



# Which one does your workplace look like?

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# We live in a Polarized Society

- Workforce is becoming more diverse with people facing very different realities.
- Gen Z & Millennial employees expect to be able to talk about polarizing topics at work.
- It is impossible to NOT bring strong emotions into the workplace.



Recognize that employees are talking about polarizing topics in the workplace.



Increasingly diverse work environments means leaders need to pay attention to the needs of different groups if you want to engage ALL staff.



Realize that the tragic events occurring in our world impact different groups in different ways and can negatively influence productivity, engagement and feelings of safety.



Recognize that employees bring their fears and other emotions into the workplace.

When we  
change the  
way we look  
at things,  
the things  
we look at  
change.



A GUIDE FOR BOLD, INCLUSIVE CONVERSATIONS

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**HOW TO TALK ABOUT  
RACE, RELIGION,  
POLITICS, AND OTHER  
POLARIZING TOPICS**

MARY-FRANCES WINTERS

## Learning Objectives

### Identify

- Common Reasons for Confrontation

### Understand

- Core Concepts

### Increase

- Awareness with Tips & Tools for Success

### Discuss

- How to have Inclusive & Safe Conversations at Work



What are Common Reasons for Confrontation?

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# TYPES OF CONFLICT AT WORKPLACE



## INTERDEPENDENCE CONFLICT

### Reason

Disagreement in views for task coordination with other team members)



## POLICY CONFLICT

### Reason

Following rules on how a particular job is done



## PERSONALITY CONFLICTS

### Reason

Diverse working styles on how to get things done



## LEADERSHIP CONFLICT

### Reason

Diverse leadership styles to lead the team



## BACKGROUND CONFLICT

### Reason

Difference in experience, educational background, age, political preference, etc



# Core Concepts for a Respectful Environment

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- Define Respect
- Know your DEI Policies & Programs
- Understand Cultural Characteristics
- Importance of Confidentiality

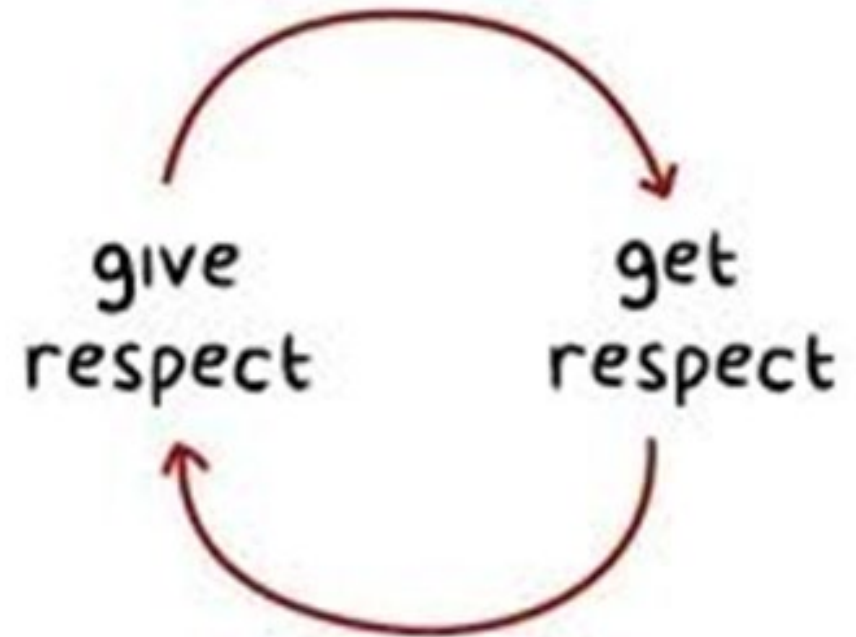


# Respect

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What does a respectful work environment look like to you?

