



IMPACTFUL INCLUSION TOOLKIT

52 Activities to Help You
Learn and Practice Inclusion
Everyday in the Workplace

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WILEY

ACTIVITY

1

Know Thyself

“To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.”

—Socrates

You may have heard the phrase “Diversity is a fact; inclusion is a choice.” Think about that. Diversity is a fact of life. We are all different. As soon as you have two people in the room, you have human diversity. Inclusion, on the other hand, can happen only when the people in the room intentionally choose to value and respect one another’s differences. Diversity in the workplace is about intentionally hiring individuals from under-represented groups with the right skills and competencies in support of organizational goals. Inclusion is about empowering that blend to work together toward a shared goal, where difference is considered a strength and cultivated toward the good of the individual as well as the organization. Each day we are faced with decisions on how best to collaborate, deal with conflict, and show appreciation for one another. It’s a constant process of choosing consciously or unconsciously words and actions where others are made to feel either included or excluded. Engaging across differences creates both challenges and opportunities.

We must learn to meet people where they are, including those who don't appreciate working with people unlike themselves as we work toward creating a sense of belonging and building an atmosphere of community. We start to make mindful choices during interactions and sometimes in challenging situations where we must be wholly present and reflective, while calibrating and recalibrating between comfort and discomfort. This requires building competencies to connect while creating a safe space and knowing how to pivot in critical moments of conflict to make better choices in the next—choices that enhance the relationship and achieve the desired outcome.

Communications are improved when we have the agility to go from being in the conversation to looking at the conversation. Imagine that you are earshot away from a conversation between Tamika, who is African American, and Gabe, who is European American. They are working on a high-level project and are struggling to meet the deadline. Neither is taking responsibility for the missteps that have brought them here. Gabe has always second-guessed Tamika's work and believes her to be pushy. Tamika views Gabe as an Ivy League know-it-all who believes that good ideas originate only from men. When Gabe introduces an idea, Tamika criticizes it. When Tamika begins an idea, Gabe interrupts. This back-and-forth goes on for about 15 minutes. If they were thinking inclusively and interested in solving the problem based on their unique perspectives, one or the other would eventually stop this interaction, analyze the process, and determine how to improve it. Gabe may say something like "I appreciate how you evaluate and quickly see the downside of ideas. Your feedback is good in helping us to avoid errors. Going forward, can we look at the positives as well? Tamika might say, "Gabe, it's really distracting when you won't let me complete a thought. I feel like you don't value what I have to say and find it difficult to complete my train of thought without becoming defensive. Please let me complete my statements before you respond." When Tamika and Gabe step back and look at the process and the patterns of the conversation, which are often based on beliefs, experiences, and the lens through which we view one another, they can begin to change the dynamic of the dialogue. Their stereotypical beliefs and generalizations were lurking in the background, which not only created a contentious exchange but also negatively affected their productivity.

To be effective on this terrain, you've got to know yourself, your inner self. What are your beliefs? What do you value? What triggers cause you to instinctively react in a certain way and why? In a post from Betterup.com, psychologists Shelly Duval and Robert Wicklund define self-awareness as "the ability to focus on yourself and how your actions,

thoughts, or emotions do or don't align with your internal standards. If you're highly self-aware, you can objectively evaluate yourself, manage your emotions, align your behavior with your values, and understand correctly how others perceive you." The trip down self-discovery lane is well worth the time and energy and rewards you with the following:

- Power to influence outcomes
- Better decision-making, leading to a boost in self-confidence, which leads to communicating with clarity and intention
- Ability to understand things from multiple perspectives
- Freedom from our assumptions and biases
- Ability to build better relationships
- Greater ability to regulate our emotions
- Decreased stress
- Increased happiness

As we aspire to be champions of inclusion, we must put in the work to develop more self-awareness and better understand our own perspective. When we are at peace with what influences our choices around being more inclusive and develop the capacity to move back and forth from our point of view to appreciating that of others, our mindfulness evolves. Then we can begin to accept that our tried-and-true assumptions are just one of many possibilities.

Actions

Create Mindful Interactions

We are a culmination of our experiences. Those experiences inform how we build relationships. During interactions:

- Focus your complete attention on the present moment.
- Be mindful not to allow preconceived notions and judgments drive the conversation—see the other person as they are, not who you think they are.
- Be open to new possibilities, ask questions, avoid assumptions.
- During stress or conflict, remember to breathe, step outside your feelings, focus on the goal, and assess how to alter the dynamic toward mutual benefit.

