



Navigating Political Polarization: Strategies for Leaders

By Kerry Stackpole, FASAE, CAE, PMI CEO/Executive Director



Kerry Stackpole

In the United States, political polarization has become a defining feature of the socio-political landscape. The differences between the major political parties, particularly the Democrats and Republicans, extend beyond policy preferences to encompass deep-seated ideological divides. For you and your leadership team, this polarization presents unique challenges and opportunities.

Successfully navigating these political differences is crucial for fostering a stable and inclusive business environment. Here are seven strategies that you can employ to address these differences effectively.

1. Grasping the Political Landscape

The first step is to gain a thorough understanding of the political landscape. PMI keeps you informed about the key issues, policy positions, and ideological underpinnings of both major parties, and we share those issues equally in our PMI Advocacy/Government Affairs Committee meetings. Germane to our industry, Democrats have typically advocated for water conservation legislation and appliance efficiency regulations. During the last Republican administration, the Department of Energy revised appliance efficiency standards to allow a showerhead to dispense 2.5 gallons per minute (gpm) each, regardless of how many showerheads were installed or in use within an individual showering space. While one can debate the merits of water-efficient fixtures and fittings, households clearly save money and energy by using them and our industry innovations continue to deliver high performance and drive customer satisfaction.

Understanding the core frameworks of political parties enables you to anticipate how changes in political leadership or policy might impact your operations. This understanding also allows PMI members to develop strategies that align with or mitigate the effects of these changes. For instance, the renewable energy and water sectors have seen increased support and funding under a Democratic administration while other industries are seeing tighter regulations.

2. Fostering Bipartisan Engagement

One effective way to navigate political differences is to foster bipartisan engagement. For a business leader, cultivating relationships with policymakers from both parties is important to ensure that your interests and concerns are heard regardless of who is in power. This can be achieved through various means, such as participating in PMI's annual legislative forums and fly-ins to Washington, D.C., and Sacramento, engaging in public-private partnerships like WaterSense, and hosting plant visits that bring together elected leaders and stakeholders from across the political spectrum. By fostering bipartisan engagement, you can advocate for policies that benefit our industry while promoting a collaborative approach to governance. This not only helps in building a more resilient business environment but also demonstrates a commitment to civic responsibility and democratic processes.

3. Promoting a Non-Partisan Workplace

Creating a non-partisan workplace is essential for maintaining a harmonious and productive environment. You and your team should emphasize the importance of respect and inclusivity. Avoid taking overtly partisan positions in your corporate communications and branding. While taking a stand on issues that align with the company's values and mission is important, doing so in a way that does not alienate stakeholders with differing political views is equally important. For example, a company can advocate for environmental sustainability and water conservation without explicitly endorsing a particular political party.

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Annual Report Reviews PMI's 'Past, Present, Future'

By Ray Valek, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

In recognition of Plumbing Manufacturers International's 70th anniversary, the title of the 2024 PMI Annual Report is "Past, Present, Future." This excerpt covers a time period starting with PMI's founding through the 1980s. Read the entire report at tinyurl.com/49x4az35.

In 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower was president and his wife, Mamie, was a kitchen and bath trendsetter. Single-handle faucets were all the rage, and Plumbing Manufacturers International (PMI) was born.

Mamie's favorite color was pink. She redecorated the White House's private quarters in pink, and the nation followed along. Kitchens and baths across America were soon brightened by pink, turquoise and other pastels. Once closed off from the rest of the home, kitchens became the heart and social center of the home as Julia Child brought French cooking into the mainstream.



Meanwhile, plumbing manufacturing industry pioneers saw the fruits of their inventiveness lead to commercial success in a post-war America eager to use modern innovations in the new homes being built across the nation.

After burning his hands by turning on a two-handle faucet, **Moen** founder Alfred Moen was inspired to invent the single-handle faucet to better regulate the flow and mix of hot and cold water. **Delta Faucet Company** and **Masco Corporation** founder Alex Manoogian brought to market a single-handle, washerless ball faucet, the Delta faucet.