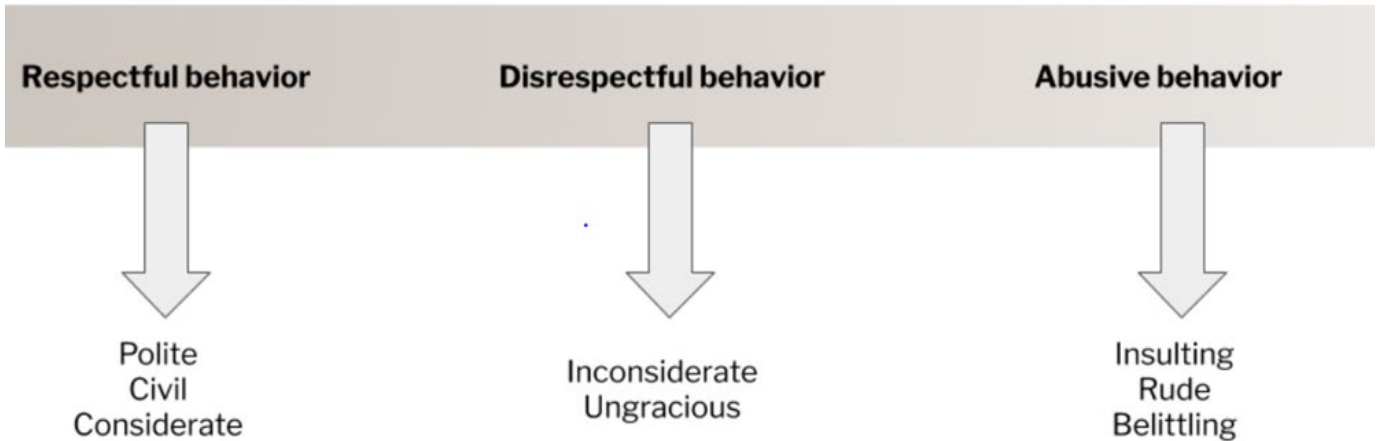
- Can you define and verbalize what respect means to you personally?
- Do you know your institution's expectations?



## What do these behaviors actually look like in action?

The following examples are a sampling of examples and are not meant to be a comprehensive list.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Respectful Behavior</b><br>Polite, civil, and considerate | Asking a colleague to join you and other colleagues for lunch   |
| <b>Disrespectful behavior</b><br>Inconsiderate, ungracious   | Interrupting a colleague, lack of eye contact with a student, dismissing the feelings of a student or co-worker           |
| <b>Abusive Behavior</b><br>Insulting, rude, and belittling   | Deliberately making a rude comment about a student and or other IU community member when they are within hearing distance |

