

# “Good Faith” vs. “Bad Faith” Arguments or Discussions

**GOOD FAITH:** A “Good Faith” argument or discussion is one in which both parties agree on the terms on which they engage, are honest and respectful of the other person’s dignity, follow generally-accepted norms of social interaction, and genuinely want to hear what the other person thinks and has to say. In many cases, they are working together towards a resolution that will be mutually satisfying. “Good faith” is similar to “good will,” in that you wish the other party well and do not intend harm.

Each party accepts the other person as a separate individual with autonomous free will, an independent mind, good and true intentions, and the right to have their own opinions and reach their own conclusions. We see this sort of discussion on display in governmental bodies where representatives of opposing parties refer to each other as “the loyal opposition” or the “honorable” member, and so on. A “discussion” in which both parties are operating in “good faith” can be worthwhile, productive, enlightening, and satisfying, even if no agreement is reached and, in the end, they “agree to disagree.”

**BAD FAITH:** A “Bad Faith” discussion is one in which one or both of the parties has a hidden, unrevealed agenda—often to dominate or coerce the other individual into compliance or acquiescence of some sort—or lacks basic respect for the rights, dignity, or autonomy of the other party. Disrespect for the other party may include dishonesty. A person engaged in bad faith does not accept the other person as s/he is, but demands that s/he change in order to satisfy his/her requirements or to accept his/her will.

A “bad faith” discussion is doomed to fail, as one or both person’s rights, dignity, and autonomy are not respected. A “good faith” argument relies on persuasion to try to convince the other person whereas a “bad faith” argument relies on other means, possibly including intimidation or coercion. “Bad faith” arguments in private life are best exited swiftly, and are generally not effective at swaying hearts and minds. In public life, they are best exposed. As Dale Carnegie expressed it in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” [This adage appeared earlier as “Convince a man against his will, He’s of the same opinion still.” in the notes of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792, by Mary Wollstonecraft.]

In general, it is always best to begin a discussion and to proceed with the presumption of mutual good faith, until or unless proven otherwise.

