

Democracy Matters 8

Lesson Fifteen: Contribute to good causes.

Be active in organizations—political or not—that express your view of life. Pick a charity or two and either set up autopay or create a volunteering schedule. By doing this, not only will you have made a free choice that supports civil society, but you will have the satisfaction of knowing that, no matter what is happening in the world, you are helping others to do good.

The First Amendment protects our right as Americans to come together and express our collective interests. This freedom is essential to the functioning of a democratic society because it is what enables people to collaborate, advocate for their rights, and hold institutions accountable. Sharing an undertaking with others teaches us that we can trust people beyond a narrow circle of family and friends, and it helps us to recognize authorities from whom we can learn. Through such activities, life comes to seem kinder and more generous, and the future is made more hopeful.

Lesson Sixteen: Learn from peers in other countries.

If you have relationships with people in other countries, do the work needed to maintain them. If you have the opportunity to make a new friend from another place, take it. What's happening in our country is not happening in isolation from the rest of the world. Much of what is occurring in the U.S. now is following patterns that are more familiar to people in other parts of the world. We may find that they have useful things to teach us if we will listen.

Read history and read/watch international news. Doing this will help you put what is happening today into a wider and more sensible context. It will help open up new ways of thinking about how to approach problems at home. It will help remind you that, however we might feel about the present, we have managed to successfully come through darker times in the past.

(Adapted from Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*.
Vintage Digital, 2017.)