

The Ruby Rule: How More Listening and Less Labeling Brings More Healing and Less Hating

Arthur F. Coombs III

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The Ruby Rule is an optimistic self-help guide that accepts the inevitability of opposing viewpoints and encourages lively, civil dialogues with others.

Arthur F. Coombs III's *The Ruby Rule* advocates for empathy, tolerance, and civility as means of combating contemporary social hatred and polarization.

In response to prevalent social issues including cancel culture, trolling, division, and cyberbullying, this book suggests useful ways of handling and embracing other people's differences. Indeed, it suggests that opposing beliefs are necessary to the advancement of freedom and democracy. In establishing its central principles, it goes beyond the common social more of treating others as one would want to be treated, proposing another approach: knowing people in an intimate way and meeting the needs that they have but are not aware of. It names common mistakes, such as regarding one's quick judgments of others as infallible and true, and believing that one's actions are driven by concern and love while dismissing others as irrational and inspired by hate.

To encourage introspection and changes in personal mindsets and behaviors, the book includes self-reflection questions at the end of each chapter. These will help when it comes to assessing different perspectives, listening to other people, having conversations on social media, and learning from others who hold contrasting viewpoints. They encourage seeking out ways to express oneself in a positive manner. And the book's chapter summaries highlight the factors that it says hinder civility and truth, showcasing takeaways, such as that vulnerability and humility foster trust and that embracing love and showing empathy toward others is of value.

Despite its heavy subject matter, the book takes a lighthearted approach to its stories and advice. It illustrates one point with the tale of two cavemen who fight for a piece of sloth meat: one beats his chest; the other yells and shows his teeth. This is an imaginative projection of how arguments originated and were formalized among early humans. And such examples complement the book's supportive anecdotes of people who engaged in civil discourse—or even maintained a thriving friendship—despite their differing political perspectives. There's also a story about a woman who met, listened to, and became friends with someone who was trolling her.

While it shares compelling advice for fostering healthy communication, bridging gaps between people with different opinions and beliefs, and handling differences in opinion, this text often seems too optimistic. Its applications hinge on individual people being able to recognize their own irrational impulses—and being willing to change. The polarization it addresses cannot be undone unless there is wide self-awareness and unless most people desire to learn and improve.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (August 18, 2022)

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