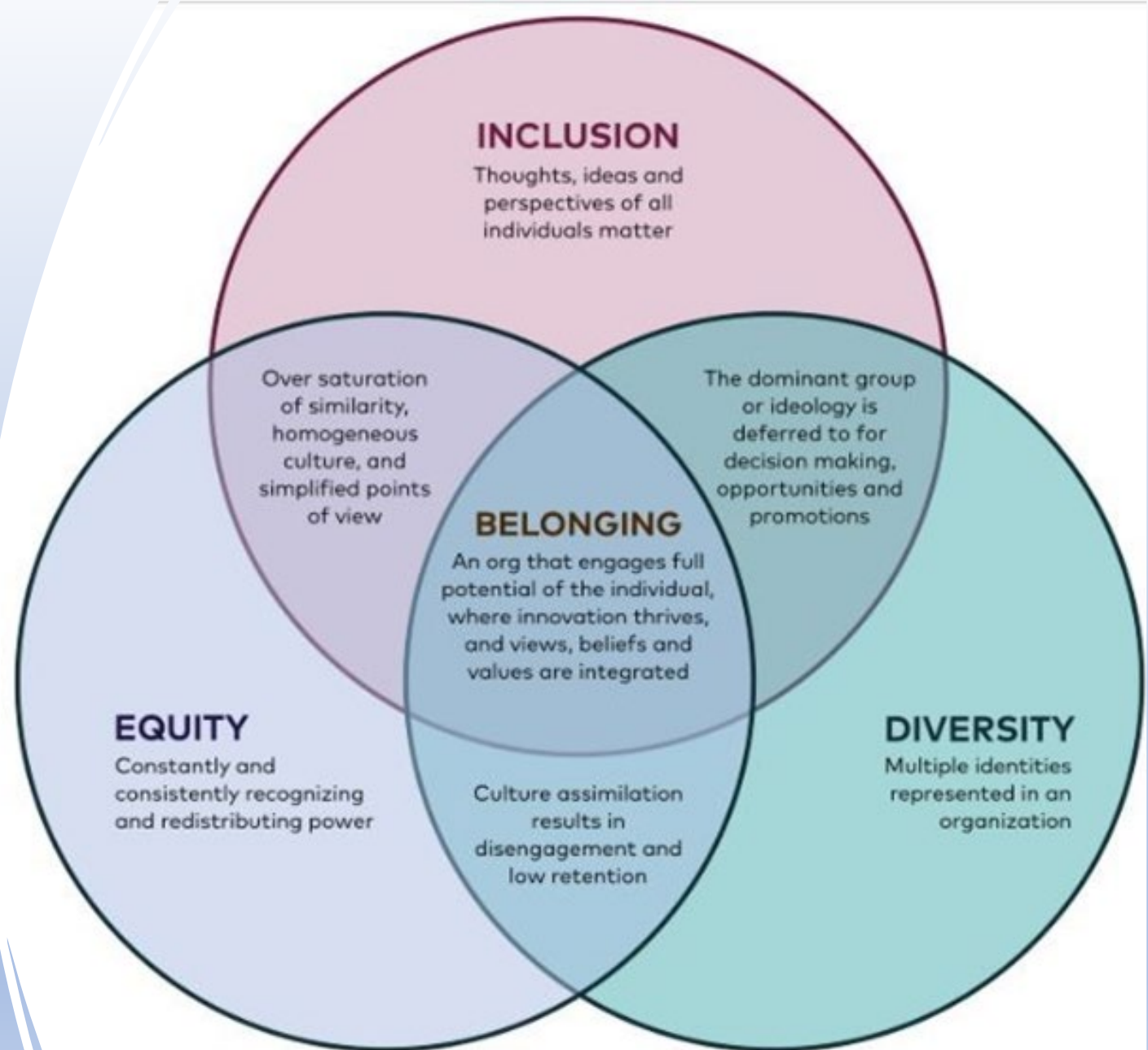


# Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging

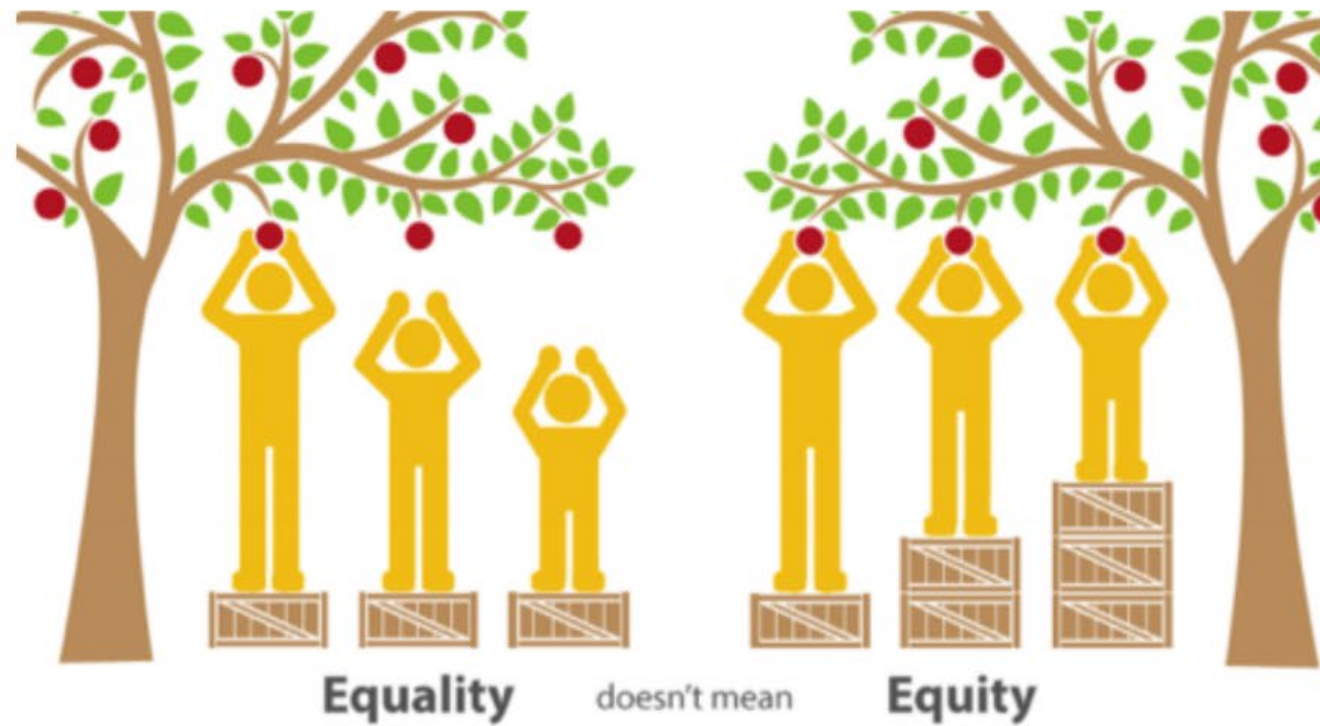
Define the differences between these terms.