Also during the 1950s, **Fluidmaster** founder Adolf Schoepe launched the company's pilot fill valve, and **Lavelle Industries** introduced the toilet flap-

per – technologies still in use today. In Switzerland, Hans Denzler & Co., now known as **Neoperl**, began to manufacture, distribute and install the previously unheard-of device called an aerator to deliver a splash-free water stream.

Soon, these innovative products were in kitchens and bathrooms around the world.

PMI's beginnings

The progenitor of PMI – the Plumbing Brass Institute – was formed by combining the Sanitary Brass Institute and the Tubular Plumbing Goods Institute. The new organization's first president, Arthur H. Goepel, immediately appointed the first plumbing standards committee for fixture fittings.

What is now known as PMI was on its way.

Through the 1960s and early 1970s, as kitchen and bath color hues moved from



psychedelic pop to earth tones, PMI's members primarily concerned themselves with adopting and regulating various plumbing manufacturing standards relating to fixture fittings, piping, valves and other components. During this time, water and sanitation were generally overseen by local authorities, with state oversight.

The 1970s ushered in increased federal government involvement in water and sanitation due to concerns about environmental degradation caused by pollution. In rapid succession, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established in 1970, followed by the passing of the Clean Water Act in 1972, and the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974.



These actions helped to keep waste and other contaminants out of freshwater and drinking water. The federal government's interest in water quality caused PMI to become active in monitoring legislation and regulations to assure safe water without unintended negative consequences to the public and manufacturers.

Even though present-day water shortages were not yet a concern, PMI members were already making plumbing products more water efficient. The first 3.5 gallon-per-flush (gpf) toilets were introduced in 1974, replacing previous fixtures using 5 to 10 gpf or more. In 1974, **Sloan** introduced a hands-free faucet, which used up to 40% less water than conventional faucets of that time. In 1976, **T&S Brass** introduced its first water-efficient spray valve, the B-107-C. In 1978, California passed a law requiring toilets to use no more than 3.5 gpf.

During the 1980s, to further assure safe drinking water, PMI provided input to the establishment of NSF/ANSI/CAN standard 61 for testing all fixtures that come into contact with potable water. To this day, NSF/ANSI/CAN 61 continues to uphold lead-free and other safety standards for plumbing products. As the dangers of lead in water became more well known, the Lead Contamination Control Act became federal law in 1988.

Member Input, Collaboration Assured Successful Transition

By Judy Wohlt and Ray Valek, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

As PMI celebrates its 70th anniversary, **Pete Jahrling** recalls how member engagement and teamwork helped keep Plumbing Manufacturers International running smoothly as the association transitioned from long-time CEO/executive director **Barbara Higgins** to current CEO **Kerry Stackpole**. As PMI Board of Directors president at the time, Jahrling worked to maintain an environment that focused on PMI's strength and stability.



Pete Jahrling

He described PMI's search for a new CEO/executive director as "collaborative, inclusive and professional." Jahrling and his board colleagues embarked on finding the right search firm and CEO candidates by creating a thorough vetting process and then presenting candidates to the PMI Executive Committee, he said.

As the PMI colleagues worked on making this transition, PMI's staff at the time – **Jodi Stuhrberg**, **Matt Sigler** and **Ann Geier** – continued to keep PMI moving along smoothly behind the scenes, Jahrling noted. Meanwhile, members stayed engaged through their work on PMI committees, focusing on the critical issues of water efficiency, plumbing research, Section 301 tariffs, and more.

Taking the leadership plunge

Jahrling spent several years getting his feet wet at PMI before taking the plunge into a leadership position.

His first experience with PMI began in the mid-1990s when his managers at Sloan asked that he "shadow" his colleague **John Lauer**, who served as PMI board president in 2005, he said. Jahrling began attending codes and standards committee meetings with Lauer and ultimately spent time working on other PMI committees.

When **Paul Patton**, vice president of the PMI board, asked Jahrling to join the board, he felt ready to serve PMI's membership in a leadership role, Jahrling said. After serving a term as president in 2017, he was asked to serve a second term after the board vice president, who was in line to become president, left the industry.

