out of it as quickly as possible." – Randy Pausch

The most important question in a debate is not "What's the evidence for your point of view?" It's "Why should anyone care to discuss the evidence for your point of view?" In any debate, the first type of evidence to demand is the kind that proves the debate is actually worth your time.

One of the most self-defeating things you can do is to participate in a conversation that neither enlightens you nor entertains you merely because you're afraid that someone is going to accuse you of being irrational for refusing to meet their demand for air-time. That's an easy way to set yourself up for endless manipulation.

"You have to sit there and listen to whatever I say. And if you don't, then I get to chastise you for being unfair or unreasonable." That line of thinking is a joke that attempts to make a punchline out of your right and responsibility to think critically about the conversations you choose to invest in.

Yes, you have a duty to pursue the truth. No, you do not have a duty to grant audience to every person who thinks they know the truth.

Yes, you have a duty to embrace the truth even if it's presented in an uncomfortable, unpleasant, or uninteresting way. No, you do not have a duty to embrace everything that's uncomfortable, unpleasant, or uninteresting merely because of someone's weak appeal to the theoretical possibility that there may be a hidden grain of truth in there somewhere.

It's not enough to think logically during your conversations. You also have to think logically before your conversations. Before you use your tools to solve a problem, stop to see if it's truly a problem worth solving.

Rationality is important. It's so important that it shouldn't be wasted on debates with people who are not willing to rationally establish the relevance of the debate itself.