Think of as a seat at a table.

Know and share your institution's definition.



Each element represents a different piece of the full human experience. Addressing only one or two of these falls short on gaining, what I think is the full human experience — a sense of belonging.



**Where do you see this difference in your workplace?**

# The Iceberg Concept of Culture

Like an iceberg, the majority of culture is below the surface.



## Surface Culture

Above sea level

Emotional load: relatively low

food ▪ dress ▪ music ▪  
visual arts ▪ drama ▪ crafts  
dance ▪ literature ▪ language  
celebrations ▪ games

## Deep Culture

### Unspoken Rules

Partially below sea level

Emotional load: very high

### Unconscious Rules

Completely below sea level

Emotional load: intense

courtesy ▪ contextual conversational patterns ▪ concept of time  
personal space ▪ rules of conduct ▪ facial expressions  
nonverbal communication ▪ body language ▪ touching ▪ eye contact  
patterns of handling emotions ▪ notions of modesty ▪ concept of beauty  
courtship practices ▪ relationships to animals ▪ notions of leadership  
tempo of work ▪ concepts of food ▪ ideals of childrearing  
theory of disease ▪ social interaction rate ▪ nature of friendships  
tone of voice ▪ attitudes toward elders ▪ concept of cleanliness  
notions of adolescence ▪ patterns of group decision-making  
definition of insanity ▪ preference for competition or cooperation  
tolerance of physical pain ▪ concept of "self" ▪ concept of past and future  
definition of obscenity ▪ attitudes toward dependents ▪ problem-solving  
roles in relation to age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, and so forth



# Why is Confidentiality so Important?

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## Matters for legal and reputational reasons

- Personal information
- “Trade Secrets”
- Managerial Information

## No Confidentiality = NO TRUST

- Fear builds
- Accountability fails
- Morale & Motivation drops
- Teamwork and collaboration decreases

Sharing someone else's story without their permission removes a person's ability to consent.



# Limits of Confidentiality

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## When is it our responsibility to violate confidentiality?


When there is a credible belief that someone represents a threat to themselves or others or if required to do so by law.

*What have you experienced?*

## What do you say?

Inform individual of your duty in that moment to break confidentiality and make clear the reporting process you feel obligated to follow.

*Never promise confidentiality up front!*

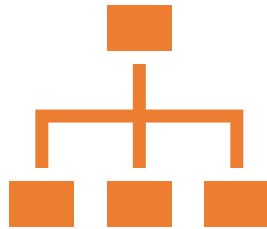
A photograph of two hands shaking, one from a darker-skinned person and one from a lighter-skinned person. A white square outline is drawn around the point of contact between the hands. The background is a light gray gradient.

If no clear ethical or legal reason to share, the most respectful action you can take is to keep the vault secure!

Practice cultivating trust by respecting someone's experience as confidential: when in doubt, assume confidentiality.



# Tips & Tools for Success



Think about current or past organizational challenges and be aware of **Unconscious Bias**



Keep in mind that no matter what programs or guidelines are in place, people are **TALKING**



Teach people how to discuss **APPROPRIATELY** in the workplace



## What is unconscious bias?

- Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside of their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identify groups, and these biases result in one's tendency to categorize.
- Biases cause people to prejudge, and applying those pre-judgments creates stereotypical thoughts and behaviors. Micro-inequities and micro-aggressions (which will be explored in more detail in the next section) are rooted in bias.
- An individual's state of mind:
  - We HOLD a position.
    - positions we hold about others are influenced by past experiences
  - We FORM filters.
    - experiences form mental filters that cause us to reach conclusions about groups
  - We REACH a conclusion.
    - and the conclusion impacts our behaviors

Unconscious biases are so prevalent because our brains can only process so much information at a time. In fact, our brain can only consciously process about 40 to 50 pieces of information every second, but nearly 11 million pieces of information can be unconsciously processed (Thakrar 2018). Because of this fact, our brains look for patterns and create shortcuts to help us make decisions.