Delivering on strategic goals

During Jahrling's tenure, PMI leadership focused on honing the association's strategic plan, placing more emphasis on committee activities, and strengthening relationships on Capitol Hill.

PMI refined its strategic plan by developing a PMI member value proposition. The association also worked on building the PMI brand, making PMI information resources easily accessible, and developing proactive technical issue positions to drive measurable outcomes. PMI made progress using several tactics, such as making design changes to the PMI website, delivering more frequent webinars on prominent issues, and conducting an economic impact study of the plumbing manufacturing industry.

PMI's committee chairs contributed to a new quarterly report to the board. The



PLUMBING MANUFACTURERS INTERNATIONAL

report aligned and reinforced member activities with PMI's strategic plans.

During the 2018 PMI Washington Legislative Forum and Fly-In, staff and members worked on strengthening relationships via in-person meetings with legislators. The group shared information to support WaterSense funding, strengthen the North American Free Trade Agreement, promote the National Institute of Standards and Technology Plumbing Research Act, and address the nation's decaying water infrastructure and skilled trades worker shortage.

Also in 2018, PMI closed its offices in Rolling Meadows, Illinois, with virtual office technology paving the way for a seamless transition to staff working remotely. "One of the big visual changes we made was to eliminate our lease in the suburbs because we didn't need a brick-and-mortar place. It was an inflection point in the rich history of PMI," Jahrling said.

Jahrling looks back with pride at his time spent on the PMI board and continues to tout PMI's value. Part of the association's "secret sauce" is respecting plumbing manufacturing executives' time while encouraging member involvement and feedback, he said. PMI is well versed on its members' products and issues – whether they are related to federal or state legislation or changes to plumbing codes and standards, he added. "From a codes and standards perspective, PMI has your back as far as things that might affect your product's market position," Jahrling said.

Registration Opens for PMI24, New Dynamic Speakers Added

By Judy Wohlt, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.

Registration has opened for the PMI24 Manufacturing Success Conference, Nov. 4-7 in Atlanta. New dynamic speakers and topics are being added to this can't-miss program that will feature experts on water management, sustainable packaging, PFAS remediation, artificial intelligence, energy- and water-efficient buildings, and more. You'll learn about exciting innovations and PMI's current initiatives, including Rethink Water. Plus, you'll get the latest forecast from ITR Economics to guide your company through the coming year.

Experts to explore water management innovations

Katherine Zitsch, water policy expert with the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center, will deliver a keynote on the "Water Wars of the South."



Katherine Zitsch

Zitsch brings together leaders from the business, federal, state, local and philanthropic sectors to address Georgia's complex water challenges.



Peter Mayer

Principal and founder of WaterDM and strategic partner of Flume Data Labs, **Peter Mayer** will present on the Household Water Use Index.

Through a network of high-resolution sensors installed in 15 metropolitan areas, Flume monitors real-time data to understand how residential water is used. A professional



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engineer and urban water expert, Mayer has dedicated his career to advancing the science of water management. His work focuses on urban water management, water demand research, water efficiency planning, demand forecasting, and utility metering.

Joining a panel discussion on PFAS destruction technology, **David Dunlap** will share his expert perspective as vice president of government relations for Enviri Corp. Dunlap



David Dunlap

formerly served as deputy assistant administrator for the Office of Research and Development at the Environmental Protection Agency, where he led PFAS research and published the EPA's first PFAS Action Plan in 2019.

Robert Bowcock, managing director of Integrated Resource Management, will present on emerging water contaminants. Before founding Integrated Resource Management, he served as



Robert Bowcock

a water utility manager in Azusa and Huntington Park, California, and worked for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. As

a United States Army civil affairs team leader, Bowcock designed and constructed water treatment and distribution systems in Southeast Asia and South America.

In addition, **Mathew Lippincott**, regulatory consultant for the University of Michigan, will discuss the



Mathew Lippincott

water innovation of urine diversion.

Keynote to address defeating hardship and finding purpose

In his keynote presentation, elite mixed martial arts fighter turned global humanitarian **Justin Wren** will share his story of courage and hope along with tools and techniques for navigating adversity, finding purpose, and making a meaningful impact in business and life.