Consider the Dynamics of Interactions

Reflect on a time where you met someone for the first time who is different from you. You each bring a story created by personal experiences, as well as culture and upbringing that shapes your beliefs and values and yet may or may not facilitate a connection. Consider the dynamic of the interaction where the connection was *not* made. Acknowledge the many aspects of yourself that you brought to that initial encounter and the ways the other person was different from you. Explore how beliefs, values, and assumptions may have interfered. Reflect on whether being open to and discovering the other's perspective may have changed the outcome. Note what you've learned. Contrast this experience to a time where your initial encounter with someone different from you led to a connection.

Enhance Your Social and Emotional Intelligence Skills

Emotionally and socially intelligent individuals are good at understanding how others may feel but are also adept at understanding their own feelings. Create a library of online courses, books, podcasts, etc., for continuous learning and practice. Here is a list to get you started:

- **Podcast:** *Living and Leading with Emotional Intelligence: Conscious Leadership*, with Matt McLaughlin: podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/living-and-leading-with-emotional-intelligence/id1516136305?i=1000546251943
- YouTube.com: *6 Steps to Improve Your Emotional Intelligence*, Ramona Hacker, TEDxTUM: www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6_J7FfgWVc
- YouTube.com: *The Power of Emotional Intelligence*, Travis Bradberry, TEDxUCIrvine: www.youtube.com/watch?v=auXNnTmhHsk
- Udemy.com: "Emotional Intelligence at Work | Master Your Emotions," by Six Seconds the Emotional Intelligence Network (course is for purchase)
- **Book:** *Emotional Intelligence*, 25th anniversary edition paperback, by Daniel Goldman

Action Accelerators

Leverage these resources to enhance your knowledge and increase the effectiveness of your actions:

- Forbes.com: “Diversity Is a Fact, Inclusion Is a Choice,” by Timothy R. Clark: www.forbes.com/sites/timothyclark/2021/03/17/diversity-is-a-fact-inclusion-is-a-choice/?sh=68e412a6bd1a
- InDiverseCompany.com: “The relevance of social intelligence in the workplace,” by Manasi Bharati: <https://indiversecompany.com/the-relevance-of-social-intelligence-in-the-workplace>
- SHRM.org: “Emotional Intelligence Helps Build Inclusive Workplaces,” by Paul Bergeron: www.shrm.org/resourcesand-tools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/global-and-cultural-effectiveness/pages/emotional-intelligence-brings-out-the-best-in-inclusive-offices.aspx
- HBR.org: “How Sharing Our Stories Builds Inclusion”: www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/global-and-cultural-effectiveness/pages/emotional-intelligence-brings-out-the-best-in-inclusive-offices.aspx
- **Book:** *What’s Your Story? A Journal for Everyday Evolution*, by Rebecca Walker and Lily Diamond

Sources Cited

Betterup.com. “What is Self-Awareness and Why is it Important?” <https://betterupstaging.ingeniuxondemand.com/en-us/resources/blog/what-is-self-awareness-and-why-is-it-important>

Bernardo M. Ferdman and Barbara R. Deane, eds. *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2014 (pages 128–139)

ACTIVITY

2

Connect with Your *Why*, Find Your *Why Now*

"I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go."

—Langston Hughes

Every year there are a few mandatory trainings to attend in the workplace. With an increased focus on diversity, many companies now conduct trainings on bias, sexual harassment, cultural awareness, and other diversity topics to avoid legal action, demonstrate their commitment to a safe and fair working environment, and foster an inclusive culture. Organizations have their diversity and inclusion *why*. The *why now* may range from maintaining brand reputation and the bottom line in the midst of social movements like #MeToo to increased awareness and real concern for employee well-being or in response to an employee impropriety. Courses are intended to help people from different backgrounds work better together, as well as with clients/customers, and better prepare leaders to support diversity efforts. Attendance tends to be company policy and a requirement for employment with the expectation that everyone understands and agrees to comply. While training is a good

thing and makes sound business sense, sometimes the unexpected happens; participants emerge feeling confused, judged, resentful, or angry. These feelings are not uncommon, and there are dozens of reasons for these reactions.

Lawrence, a White male senior manager in his mid-forties, feels that racism and discrimination aren't issues as he personally has never experienced them in the organization. He believes that the training was a total waste of time and that those company resources could have been used to fund his next project. He's baffled that the leadership team would do such a thing. Martha asserts that she is not racist; her nanny is Hispanic, and she is proud to say that she doesn't see color. Racism is someone else's problem but not hers. George thinks that diversity training is for the sole benefit of minorities so that they can get "special treatment" and complains of reverse discrimination. The multicultural messaging makes him feel left out and builds feelings of animosity. Janet is overwhelmed with the increased awareness of her bias, times of insensitivity to racial injustice, and the countless unintended microaggressions she's committed. She now feels as if she is walking on eggshells. Fernando is skeptical of the company's efforts and sees it as a check-the-box exercise. Months later, nothing has changed except that he is expected to be the voice of all Hispanics since he's the only one, where for years, no one ever expressed interest in his opinion or concerns.

