

# It says so on my shirt

A Los Angeles garment-maker is rocking the boat with T-shirts that ask political questions, writes Korri Kezar

**W**HEN is a T-shirt not just a T-shirt? When it's Politeed, according to Sherry Henry, CEO of the Dallas company. Politeed shirts blare questions, asking onlookers to consider what side of an issue they're on. Some ask — "are gay rights civil rights?" — while others ask "do illegal immigrants contribute to the prosperity of the US?"

The concept is to spark meaningful thought on political issues without revealing what side the wearer is on.

"Most people don't want to discuss politics as if it is a taboo to do so because someone might get angry at what you say," says Henry, one of the forces behind the T-shirts. "I believe the opposite, in that if you don't talk about the issues you will never break down the barriers. If the shirts make anyone pause for even just a few moments, then I've accomplished what I wanted to accomplish."

She created the Politeed concept with business partner Lisa Stone in 2005 with money from a buyout from Verizon Wireless and savings. She defines her inspiration for the company as "divine intervention".

Henry claims her shirts are neither right nor left wing. "A question is just that — a question. It is how you interpret the question and your experiences that make the question liberal or conservative," she says.

The reaction of high school and college students was mixed.

"I like that they're more intelligent than the normal, cliché shirt sayings," says senior John Stricker of Devine High School.

"It's a way to provoke discussion

and look good without anyone accusing me of being on either side of an issue," freshman Melanie Ferrari of Texas State University says.

"Politeed is achieving its goal if it wants to promote political awareness. When I showed the website to my friends, they were really interested. They started thinking about what side of the issue they stand on. The shirts have a great impact."

But some find the shirts abrasive.

"It's easy to find them offensive," says Devine High School junior Cody Asher.

"I'm not sure the shirts are achieving their purpose of political awareness," says Palo Alto freshman Aaron Cottle.

"I thought the shirts were just as easily classified as a fad or trend. It's a shirt, and anyone can wear it, whether or not they know what they're talking about. It defeats the whole idea.

"Plus, I don't like questions being demanded of me by an offensive shirt."

Buyers can purchase shirts on issues including foreign policy, gay rights, global warming, human rights, immigration, Iraq, race, religion, terrorism and war. Henry is working on new shirts on additional issues and the company has already produced 16 more possible shirt phrases.

Politeed contributes a portion of its profits to the National Defence Resource Council, to aid in the prevention of global warming and the preservation of the habitat of the polar bear. Shirts are available online at [politeed.com](http://politeed.com), in sizes up to 2XL. All items are made in Los Angeles from the bottom up. — © (2007) *The New York Times*



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