

USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR GOOD OR AT LEAST FUN

In Tuesday's debate, Vice President Harris showed her ability to dog-walk Trump into betraying his unfitness and his fury. If you hang out on social media much, you'll see the same fury among his followers. They're responding with vehement ugliness.

For the past several months I've been experimenting with my Xitter feed, trying to figure out some tactics for coping with these people. In this post I'll lay out some of the things that seem to work, at least to make it more fun for me, and possibly to discourage some of them.

I think most of this works on any social media platform swarmed by the ignorant, the trollish, and the ugly, but I don't use any of the others so I don't know.

1. On Xitter, use lists. You probably only follow sane people, funny people, people who have some expertise in a field you care about, people whose views you want to read. Make private lists. These are lists that only you see and are not shared with others. I currently follow about 500 people. There are a lot of lawyers, a couple of philosophers, some funny people, a few journalists, and experts in science, economics, and finance. I selected a about 150 and put them on lists. I sorted the lists so that one has my current favorites, then one with second favorites, and a third for the rest. I move accounts around from time to time.

When I read Xitter on my phone I'm given columns at the top. One is the "for you" column. It's loaded with Musk garbage, lunatic right-wingers, Qanon freaks, Covid deniers, anti-vaxxers, and other loons. I never read it. I don't even update it. I just let it sit there in all it's noxious glory. The next column is "following". I

read it when I'm waiting at a doctor's office and expect to be sitting awhile. Then there are columns for each of my lists. I read them regularly.

On my desktop, I go directly to the button on the left column labeled lists and select one. That's it. I don't read Musk garbage.

2. One of the criteria I use for selecting for lists is the quality of the reposts I get. I follow several people who do a great job of reposting things I'm interested in.

3. I often reply to posts in my lists. I try to accomplish one of three things with those replies. First, adding some useful information. For example, if I see a post on something related to Project 2025, I often add a page citation and a link, encouraging people to see for themselves. Second, I try to be funny. It's hit or miss on that.

4. The third goal is more open, I reply to some of the loons who have replied. I try never to respond to anyone with fewer than 300 followers, and lately more. If I do, it's usually one or two words: Troll, Troll Alert, or "You seem smart," which I stole from Lizz Winstead.

For MAGAs, I have several stock responses.

A) "You seem smart, can you tell me what Trump meant here?" Then I add one of several tweets I've bookmarked. One example is this from Judd Legum. It's a collection of Trump's nonsense. Another is this from Acyn, where Trump promises to bring back cement. I ask if they know where the cement went.

B) "You seem like a real patriot. Please empty your retirement account and send the money to Trump. If he doesn't get elected, the world will collapse and you won't need it."

C) "You seem really angry. That can't be good for you and your friends and family."

D) "We got rid of our old guy, and he was a decent man who maybe lost a step. Why are you welded to your old guy who ignores every norm of human decency and who says weirdo stuff like this: [adding one of my links]."

5. You will get responses from some of these. I have some rules for handling them.

A) If they are seriously angry, mute and block. Life's too short for that kind of nonsense.

B) Most of the replies are personal attacks. Often it's homophobia, or you're stupid, or "your a commie" [sic]. I never reply to the slur. Instead I keep the focus on them. An easy way is 4. (A) or (B) above or variations.

C) Check their Xitter profile. For crypto dudes and related finance types, I might go with "How much did you lose on \$DJT, which is Trump's social media company?" I often link to a Google search for that symbol, and set it to one year. It's an ugly chart.

D) There's a lot of obscenity and jerk behavior. I've been replying with some version of: "Ooh that's ugly. It's natural to be distressed after seeing your doddering old criminal get whipped by the Vice President, so maybe take a break from this site until you recover." If they reply I continue in the same vein: "It's okay: psychic pain is normal after a crushing defeat." No matter what, keep the focus on them and their defects.

E) I make an exception for the anti-abortion crowd. I don't see much of them unless they're replying to a post from someone else. I generally reply with this link to an article on human reproduction by an embryologist,
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ntls.20220041>

I often suggest they need to learn about the reality, not what their preacher says. The goal is to get them to realize the dangers of pregnancy, and the actual facts about things like fetal heartbeats and fetal pain. I don't think you can convince anyone, but maybe it's a good first step to opening minds.

One common claim from rabid anti-abortion people is the execution after birth lie. This one is deeply rooted. A Chicago Sun-Times reporter attended a debate watch party sponsored by the Niles Township GOP; Niles Township is a suburb North of Chicago.

... [Attendees were in disbelief after Harris said, "Nowhere in America is a woman carrying a pregnancy to term and asking for an abortion," with audible claims that she's lying or "full of s-t."

My stock response to these ignorant people is: Killing babies is a crime. If you know of such a crime and don't report it you are an accessory and are criminally liable.

6. I have a few phrases I use all the time, including:

- The filthy rich and their price-gouging corporations
- Doddering old criminal
- MAGA SCOTUS
- Billionaire media and their hired hacks

I also try to use words and phrases current on the site. Sane-washing is a good current example.

7. Family. I'm lucky that my extended family is fairly normal politically. My dad was always conservative, but in his old age he became besotted by Fox News. It was miserable. I don't have much to go on, but maybe the following will help.

Don't respond immediately. Wait until the initial response dies out, and then wait some more.

There may be a specific reason for the anger. We have no way to figure that out for strangers on social media, but we can at least try with family. Then maybe you can work with that in a later interaction, away from the immediate contact. At least maybe you can avoid triggering something unpleasant.

Post a lot of family pics, pet videos and non-political funny stuff. It's harder to be angry with people who make us laugh. If they go off the hook, respond later, much later, with a funny, or a link to a sports thing or anything but a reply. Life's too short to be angry with family.

Finally, if you do respond, do so with a question: Where did you hear that? Do you have a link? Why do you think that? Could you explain?

I'm pretty sure the actual facts and your links won't help matters, but I have to believe that getting people to say things directly, to type them out, to try to justify them, will help in the long run.

This isn't a game for everyone. But I think it's important to push back as best we can. We can't let the creeps ruin everything. Do you have ideas? Comments are open!

UPDATE: There are a number of accounts that hang around accounts you might like, such as Democratic politicians. Here's a good example:



Paul A. Szypula, @Bubblebathgirl. This person spends hours posting garbage tweets, which draw lots of response. The account does not engage, and any time you spend there is wasted. Do not engage. If you feel like it: reply with "Do not engage with this troll".