What's particularly interesting is that leaders expect these one-and-done trainings to have a lasting impact on company culture as new knowledge and tools have been imparted to encourage new ways of interacting. An article by Harvard University explains, "Hundreds of studies dating back to the 1930s suggest that anti-bias training doesn't reduce bias, alter behavior, or change the workplace. Two-thirds of human resources specialists report that diversity training does not have positive effects, and several field studies have found no effect of diversity training on women's or minorities' careers or on managerial diversity." That said, while training does indeed offer a new perspective and increased awareness of behaviors and attitudes that get in the way of improved working relationships—there is no reason to expect *that* alone will change life-long beliefs and interactions based on those beliefs. That is a conscious choice to be made solely by the individual. We've got to decide what to do with the newly acquired information and choose to practice it every day if we genuinely care about the well-being of others. Start by connecting with your *why* and your *why now*. As a *Forbes* article describes, "If one knows their why, it's a lot easier to anchor to that stated mission, put in the time and make a concerted effort to go after the objective.

D&I (diversity and inclusion) is very much an individual journey where folks need to get introspective, peel back the layers of their experiences to help dismantle the fear, and learn what their respective mental blockers might be.” Once you’ve discovered your *why*, cement it with your *why now*. Why now after years of thinking and behaving in the same way, would you change? When we do things that we believe make a meaningful impact toward our principles and philosophies, it’s human nature to feel happier, more fulfilled, and thus, more inclined to apply the knowledge.

Christina, a regional manager at a prominent mobile phone service provider, experienced this transformation firsthand. Training raised her awareness of her biased beliefs that Black people were lazy and not as driven as White people, yet she was still blinded to the exemplary work of Tamara, a single Black mother of two and an employee of four years. Tamara’s customer survey scores were regularly above 90 percent, and she consistently ranked in the top three of the seven frontline sales representatives. Tamara was indeed ambitious and worked hard to provide a good life for her sons but was looked over for the opportunities of team lead on one occasion and store manager in another, in favor of White co-workers with lower satisfaction scores and sales numbers. Christina could never provide an objective reason for her decisions except that Tamara wasn’t ready yet and needed to be more like the individuals who were promoted. Tamara wondered what that meant. It was during the follow-up discussion, after the second denial for advancement, that Tamara asked for more specifics and examples in an effort to do better next time. As Christina shared her observations about the promoted individuals, she realized that they were very much like her. They came from similar backgrounds and had yet to start families. Her assessment of readiness wasn’t based on skills and competencies, which Tamara had clearly demonstrated, but her view that capable people were like her, White, college educated and without children. Now that Christina was aware of how her stereotypical beliefs about Black people and her model of success informed her decisions about Tamara as well as the impact of those decisions—that a very hard-working candidate was blocked from consideration—she knew that she had to change her thought process. She had the *why* and *why now* she needed to look for ways to interrupt her biased thinking and decided to get to get to know Tamara by mentoring her. In the process, she discovered the sacrifices Tamara made on behalf of the company like working off-days to cover the shift of co-workers who called in sick, and she also learned of Tamara’s dreams of homeownership. Christina began to feel more fulfilled knowing that her guidance was positioning Tamara for success and the realization of her

dreams. Ultimately, Tamara accepted a manager's position in a different industry and continues to communicate with Christina. Christina has become more objective in the evaluation of employee skills for promotion opportunities and continues to learn and give back by volunteering at a local Junior Achievement—a not-for-profit organization that helps prepare students for a successful future.

The knowledge and skills acquired in diversity training wane over time as people return to old habits, especially when there is no company ecosystem in place to encourage and reward inclusive behaviors. We've got to decide whether we sincerely want to make the effort to be more inclusive, what beliefs need to change, and what actions we need to take. Ask ourselves questions that cause us to reflect. Consider starting with "Do I believe in equity for all, and how do my actions reflect what I believe? What can I do to make a lasting difference that goes beyond what I am currently doing?" Whether a training or other vehicle like books, webinars, etc., the application of the knowledge is where you can begin to make an impact. As champions of inclusion, we are continuous learners who seek to evolve our thinking and alter behaviors that create inclusive experiences with others. We endeavor for enhanced perspectives. We disrupt our biased thinking so that we can model what impactful inclusion looks like in the workplace and beyond. The outcome is well worth the effort.

Actions

Get Acquainted with Your *Why*

Connecting to your *why* will require some soul searching as you explore the inner you. Gain clarity by having an open and honest dialogue with folks you trust about your self-discoveries or revelations. Those close to us often know us better than we know ourselves and can help us connect better to our *why* and *why now*.

