

EXCERPT FROM *ONE NATION*

How to Get Along When 'Unfollow' Isn't the Answer (And Moving to Mars Isn't an Option)

by BJ Rae

From the Opening: Why This Book Exists

Picture this: It's the holidays. The table is set, the food smells amazing, and everyone's gathered for what should be a warm family moment. Then someone mentions politics.

Within minutes, Uncle Joe's face is turning the same shade as the cranberry sauce. Cousin Sarah is stress-eating her third helping of stuffing. Grandpa is gripping his fork like it's a weapon. And little Tommy—who just wanted more pie—is wondering why all the grown-ups are yelling about something called "the electoral college" when he's pretty sure college is for big kids.

Sound familiar?

Welcome to modern America, where family gatherings have become conversational minefields, Facebook has turned into a battlefield, and "How about that weather?" has become our national emergency exit strategy.

Here's the thing: We're stuck with each other. Moving to Mars isn't an option (yet). Unfollowing everyone you disagree with just creates an echo chamber. And joining a monastery in Tibet, while tempting, doesn't actually solve anything—plus, the Wi-Fi situation is reportedly terrible.

So let's do this differently. Let's talk. Let's disagree without destroying each other. Let's debate without dehumanizing. Let's remember that the person on the other side of the political divide is still a person—with a family, with fears, with hopes, and with a story.

From Chapter 4: The Art of Difficult Conversations

Remember when we were kids and teachers would say, "Put on your listening ears"? Turns out, they were onto something. Active listening isn't just nodding while waiting for your turn to talk—though we've all perfected that move during countless Zoom meetings where we're actually playing Wordle in another tab.

The fascinating world of listening comes in distinct flavors, each with its own special charm and potential pitfalls.

First, we encounter what I call **Shopping List Listening**. This is when you appear to be listening but are actually mentally planning dinner or wondering if you remembered to feed the cat. We all do it, especially during those meetings that could have been emails or when your coworker is explaining their cryptocurrency investment strategy for the fifth time this week.

Next up is **Debate Team Listening**, where you hear the words but are only looking for weak points you can attack. It's like being a grammar Nazi but for opinions.

You're basically loading your conversational ammunition while the other person is still building their fort. This is about as productive as trying to teach quantum physics to your houseplant—technically possible but unlikely to yield positive results.

Finally, we reach the holy grail: **Real Listening**. This is when you're genuinely trying to understand the other person's perspective, even when they say something that makes you want to throw your phone into the ocean and become a hermit in the mountains (with good Wi-Fi, of course, because let's be realistic about lifestyle necessities).

The magic phrase "Tell me more about that" works wonders in transforming conversations. Instead of immediately jumping in with "Well, actually..." (the unofficial motto of the internet), this approach gives someone conversational runway space. Let them land their point before you start building your counter-argument airport. Think of it as being a conversational air traffic controller rather than a verbal fighter pilot.

From Chapter 7: How to Disagree Without Starting a Revolution

When someone expresses a view different from yours, your first instinct might be to question their intelligence, their upbringing, or their suspicious preference for black licorice. Resist this urge. Remember: Attacking someone's character is like trying to fix a computer by yelling at the monitor. It might make you feel better momentarily, but it accomplishes nothing except raising your blood pressure.

Instead of saying, "Only a complete moron would think that!", try: "That's an interesting perspective. Help me understand how you arrived there." (See how much more civilized that sounds? You're practically ready for afternoon tea with the Queen.)

The Power of Three Magic Words: "Help Me Understand"

"Help me understand" is like a conversational Swiss Army knife. It's versatile, helpful, and much less dangerous than other tools you might be tempted to use. These three words can transform a potential argument into an actual dialogue faster than your neighbor Carl can turn any conversation into a monologue about his stamp collection.

When someone says something you find completely baffling (like claiming that socks with sandals is an acceptable fashion choice), take a deep breath and say, "Help me understand your thinking on this." It's amazing how different a conversation turns out when you approach it with curiosity instead of combat readiness.

From the Final Note to All Readers

Just as you wouldn't try to fix a broken phone screen with duct tape (well, maybe you would, but you shouldn't), don't try to patch up political arguments with quick fixes. Take the time to repair them properly, and your relationships will be stronger.

And if all else fails, remember this: You didn't read this book to become a saint. You read it because you're tired. Tired of walking on eggshells. Tired of losing

associations with people over politics. Tired of choosing between your values and your relationships.

Here's the good news: You don't have to choose. You can disagree without disconnecting, debate without destroying, and discuss without dismissing. That's the secret of the whole book.

Now go prove that one nation doesn't mean one opinion—it means one table, with room for everyone. Even the people who chew with their mouths open. We're still working on them.

***One Nation* is available now online.**