Wren has dedicated his life to making a positive impact – after achieving success in his MMA career and overcoming injuries and an attempted suicide. He



Justin Wren

founded Fight for the Forgotten to provide clean water, education and empowerment to Pygmy communities in Africa. He advocates for indigenous rights and delivers a powerful voice for marginalized communities.

Known as "the Big Pygmy" – the name his tribal family in the Congo gave him – Wren has helped drill wells and teach others in the Pygmy communities

how to gain access to life-saving clean water, reported an Oklahoma News 9 story. He also wrote the book, "Fight for the Forgotten: How a Mixed Martial Artist Stopped Fighting for Himself and Started Fighting for Others."

Determination pays off for PMI Women's Breakfast speaker

The PMI Women's Breakfast will welcome **DeRetta Cole Rhodes**, Ph.D., executive vice president and chief culture officer of the Atlanta Braves. She will provide



DeRetta Cole Rhodes

insights on the importance of finding a personal voice as a female leader. Dr. Rhodes oversees communications and community affairs for the Braves and the team's spring training facility operations, as well as for The Battery Atlanta shopping mall near Truist Park, where the Braves play.

She regularly shares her experiences and challenges, offering career advice and tips to women and others. After a leader she worked with told her, "you'll never have a leadership role," Dr. Rhodes persevered and earned her MBA, she reported in an X post. Her parents taught her the importance of education and

perseverance, she explained in a video. When working for another organization, Dr. Rhodes found a supportive leader who told her, "You have a voice. You're not invisible and I need for you to be bold," she added.

Dr. Rhodes has scored several wins in her short time with the Braves, expanding the organization's culture with training programs and employee resource groups and creating an internal diversity, equity and inclusion council, stated the Braves website. She also managed the organizational changes that became necessary because of the pandemic.

PMI Inspiring Leaders Program to focus on agile leadership

All employees of PMI member companies are invited to participate in the PMI Inspiring Leaders Program, "Strategic Doing – 10 Skills for Agile Leadership," on Nov. 4 at Atlanta's Carter Center. **Scott Hutcheson**, Ph.D., will introduce attendees to a new strategic management approach developed at Purdue University.



Scott Hutcheson

A senior lecturer and professor of technology leadership and innovation at Purdue, Dr. Hutcheson will share a practice-proven framework that helps leaders form action-oriented collaborations quickly. Participants will learn how to manage complex challenges better, add evidence-based tools to their portfolios, and gain the confidence to use the new tools and insights immediately.

His presentation will be based on the book "Strategic Doing: 10 Skills for Agile Leadership," which he co-authored. Having worked with more than 4,000 leaders from 147 countries, Dr. Hutcheson speaks at conferences and other events worldwide, and his TED Talk on the science of prospecting has been viewed on YouTube more than 1.3 million times.

This year's program will take place at Atlanta's Carter Center, founded in 1982 by former president Jimmy Carter. Located on 37 acres of parkland near downtown Atlanta, the Carter Center's incredible grounds feature formal gardens, sculptures and waterfalls tucked between two small lakes.

Register for PMI24 today!
safelumbing.org/pmi24



PMI Workshop Helps Members Improve Virtual Presence

By Ray Valek, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.



Christine Adam

Leading a group of co-workers during a virtual meeting brings a set of challenges that are different from those in an in-person setting. Voice and communication coach

Christine Adam gave advice about how to improve virtual leadership to a group of PMI members during a Plumbing Manufacturers International Inspiring Leaders Workshop.

Preparing to lead a successful virtual meeting requires a bit more preparation and practice than simply grabbing a coffee and plopping down in front of your computer. For example, maintaining eye contact and picking up on cues from members of the group requires a mindfulness that comes more naturally in a live setting.

For these reasons, Adam suggested bringing more awareness to your camera framing, bodily behaviors and vocal energy. This self-awareness can provide you with insight on how to improve your virtual presence. “The good news is that these are skills we can cultivate. It’s not something we’re either born with or not,” she emphasized during an interview after the workshop.