Keep Your *Why* Top of Mind

Create a personal *why* statement. Understand why inclusion is important and how you want people to feel as a result of interacting with you. Consider who else can benefit from your inclusion efforts beyond your place of work. Keep your *why* statement posted somewhere that you can see it every day. It's your *why* that will keep you forging ahead when you feel like giving up.

Go Beyond One-and-Done Training

Commit to ongoing learning. Create a newsfeed related to diversity topics, various cultures, or legislation impacting underrepresented groups to stay current on the issues and identify areas that align with your *why* for greater impact.

Stay Connected to Your *Why*

Everybody loves to measure their success when they commit to something. Journal about the application of your new knowledge, its impact, and how that makes you feel. Capture mistakes, what you learned, and new connections made.

Action Accelerators

Leverage these resources to enhance your knowledge and increase the effectiveness of your actions:

- YouTube.com: *How to Outsmart Your Own Unconscious Bias*, Valerie Alexander, TEDxPasadena: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP-cqFLS8Q4&t=905s
- YouTube.com: *We Are Not a Melting Pot*, Michelle Silverthorn: www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnwTnYE_onQ
- Wseap.com: “6 Tips on How to Be Inclusive at Work,” Workplace Solutions: www.wseap.com/how-to-be-inclusive-at-work
- HBR.org: “Why Diversity Programs Fail and What Works Better,” by Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kale: hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail

Sources Cited

Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev. “Why Doesn’t Diversity Training Work? The Challenge for Industry and Academia,” scholar.harvard.edu/files/dobbin/files/an2018.pdf

Bernard Coleman. *Finding the Why in Diversity and Inclusion*, February 25, 2019, www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoaches-council/2019/02/25/finding-the-why-in-diversity-and-inclusion/?sh=3d4a957b4f24

ACTIVITY

3

Create New Habits

“We should indeed keep calm in the face of difference and live our lives in a state of inclusion and wonder at the diversity of humanity.”

—George Takei

I have yet to meet anyone who believes that they are just average as they assess their knowledge and skills. When it comes to acts of inclusion, it's easy to consider ourselves above average especially when we are not consciously seeking to be exclusive in our behaviors and interactions. Though you may believe that you are on top of your inclusion game, my money says that there's always room for improvement. Psychological research suggests that we are not very good at evaluating ourselves accurately. This natural tendency to overestimate our competencies in disciplines such as money management, reading people's emotions, or driving is described by researchers as the Dunning-Kruger effect—the cognitive bias whereby people with low ability at a task overestimate their ability. A *New York Times* article summarizes that “Dunning and Kruger's research shows that underperforming individuals reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence

robs them of the ability to realize it. This incompetence, in turn, leads them to hold inflated views of their performance and ability.” What’s notably interesting according to the research is that those with the least ability are often most likely to overrate their skills to the greatest extent.

Meet Brad. He’s been a production manager at a manufacturing company for 3 years and has 16 direct reports. His organization works to be compliant with all federal workplace harassment and discrimination laws, ensures leaders attend requisite trainings, and is making progress on hiring people of difference. Brad believes himself to be a well-intentioned, ethical, and a supportive leader who openly embraces diversity. Yet, his department has the highest turnover and recently a few staff members have complained to human resources that he has treated them unfairly. In subsequent meetings with human resources, Brad was surprised to learn that his interactions with women of color demonstrated bias, bigotry, and racism that negatively impacted their day-to-day experience within the organization.

Unfortunately, we are all prone to an inflated view of our expertise as we rely on current competencies to be successful, as we don’t know what we don’t know. The experts argue that when we lack knowledge and skill in particular areas, we make mistakes leading to poor decisions, and those same knowledge gaps blind us to our errors. In other words, when we lack the very expertise needed to recognize how badly we are doing, we continue to perform badly. The Dunning-Kruger effect isn’t about ego making us oblivious to our weaknesses, as we tend to acknowledge them once we become aware of their existence. In one study, students who initially underperformed on a logic quiz and then took a mini course on logic were then able to recognize that their original performance was more flawed than they thought. This may be why people with a modest level of skill or experience temper confidence in their abilities as they know enough to know that there’s much left to learn. Like anything else, in building skills, we need to consider the constructive feedback of others with an open mind and be on a continuous path of learning from various sources. We may choose to observe others who are getting it right, attend workshops, or read books followed by the application of what we’ve learned. From that work, we change our actions, and over time these actions develop new habits. Good habits create positive change and eventually become routine, thereby requiring little cognitive energy or effort to execute. Imagine the impact from the habit of greeting people authentically, listening as an ally, or creating a safe space for you and your co-workers to have courageous conversations. As champions of inclusion, we commit to the development of

inclusive habits and live by that commitment. We actively mix up our routine to engage with more people and keep insights fresh. Rest assured, there are individuals in our organization who feel watched without ever being seen – signaling “I don’t belong here.” We can mitigate that with inclusion habits built into everyday interactions. It’s about paying closer attention to the feelings of others and no longer assuming or not caring. The hardest part is getting started. Start small if you need to. But start. Create new habits with a purpose.