## The fact is...

- We are *all* guilty of sending negative micro-messages to our colleagues at one time or another.
- We are *all* part of the problem – this is why it is so BIG!
- FACT: It is estimated that we send 2,000-4,000 micro-messages every day.

### Be more mindful.

Accept that we all have biases and that's ok. Having them is not an excuse for poor behavior. Be aware of yourself in the moment and figure out why you are reacting or behaving in a certain way.

### Dive into comfort.

Put yourself in situations and conversations that cause discomfort and tension, to talk openly about our biases.

### Engage with the "Others."

Spend time getting to know people you consider to be "others." Make a conscious effort to spend time with people outside your normal and comfort zones to debunk some of the inaccurate stereotypes and unconscious biases.

### Consciously engage in positive stereotyping.

Pay close attention to make sure you get positive images and coverage of non-dominant groups (e.g., annual reports, posters, websites, and others). This is one way to counter unconscious bias in the workplace.

### Pause (P.A.U.S.E for constructive uncertainty)

The PAUSE (model was developed by Howard J. Ross, [Everyday Bias \[2014\]](#)). Halt unconscious biases from wreaking havoc in the workplace and PAUSE before making a decision. Here's what to do:

- **P**ay attention to what's happening behind the judgments that you make.
- **A**cknowledge your own judgments, interpretations, and reactions.
- **U**nderstand other possible judgments, interpretations, and reactions.
- **S**earch for the most productive, empowering, constructive way to deal with a situation.
- **E**xecute your action plan.

The key is to remember that we all have unconscious biases and that awareness of them is our first step forward, but not our last. The list above helps to lay out a process for understanding and overcoming our biases.

## Gender Identity & Orientation

- Acceptance of all orientations
- Challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community

## Religion

- Religious books and discussions
- Religious apparel

## Persons with Disabilities

- Visible vs non-visible abilities

# Topics being discussed in workplace

### Race and Racial Tensions

- Race based organizations or movements
- Topic of 'privilege'
- Non-racist vs. anti-racist

### Politics

- Current Events
- Political Ideology
- Elections

### Military

- Military actions and maneuvers
- Celebrations related to military achievements

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# Constructive Confrontation *with a learning mindset*

- Clearly articulate the topic or issue and use non-accusatory language.
- Listen attentively and consider the other person's point of view.
- Be aware of peer-to-peer communications and influence. Use phrases like:
  - *You may or may not be aware...*
  - *Help me to understand...*
  - *Let me think about what you said...*
  - *How is this productive to our work...*
  - *How does this impact our relationship...*
- Know when to take a pause.
- Involve leadership immediately if unable to work through on own.

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There's a  
**MOMENT**  
where you have to  
choose whether to be  
silent or stand up.

**Malala Yousafzai**

*Pakastani activist for  
female education*



Being an active bystander means being aware of when someone's behavior is inappropriate or threatening and choosing to challenge it.

“MOVE OUT OF YOUR COMFORT  
ZONE. YOU CAN ONLY GROW IF YOU  
ARE WILLING TO FEEL AWKWARD  
AND UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN YOU  
TRY SOMETHING NEW.”

—BRIAN TRACY



How to have Inclusive Conversations

# Debate vs. Discussion vs. Dialogue

## DEBATE

- Competitive – focus on succeeding and winning, proving others' logic “wrong”
- Focus on “right” and “wrong” through evidence
- Looking for weaknesses, searching for flaws in others' logic – critique their position
- Listening is used to form counterarguments
- Focus on conflict and difference as an advantage
- Disregard relationships
- Using silence to gain an advantage

## DISCUSSION

- Conceptual and/or conversational – present ideas, often in “clean” or “sophisticated” ways
- Aim to share information – seeking to staying “neutral” in conclusions
- Seek answers and solutions
- Give answers, often those in accordance with academic standards – “What do our readings say?”
- Listening is used to find places of disagreement or to gather rational pieces of argument
- Avoid areas of strong conflict and difference
- Retain relationships
- Avoid silence