Ready yourself for the virtual meeting

For starters, she recommended getting out of your chair and warming up your voice before you start a meeting. That way, “you’re getting some movement in your body and your voice, and you’ve got some energy when you sit back down to speak,” she explained. In addition, dress your part. If you’re a leader of a group that follows a dress code, dress appropriately.

Sit down in your chair at a height that’s conversational, feeling the back of your chair and your feet on the floor. “Your camera should tell the story that this is a relationship of equals,” she stated. “I’m not looking up at somebody and I’m not looking down. I’m putting my device at a height that allows me to be an equal with whom I’m talking to.”

Allow yourself to breathe easily, with your spine aligned to your chair and with no tension in your abdomen. “Think and breathe before you say something,” she advised. “Make sure you’re ready to talk before you start talking.”

Adam emphasized the importance of preparing your story and messages in advance and making sure your virtual presence is congruent with what you’re trying to communicate. For example, communicating a very important message about a company’s future direction, for example, requires more formality than a casual meeting about where to meet for an employee get-together.

Move your voice ‘up and out’

During the webinar, participants did vocal exercises to encourage the voice to move “up and out,” Adam said. “Often-times, virtually, because we’re so sedentary, we lose energy in the body, which means we lose energy in the voice.” She also encouraged attendees to speak with intention. “If you want to have an impactful presence, your audience needs to feel something about what you say. The only way they feel something . . . is if you feel something,” she emphasized.

Adam also provided advice about how leaders can gain more engagement from their virtual audiences. For example, audience members may choose to work with cameras off or not to speak. “This is a particular challenge because we are disoriented to the audience. We can’t see them, and if we can see them, we might



see that they’re distracted. Also, team members may be more reticent to speak up when they were being seen by a large group,” she stated.

Ways to create more engagement in these cases include encouraging participants to have cameras on during a meeting and using breakout rooms where participants can discuss topics within smaller groups, Adam advised.

During discussions in breakout rooms toward the end of the workshop, participants stated that the training improved the pace of their speaking, their confidence, and their sense of ease, Adam said.

Adam provides comprehensive voice work, accent and dialect training, and tips on public speaking tips and executive presence. Her clients include actors, activists, business professionals, teachers, and anyone wishing to become a more effective and empowered communicator. Adam earned a master of fine arts in voice studies from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London.

She has been widely acknowledged for her holistic coaching philosophy that understands and addresses the connections between voice, body and mind. Her Voice What Matters platform integrates her communication coaching business, digital courses, YouTube channel, and podcast. To find out more, go to voicewhatmatters.com, youtube.com/@voicewhatmatters or voicewhatmatters.com/podcast/.

PMI Market Outlook LIVE – Gear Up Now for Future Growth

By Ray Valek, PMI Communications Team, Valek and Co.



Connor Lokar

Connor Lokar of ITR Economics presented an optimistic forecast of the 2025-2026 economy during the PMI Market Outlook LIVE in July.

“There is a positive, rebuilding narrative building,” he reported to PMI member attendees. “Plumbing product production is trending up, and we expect it to continue into positive territory.”

Expect a temporary decrease in inflation and interest rates

With inflation trending downward and the Federal Reserve signaling a rate cut, Lokar said he expects lower mortgage rates and better affordability in the housing market. He added, however, that reduced inflation to around 3% and lowered interest rates will likely be temporary before rising again due to the national debt and high federal government spending.

He urged PMI members to focus on Phase A recovery objectives, which include making investments in hiring, training, acquisitions and marketing to prepare for the growth expected in the years ahead.

Looking at the global economy, Lokar said the United States is performing better than most regions and nations, many of which remain in recession. The economies of India and Mexico are performing very well while China undergoes a marked slowdown due to older demographics and a declining population after years of significant growth.

The U.S. leads the world with 26.1% of the global gross domestic product, followed by China (16.9%), Germany

(4.3%) and Japan (4.0%). Just as is being experienced in the U.S., economic nationalism is being embraced in other nations, as well. Lokar said this sentiment may be beneficial to the North American economy.

Be sure your production can meet demand

Lokar stated that sales in the plumbing and hardware sector are now matching inventory. He encouraged PMI members to make sure to match production with demand. “We’re out of the woods, with demand increasing,” he said. “It’s time to flip the switch. Make sure you’re capturing the demand.” He added that the supply chain is normalizing while cautioning an increase in global shipping rates.