Check out 10 habits to work toward in Figure 3.1.



1. Elevate equity.
2. Gravitate toward difference.
3. Amplify voices.
4. Acknowledge inclusive efforts of others.
5. Self-educate.
6. Learn from mistakes.
7. Call in—call out.
8. Advocate for others.
9. Encourage others to be inclusive.
10. Create psychological safety.

Figure 3.1: Ten habits to work toward

Actions

Understand How Beliefs Impact Actions

Consider the lives of three colleagues who are different from you. Expand your view beyond race and gender to include age, socio-economic background, disabilities, etc., and reflect on societal norms that impact what you believe and how you treat them. Ask yourself, “What can I start doing to make them feel more included?” and “What can I stop doing that make people feel excluded?” and do those things consistently.

Consider the Impact of Exclusion

Recall a time when you were an outsider and felt excluded. What impact did it have on you? Ponder the emotional toll of that happening to you over and over for years. Next, think through what someone could have done in those moments so that you felt included. Did they need more empathy, compassion, a sense of fairness or courage to speak up? Decide what you need in order to be that person for someone else.

Plan to Act on Your Inclusion Commitment Daily

Now that you have connected to your *why* as outlined in the previous activity, it's time to commit to it. Begin your day by asking yourself, "How can I demonstrate my commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?" Write it down and celebrate when you've accomplished it.

Action Accelerators

Leverage these resources to enhance your knowledge and increase the effectiveness of your actions:

- DiversityJournal.com: "The Inclusion Habit," by Amanda J Felkey, PhD: diversityjournal.com/20611-the-inclusion-habit
- FastCompany.com: "Why Showing Up as a 'Comrade' is the First Step to Inclusion in a Remote Environment": www.fastcompany.com/90533099/why-showing-up-as-a-comrade-is-the-first-step-to-inclusion-in-a-remote-environment?partner=rss&utm_source=rss&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=rss+fastcompany&utm_content=rss?cid=search
- LinkedIn.com/pulse: "Everyday Acts of Inclusion," by Victor Dodig: www.linkedin.com/pulse/everyday-acts-inclusion-victor-dodig
- YouTube.com: *Inclusion Revolution*, Daisy Auger Domínguez, TEDxPearlStreet: www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-VMr51yiVc

Sources Cited

Allison He. "The Dunning-Kruger Effect: Why Incompetence Begets Confidence," *NYtimes.com*, www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/learning/the-dunning-kruger-effect-why-incompetence-begets-confidence.html

David Dunning. *Why incompetent people think they're amazing*, YouTube.com, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOLmD_WVY-E

ACTIVITY

4

Make the Connection

“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”

—Brené Brown

Every workplace has varying degrees of diversity—from the most obvious of race, age, gender, and culture to the sometimes less obvious of education, experience, socio-economic background, and ability. It’s pretty much impossible to get through the day without encountering someone different from you. We often miss out on the rich experiences of getting to know our co-workers in the quest for meaningful work or just getting through the shift. To-do lists, priorities, meetings, deliverables, deadlines, setbacks—you name it, all are part of just getting through the day. Our focus is on *what* we’re doing and not on *who* we’re doing it with. Since a great portion of our day is consumed at work, one may consider it a no-brainer to develop relationships. By nature, we are social beings. Connecting with one another makes the work more meaningful and more enjoyable and supports the organization’s bottom line as good

working relationships are paramount in getting the work done. The stronger the relationship, the more comfortable we are in being ourselves, voicing our opinions, and contributing ideas. Good working relationships also provide peace of mind. Consider the emotional toll of working with a colleague that you find difficult. The effort spent in avoiding the individual, strategizing on how to spend as little time as possible in their presence, and lamenting about the messed up situation is energy you can never get back.

