

A Berkeley professor explains why society needs more troublemakers

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It's sweet to be agreeable—but what a vibrant, healthy society really needs is principled troublemakers.

Those who dare to say “no” when it appears that everyone else is in agreement are rare and brave—and they make the world a better place, according to University of California, Berkeley psychology professor [Charlan Nemeth](#). Her new book, [In Defense of Troublemakers: The Power of Dissent in Life and Business](#), shows how everyone benefits when someone presents a thoughtful contrarian view.

Nemeth's research in social psychology and cognition has shown that disagreement improves group thinking. “It's a benefit regardless of whether or not [dissenters] hold the truth,” she argues. “Most people are afraid and [they don't speak up](#). Companies have that problem all the time. And the research really shows us that that even if it's wrong, the fact that the majority or the consensus is challenged actually stimulates thinking.”

The professor has spent decades studying disagreement, looking at the behavior of juries, companies, airplane crews, and groups in general. Her work shows that a challenge to the general consensus generates necessary consideration and debate. This, in turn, improves decision-making, leads to more creative solutions, and even saves lives, for example in a criminal case where a defendant's life or liberty may be at stake.