



Before You Post Promoting Respect Through Social Media

Roanoke Collaboration Project
George C. Anderson
April 8, 2026

I remember vividly when social media first emerged on the cultural landscape. There were high hopes for what it might make possible: reconnecting friends and families, expanding creativity, opening new economic opportunities, and even democratizing the flow of information so that truth could travel more freely.

In many ways, social media has delivered on those promises. I remain on my chosen platforms because they continue to serve meaningful purposes in my work and life.

But like every powerful tool of communication in history, social media has also been used to spread distortion, division, and distrust—often for influence or profit. In some cases, it seems that falsehood travels faster and farther than truth. It has contributed, in no small part, to the polarization the *Roanoke Collaborative Project* is trying to address.

What concerns me most, however, is not the technology itself, but what it can draw out of us. I have watched thoughtful, decent people become harsher, quicker to judge, and less charitable online than they would ever be in person. That pull is real—and none of us are immune to it.

So how do we resist it? How do we become part of the solution rather than the problem?

Here are a few practices that can help:

- 1. Remember there is a person on the other side.**

Not an issue. Not a category. A person. Someone who should not be reduced to a caricature or treated like an object. Avoid speaking in broad generalities as if all people in a group are the same. It's sloppy reasoning—and it inevitably harms people you may not intend to harm.

2. Speak with conviction, but without contempt.

You can be clear without being cruel.

3. Don't say online what you wouldn't say in person.

And if you wouldn't say it to someone you love, reconsider.

4. Slow down before you respond.

If something makes you angry, wait. Truth rarely suffers from a lack of speed. And remember: what you say may be seen by far more people than the one you are addressing. Ask yourself, *Do I want to be known by this comment?*

5. Ask: Why am I posting this?

To inform? To connect? To serve? Or to vent, impress, or win? And if you are tempted by sarcasm, ask whether you will be remembered for your humor—or your snark.

6. Share what is true—and verify before you amplify.

Passing along falsehood, even unintentionally, does harm. Take the time to check before you share.

7. When in doubt, choose silence.

Not every thought needs an audience.

8. Curate your social media environment.

You have some control over what you see and what appears on your page. Use those tools wisely to encourage healthier, more constructive conversations.

It's true that attention can be captured, influence gained, and even money made by ignoring these practices. But if your goal is to be a constructive voice—to strengthen relationships, to treat others with dignity, and to resist the forces pulling communities apart—then these habits matter.

In a community like ours, where relationships still matter, how we show up online shapes what is possible offline. In the end, the question is not whether we will use social media, but what kind of presence we will have when we do.