PASSION DIALOGUES: Courageous Conversations

1. **Assume positive intent.** To truly have constructive conversations across differences, embrace a mindset that something good will happen as a result. This requires assuming positive intent from everyone—you must consciously choose to believe that people act and speak to the best of their ability and for the benefit of others. By assuming positive intent, we put our own judgments, viewpoints, and biases aside and focus on what the person actually means. This may also mean presuming that others can be responsible for their choices and behaviors, and holding them accountable for assuming positive intent from us and others

2. **Engage in dialogue—not debate**
Debates (back-and-forth exchange with contrasting viewpoints) can quickly turn into arguments and result in negative feelings and stalled progress. Instead, dialogue fuels deep understanding and action. Dialogue is open-ended, where people express and learn from one another's experiences, viewpoints, and perspectives. Shared learning is the goal, and it results in deeper connections with people who may be different from us. This is a hallmark of inclusive work environments, where people feel valued and heard

3. **Demonstrate cultural humility— hold yourself and others accountable to do the same.**
To foster inclusion, we must commit to ongoing learning, mitigating bias and inequities, and holding ourselves and others responsible for actions. These are the core elements of cultural humility, and are critical regardless of your position of power or dominant/non-dominant group status. As such, demonstrating cultural humility requires you to:

• Not make assumptions or snap judgments about any aspect of a person's identity
• "Maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to" the people you are interacting with. This means holding yourself and others accountable for self-reflection, learning, and continually analyzing your assumptions, behaviors, and experiences. At the same time, interrupt when you see others engaging in biased behaviors by constructively calling out their missteps and suggesting alternative ways of thinking. Interrupting biased behavior can happen in the moment or later— show humility by stepping back and thinking through how you want to follow up.

4. **Be open, transparent, and willing to admit mistakes.** Sharing and deepening understanding of colleagues' experiences at work will help reinforce open and honest

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communication and cultivate inclusion. Yet, we all can inadvertently make mistakes or say something we regret. We need to have the courage and personal sense of accountability to admit and learn from mistakes.

We can't let potential for mistakes lead us to remain silent or not engage in dialogue about our differences. We must pledge to practice—jumping into potential discomfort and taking action to start meaningful conversations across difference. When we commit to learning, miscommunication is approached with openness and positive inquiry. Your ability to be open and transparent can vary based on your organization's dynamics and personal situations, so it's best to assess the circumstances first. When considering the timing or situation, equip yourself with the resources, tools, and knowledge to have courageous conversations. Take a risk. Learn from your efforts—and mistakes. And invite others to do the same. Your example will inspire others to step out of their comfort zones.

5. **Embrace the power of humble listening.** Inclusion requires really listening rather than only hearing what some one is saying. In this way, listening requires humility and a willingness to pause and put your own ego, assumptions, and viewpoints aside to reflect on and learn from someone else's experiences. Attend to others with empathy by reflecting on what they are experiencing, asking clarifying questions, and gaining a deeper understanding.

There are unexpected benefits from listening to other people's stories. In particular, researchers show that "listening to personal stories…can help people 'perk up' and be a little less likely to 'change the channel and move on' when faced with the complex issues of today." If you aren't sure you are really listening and understanding another person's perspective, continue the conversation by asking clarifying questions.

6. **Create trusting and safe spaces— where a little bit of discomfort is okay.** Although uncomfortable, engaging in dialogue across and about our differences can accelerate progress—if done correctly. What is deemed safe may look different to an individual with a different cultural background, experiences, and expectations. Sometimes ground rules to "share freely" can mislead individuals to think their viewpoints, opinions, or perspectives will not be challenged. Researchers found that, in practice, sharing examples about safety may inadvertently resonate more with dominant group members than with others. Authentic communication should be framed as a strength, rather than a challenge. At the same time, we must set clear expectations that some discomfort is part of the process. For example:

• Among colleagues: "To be more effective, I would like our team to move beyond only talking about project goals. I am taking a risk in saying this, but we have some differences that I'd like to understand. It's not going to be easy. But I want to learn…"
• In a one-on-one conversation: "Let's each share our perspective, where we are coming from, and how our personal backgrounds and life experiences shape the way we view this work. We may not always agree, but I want us to understand each other."

Modified from:
http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/engaging_in_conversations_about_gender_race_and_ethnicity_in_the_workplace.pdf

Additional resources:

https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/difficult-dialogues/

https://commons.georgetown.edu/teaching/teach/discussions/

https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/managing-hot-moments-classroom