## DIALOUGE

- Collaborative, towards a sense of community understanding
- Aim to re-evaluate and acknowledge assumptions and biases
- Bring out areas of ambivalence
- Look for shared meaning
- Discover collective meaning; re-examine and destabilized long-held ideas
- Listening without judgement and with a view to understand
- Building relationships
- Honor silence



# Inclusive Conversation Tips

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Inclusive communication should include information on:

- The societal context of the conversations & importance to the organization.
- What you will do with the feedback from the conversations.
- Why it's okay for employees to engage in these conversations.
- The fact that the conversation is uncomfortable for all parties.
- What help and support is available for anyone who is challenged by the topics being discussed.



Keep communications simple, honest and direct.

Be aware that conversation locations matter!



## Boundary Setting is Important

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- Helps individuals understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Sets rules of conduct within the workplace.
- Determines what is and is not appropriate on the job.
- Sets expectations for accountability to our actions and allows for disciplinary action for those who violate them.

“Some of the most compassionate people are also the most bounded...”

Boundaries are not fake walls, not separation, they’re not division. They are respect for what’s ok and what’s not ok for me.”

- Brene Brown

# BOUNDARY-SETTING SENTENCES

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"I CAN'T DO THAT, BUT I CAN HELP YOU FIND SOMEONE WHO CAN."

"I APPRECIATE THE GESTURE, BUT IN THE FUTURE, I'D PREFER..."

"I CAN'T TAKE ON ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES RIGHT NOW."

"I'M NOT COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING THIS TOPIC WITH YOU."

"I'M UNCOMFORTABLE WITH WHAT YOU JUST SAID / DID."

"THANKS FOR YOUR CONCERN, BUT I CAN HANDLE THIS."

"I CAN'T ATTEND, BUT I APPRECIATE THE INVITATION."

"I DON'T GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO DO [X] TO ME."

"I CAN'T DO [X], BUT I'M OPEN TO TRYING [Y]."

"I DON'T FEEL SAFE SO I'M GOING TO LEAVE."

"I WON'T BE SPOKEN TO IN THAT MANNER."

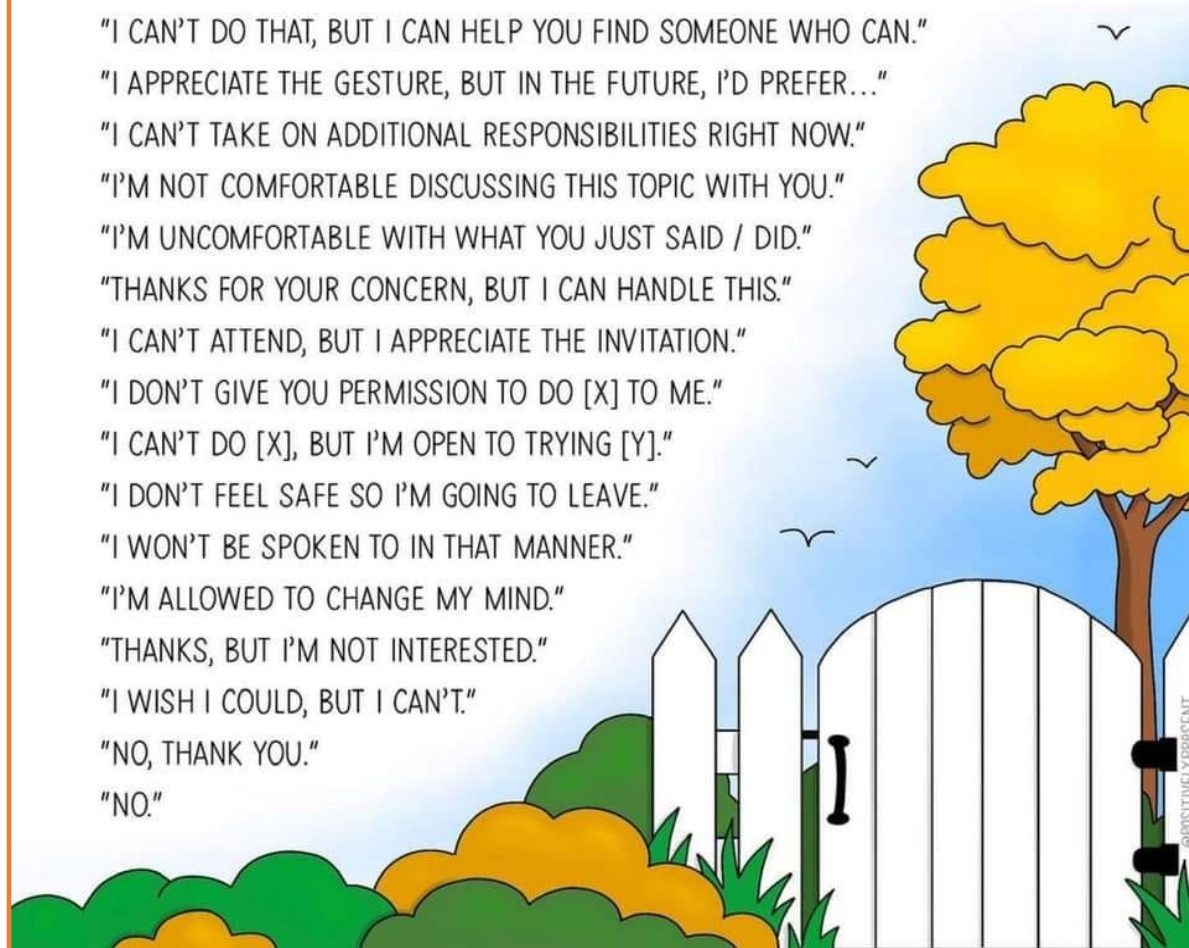
"I'M ALLOWED TO CHANGE MY MIND."