When building relationships, especially social ones, naturally we seek people who are like us. We prefer lunch, watercooler chats, and instant messaging with folks around the same age, who share our world views, race, gender, or class, or come from our hometown. In the workplace it is unrealistic to expect that you'll have relationships with only the people who are like you. The process of getting the work done demands working across differences. While you may have figured out how to peacefully coexist with colleagues who are very different from you, that's not the same as connecting and developing interpersonal relationships. It's in this space that relationship development requires more energy as you shift from seeing difference as a problem to valuing it as a strength. True success is an interdependent relationship, and the relationship is the building block of inclusion, which helps us embrace diversity. It's essential that we build relationships where we feel connected to one another as we partner toward a shared goal. The connection matters more than you may think and even more so for our colleagues who work remotely. Connection creates a bond between people when they feel seen and valued. It gives us a sense of belonging in a group, a sense of identity in distinction to others, and a sense of purpose in being a part of something bigger than ourselves. Chanel was hired right out of college to join a team of five sales representatives for a software company. She graduated magna cum laude in mathematics and racked up years of experience working her way through school. She was the only person of color on the team and one of several in a companywide staff of 75. Susan, her manager, believed Chanel's analytical skills and service-oriented background would be an asset to the team as they expanded into new markets. Chanel would bring a much-needed fresh perspective in support of team goals. Susan's expectations might have been met as Chanel proved herself by bringing her A game each day, learning the product inside out, and was exceeding goals by her fourth month; except Susan had not prepared the team to cultivate a relationship with Chanel. She never had to. The team was homogenous and survived on groupthink. A practice described by *Psychology Today* as "a phenomenon

that occurs when a group of well-intentioned people makes irrational or non-optimal decisions spurred by the urge to conform or the belief that dissent is impossible. The problematic or premature consensus that is characteristic of groupthink may be fueled by a particular agenda—or it may be due to group members valuing harmony and coherence above critical thought.”

Though Chanel worked alongside them, she felt isolated and disconnected. She struggled to fully understand her role and how to contribute to the team’s success. While Chanel was highly productive, the team was missing out on her insights, and Susan couldn’t figure out why. Chanel approached Susan about her feelings of isolation and not feeling part of the team, and Susan knew something needed to change in order to maximize the team’s potential. They devised a plan where the team met weekly to discuss one another’s sales opportunities and challenges and explore solutions, and Susan was intentional about making space for Chanel in the conversations. In addition, Susan partnered her with a peer, Brad. His role was to provide context to the team dynamic and shed light on cultural norms and unspoken rules. Over time, the team got to know each other on an interpersonal level. The challenges of one became the challenge of all as they continued to work toward goals. The new structure facilitated connection and camaraderie and positioned them to leverage one another’s strengths.

It’s important to make a conscious effort to expand your circle and get to know others. Look for opportunities. They’re everywhere. For example, during the next team meeting or company event, introduce yourself to folks whom you rarely encounter of a different race, age, gender, or other visible difference. Be genuine. Strive to make the connection. A new point of view awaits. Mentoring or reverse mentoring opportunities may present themselves. The exposure to new people has its advantages. We never know who is going to inspire our next big idea or who we will inspire. Champions of inclusion understand what exclusion can mean to the everyday experiences of co-workers and transform good intentions into meaningful connections.

Actions

Expose Yourself to Difference

When making social plans, choose to attend events that cater to people and interests different from your own, and strive to connect to at least one person.

We tend to seek advice or collaborate with those who are like us. Today, make it a point to seek the point of view of someone who is not like you at all. Strengthen the connection with a “tell me more” attitude.

Connect to the Issues

Learn from those actively involved in driving change. Follow people who are different from you on social media to get a sense of what is going on in communities of difference and the work being done. The exposure will identify movements that you can connect your efforts to. Check out Sybrina Fulton, social change activist; Minda Harts, workplace and equity consultant; and Stacey Abrams, voting rights activist.

Facilitate Connections

Make time to foster and facilitate connections with co-workers on other teams and departments, and don’t forget about remote colleagues. In the process we not only create and expand our network, but we also do the same for others. Bring folks together whom you believe have synergies or are working to solve similar problems. Mutually beneficial connections cultivate inclusion.

Adjust Your Lens

Shifting our point of view allows us to see things in a whole new light. Ever notice that when you are too close or too far away from an object that it’s difficult to discern what it is and how to respond? If we don’t adjust the angles when we are in the unfamiliar territory of fostering inclusion, we make assumptions, repeat patterns, and easily miss opportunities in plain sight.

Action Accelerators

Leverage these resources to enhance your knowledge and increase the effectiveness of your actions:

- YouTube.com: *Building Connections: How to Be a Relationship Ninja*, Rosan Auyeung-Chen, TEDxSFU: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBmMZFMpf18&t=632s

- YouTube.com: *How to Connect to Anyone*, Soraya Morgan Gutman, TEDxWilmingtonWomen: www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JNElVrSTjs
- TED.com: *How to Connect with People who are Different than You*, Abigail Spanberger, TEDxMidAtlantic: www.ted.com/talks/abigail_spanberger_how_to_connect_with_people_who_are_different_than_you
- TED.com: *10 Ways to a Better Conversation*, Celeste Headlee, TEDxCreativeCoast: www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation

INTERVIEW: TELLING IT LIKE IT IS... TO GET WHERE WE NEED TO GO

Why Everyone Needs Interpersonal Skills

Meet Khaite. She is a marketing manager at a world-renowned hospital in Illinois. Her high energy and professionalism consistently get her noticed. She has a reputation for going above and beyond in all she does and prides herself on her ability to connect with anyone. As the youngest African American on the team, who happens to be a lesbian, she feels that there is a special lens on her and pressure to represent not just Black people but also the LGBTQ community. Originally hired as a writer reporting to an Asian American woman, everything had gone smoothly for the first two years. When the department restructured, her role expanded. She was given a camera and informed that she was now on the digital team reporting to a middle-aged White man, Richard. He originated from Kansas and had a very 1980's management style. Khaite continued to go above and beyond in her new role and thought that she and Richard were adjusting to one another okay. The relationship was not quite as solid as the one with her previous manager, but after six months of working together, she felt that it was as good as it was going to get. Through seemingly insignificant circumstances, Khaite discovers that Richard is a bit uncomfortable in his new role as her boss.

After an event at the hospital, Khaite hurried back to the office to start her next project. After a few minutes, Eric, a White co-worker sends a text saying that Richard is requesting that she pick up the artwork from the event that he had forgotten and that he needed in time for an event the following day. This wasn't the first time Khaite received requests from Eric on Richard's behalf. Already deeply focused on the new project, she responds that now is not a good time and she will soon be in a meeting. She would be happy to do it afterward except the building where the artwork is located will be locked before the meeting ends. Eric is insistent that Richard wants her to carry out the request. She apologetically reiterates the conflict and takes the time to

find someone else to help. She found the situation unsettling as she could not make sense as to why Richard was so unwavering, especially since both he and Eric were still in the area. She assumed that they were just too busy as well. The next day Eric paid her a visit, which wasn't unusual, except this time instead of a big smile and casual attitude, he had a tense look on his face. He began by thanking her for finding a resolution to the artwork dilemma and shared something Khaite will never forget.

A few months earlier, Richard approached Eric to keep a watchful eye on Khaite and to make sure that she stays in her lane. Eric questioned why he needed to become her second and unofficial boss. They shared the same title, he had no more authority than Khaite, and the added responsibility fell outside his job role. Besides, he considered Khaite a friend, and the directive made him feel like a traitor. The situation haunted Eric, and he felt the need to tell her. Richard never made it clear to Eric as to why Khaite needed the extra pair of eyes. But for Khaite, this revealed that despite her best efforts to connect with Richard, she always felt uncomfortable in his presence, and this gave some insight as to why Eric was tasking her with requests from Richard.

Khaite contemplated whether Richard was ill-equipped to lead a diverse team or whether he had some sort of personal problem with her. While the team was gender and age diverse, her presence added a few extra dimensions that may have been unfamiliar. Could it be that she was Black, the youngest, or gay? Could it be that being the "only" on the team, where she did not fit the persona of others who held the title and as a result deemed less competent. Worse, what if he was racist or homophobic? She could not fathom a reasonable explanation as to why Richard did not want to interact with her directly. She pondered whether to approach him but was concerned that it may negatively impact Eric's relationship with Richard or that it may increase the tension with her and Richard. She wondered whether talking to human resources was appropriate, but there were no policies broken that she knew of, so what good would that do? She decided to stick it out and hope for the best. Khaite continues to feel that the relationship with Richard would be much improved if he would take the time to get to know her rather than brush her off as a problem on someone else. The culture created by Richard is now awkward for both Khaite and Eric and created tension in a previously positive and productive work environment.

ACTIVITY

5

Experience Other Cultures

“People of different religions and cultures live side by side in almost every part of the world, and most of us have overlapping identities, which unite us with very different groups. We can love what we are, without hating what—and who—we are not. We can thrive in our own tradition, even as we learn from others, and come to respect their teachings.”

—Kofi Annan

Understanding the unique cultural differences of co-workers can go a long way in creating a welcoming workplace. Things Americans take for granted like the handshake greeting and engaging in eye contact during conversation, for example, may fall outside the tradition of others, and colleagues may come across as standoffish or rude. Shaking with the left hand is considered insulting in the Middle East as the right hand is used for eating while the left hand is reserved for washing after using the bathroom. That said, one must always use their right hand. African Americans are compelled to work longer hours as a means to repudiate stereotypical beliefs of being lazy and staying employed, while for the dominant culture, it's a demonstration of commitment to work and means