In the labor market, companies are seeing lower quit rates and better retention. “As the economy rebounds, however, employees will get expensive at a quickening rate,” he explained. He encouraged employers to hire now and reduce layoffs because in 2025 there may be a “knife fight for talent” and wage growth will likely outpace inflation.

Remodeling, multifamily housing and non-residential construction continue to lag behind single-family residential housing, he stated.

Lokar urged attendees to “ignore the political noise.” He said ITR doesn’t expect the 2024 elections to have a significant impact on the economy, according to an analysis of past elections. The firm also sees a significant recession or depression occurring around 2030 due to retired Baby Boomers contributing less in taxes while drawing upon Medicare and Social Security benefits.

PMI members can log in to view the entire webinar at tinyurl.com/296w4h8k.



Phase A Recovery Actions

1. Evaluate supply chain risks, seek resiliency and redundancy
2. Perform due diligence on customers and extend credit
3. Be on good terms with a banker; you will need the cash more now than in any other phase
4. Prepare for a return of inflation and higher interest rates
5. Develop a pricing plan given inflation and persistent labor challenges
6. Allocate additional resources to sales and marketing
7. Invest in customer market research; know what clients value and market/price accordingly
8. Invest in training in preparation for increased demand
9. Make opportunistic capital acquisitions and business acquisitions
10. Assess demand for input materials and purchase forward based on the cost forecast
11. Make sure you have ‘enough’ to meet the coming demand

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4. Navigating Regulatory and Policy Changes

Political differences often manifest in varying regulatory and policy approaches. Staying agile and adaptable to navigate these changes is key to effective leadership. PMI's proactive monitoring of legislative developments and regulatory updates, monthly PMI Advocacy/Government Affairs Committee meetings, Tech Talk Reviews, and exclusive members-only "Inside My PMI" newsletter helps you and your team stay up-to-date and engaged in maintaining open lines of communication with regulatory agencies. PMI's robust compliance framework is essential for mitigating your risks associated with regulatory changes and for staying up to date with plumbing and building codes and standards and legislative action. A truly unique benefit of PMI membership is the opportunity for you to engage with legal and policy experts who provide valuable insights and guidance on navigating our complex regulatory environments.

5. Corporate Social Responsibility and Political Advocacy

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives provide an opportunity for your company to address political differences constructively. By aligning CSR efforts with your company's values and the broader societal good, your business can demonstrate its commitment to positive change. When engaging in political advocacy, take a balanced approach. This involves supporting policies that promote economic growth, innovation, and social well-being, regardless of which party advocates for them. By focusing on issues rather than partisan politics, you can play a constructive role in shaping policy outcomes that benefit society. So many PMI member companies walk that walk by investing in community development programs, supporting educational

initiatives, and contributing to global environmental conservation efforts – all of which reflect positively on our industry's mission and value to the world. Safe, responsible plumbing, always.

6. Encouraging Civic Engagement

As a business leader, you can also encourage civic engagement by your team and stakeholders. Providing resources and opportunities for employees to participate in the democratic process, such as offering paid time off for voting, organizing voter registration drives, and hosting informational sessions on key issues helps foster a more informed and active citizenry, which is essential for the health of any democracy. It also demonstrates your company's commitment to civic responsibility and can enhance your reputation as a socially conscious organization.

7. Leading by Example

Ultimately, as a leader you must lead by example in navigating political differences. This involves demonstrating integrity, transparency, and a commitment to ethical principles in all business dealings. By prioritizing the long-term well-being of employees, customers and communities, you can build trust and credibility across the political spectrum.

Addressing the differences between political parties in America requires business leaders to adopt a multifaceted approach. PMI is committed to helping you and your team understand the political landscape, foster bipartisan engagement, promote a non-partisan workplace, navigate regulatory changes, engage in responsible political advocacy, encourage civic engagement, and lead by example. Together, we can effectively navigate political polarization and contribute to a more stable and inclusive business environment. That is work worth doing every day.

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