"THANKS, BUT I'M NOT INTERESTED."

"I WISH I COULD, BUT I CAN'T."

"NO, THANK YOU."

"NO."



I can do things you  
cannot, you can do things,  
I cannot. Together we can  
do great things.  
-- Mother Theresa

## Post Conversation Tips:

- Share **gratitude** for those who took part and recognition of the emotional energy spent by everyone.
- Identify **key themes** of the learnings gained from the conversations.
- Connect conversations to university's values and mission.
- Make a **commitment** to action as a result of your learnings.
- Communicate how you intend to **keep the conversation going** to learn from and hear the voices of protected class employees.

A close-up photograph of a hand held palm up, with fingers slightly spread. The hand is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with a bright sun or light source in the upper center, creating a warm, golden glow and lens flare effects. The overall mood is hopeful and open.

# Inclusive Habits to Live By...

- **Acknowledging:** you don't know everything...there is always something to learn.
- **Legitimizing:** Other perspectives are just as valid as your own and need to be listened to for the purpose of understanding, not necessarily agreement.
- **Listening:** Listen to understand and be aware of your own biases.
- **Reflecting:** Spend more time reflecting on your own values and beliefs. Why do you believe what you do?
- **Questioning:** Show genuine interest in others. Be curious, not judgmental, about others' experiences.
- **Respecting:** Respect the dignity of every person even when you don't agree with them. Separate the person from the position. Practice the Platinum Rule, by treating others the way they want to be treated.

# Inclusive Habits continued...

- **Pausing:** Always take a pause before you provide your opinion on polarizing topics. Take a deep breath. Think about what you are going to say. Be patient of mistakes. Be patient of frustrations of historically marginalized groups. Be patient with people who don't understand your experience as a member of a historically marginalized group.
- **Accepting:** Accepting does not mean agreement. It means you acknowledge that there are a myriad of worldviews and it's important to learn about them. Accepting is better than tolerating. Work to move from tolerance to acceptance.
- **Apologizing:** If you say something that offends someone else, genuinely apologize. Do not defend your comment. Simply say "I am sorry. Please help me to understand why that was offensive." Consider it a teaching moment.

# The End Point is Reciprocal Empathy

If we can get to an ability to understand what it's like to be the 'other' then we increase the likelihood of generating new ways to engage with each other.

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When we engage, we create opportunities to learn more about each other's similarities and differences, build better relationships & improve trust.

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This leads to employees feeling more valued, respected and more motivated to give their all.





# CONTACT INFORMATION:

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