to advancement. Addressing someone as ma'am or sir demonstrates respect in some cultures and is discouraged in others. By learning and understanding different cultures, we understand why people do things the way they do. The more we know, the better we can connect and communicate. There's no better way to acquire knowledge of other cultures than through experience. The feelings and the lessons learned when experiencing something new can stay with us for a lifetime. Consider your last vacation to somewhere you've never been, especially if it was not your country of origin or country of current residence. Immersing yourself, even for a short time, can change your perspective and help you learn more about yourself. My first vacation to the Bahamas was eye-opening. Coming from the fast-paced environment of Chicago, there are many things I've grown accustomed to, like being serviced in a timely and attentive fashion in restaurants. I remember sitting at the table for what felt like a million years before anyone acknowledged me. I think of how frustrated I became while waiting and vowed to leave an insulting tip. When finally approached by the server, a seemingly middle-aged woman with a big, beautiful smile asked what I would like for breakfast, her smile melted away some of my frustration but didn't stop me from complaining to her about the wait. She continued to smile and didn't address a single gripe. Rather than push for an apology, which I would have received in Chicago, I decided to let it go and work toward enjoying the day. Imagine my temperament when the exact same thing happened again at dinner at a different restaurant. When I returned to the hotel fuming, I vented to a fellow American who frequented there. She explained that the laid-back atmosphere is one of the many things that bring her back again and again. She admitted that it took some getting used to and encouraged me to embrace it. I pondered that whole laid-back thing for a minute. It was in that moment that I realized how impatient I am and how rude I can be when my expectations are not met. This may sound corny, but I was indeed forever changed. For the duration of the vacation, I reminded myself that I was not in a rush for anything, and I should be fully present to truly enjoy the experience of being there. I decided that while in Rome, I would live as the Romans do. It felt great! Returning to Chicago, feeling refreshed, I chose to maintain those lessons learned. I became more observant of the space I'm in before letting emotions take me places where I don't need to be and cause me to react in ways that may harm others. That experience helped me to realize that there are numerous approaches to life, that my approach may not always be the best, and that I should always be curious rather than judgmental when in a new environment.

A cross-cultural experience in the workplace is unavoidable as organizations expand globally and continue to diversify beyond age, race, and gender. As we interact with people from different cultures, we gain a different perspective that can enable us to establish new ways of thinking as well as approaching and solving problems. We get to reconsider our backgrounds and establish where we may have learned culturally insensitive opinions and habits. By acknowledging personal biases and being ready to adjust our views, we start appreciating people from diverse groups for who they are. When we are intentional about truly connecting cross culturally, we expand our knowledge of their history, traditions, values, and beliefs. Subsequently, cultural competence increases, and we can begin to bridge the gap. Get to know the history and significance of cultural celebrations of your colleagues, which may include National Hispanic Heritage Month, Lunar New Year, or Kwanzaa. Discovering the “*why*” behind the traditions not only offers a better appreciation for our differences but provides a more well-rounded approach to the way we engage. There is so much beauty and richness coming from all cultures. Champions of inclusion work to acquire an understanding of appropriate behaviors for better interactions with co-workers of different cultures and build competencies that demonstrate respect. Take the time to plan your work and work your plan.

Figure 5.1 shows a variety of people who may be in your workplace.



Figure 5.1: Individuals representative of various cultures and religions

Actions

Put Yourself in Spaces to Experience Various Cultures

Take a break from the ordinary. Explore fun ways to immerse yourself in new environments with people who are different than you, and discover a whole new world. Here are a few things to try:

- Taking a multicultural cooking class
- Visiting multicultural museums, art galleries, and local fairs
- Volunteering for organizations that serve underrepresented groups or communities
- Traveling with purpose—set aside time to detour from the tourists' spots and mingle with the locals, engage in conversation, and return with a fresh perspective

Educate Yourself on the Cultures of Friends and Colleagues

The more we understand about an individual, the easier it is to build a relationship and work together. When you examine the impact of cultural differences on interactions between individuals nurtured in different cultures, for example, a Chinese manager leading a team of Americans in the United States, you have to consider to what degree, and in what way, do their values differ from Americans in trust building, communication, and teamwork. Research the unique background of the various cultures that exist in your workplace to increase your understanding. When you work to understand, you open the door to being understood.

Make Curiosity the Default

Consistent interaction with individuals different from you is destined to create awkward moments when the unexpected happens. Instead of ignoring, judging, or assuming, ask questions. During conversation, express interest in learning more about your colleague's culture. Be genuine. Have an open mind. Share stories about your culture, traditions, and beliefs. Do more listening than talking.

Action Accelerators

- YouTube.com: *Cultural Diversity: The Sum of Our Parts*, Hilda Mwangi, TEDxUCSD: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tv7NaV47no&t=385s
- YouTube.com: *How Culture Drives Behaviours*, Julien S. Bourrelle, TEDxTrondheim: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-Yy6poJ2zs
- HBR.org: “3 Ways to Improve Your Cultural Fluency,” by Jane Hyun and Douglas Conant: hbr.org/2019/04/3-ways-to-improve-your-cultural-fluency
- **Book:** *Your Unique Cultural Lens: A Guide to Cultural Competence* by Prof Enrique J. Zaldívar

