



Moving from Bystander to Upstander

COMPANION LEARNING GUIDE



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CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT:

Managing Divisiveness in the Workplace



BURST VIDEO: Bridging: Towards a Society Built on Belonging

Narrated by Director John A. Powell,
Othering and Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley

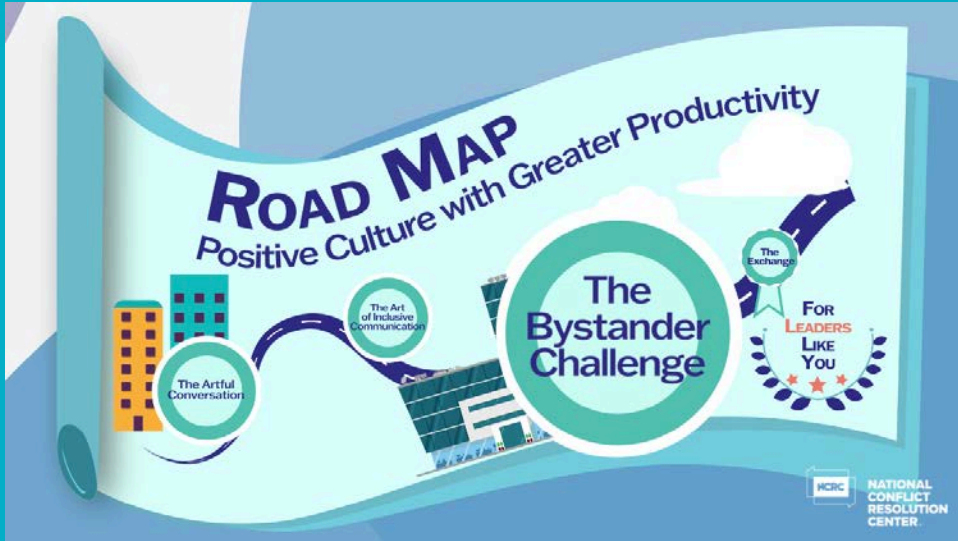
REFLECT:

What stood out for you in the video?

JOURNAL: *Consider how you have reacted to “the great change” around us. Journal about how you have managed the natural anxiety you have experienced.*

DIALOGUE WITH A TRUSTED COLLEAGUE:
How do we, as workplace leaders, help create an environment that is one of bridging rather than breaking, particularly around political issues and other divisive topics?

Overview of the Series



We will do all we can to create a psychologically safe space for you so that you can comfortably share your experiences and perspective.

We also ask that you consider the work of Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University in taking the approach of a growth mindset as you participate in the sessions. While each of you is an expert, there is always more to learn!

There will be a series of four sessions

1. **The ARTful Conversation:** You'll learn how to effectively handle challenging one-on-one conversations. This foundational course lays the groundwork for all subsequent sessions.
2. **The Art of Inclusive Communication:** You'll explore strategies and techniques to embrace and promote inclusivity.
3. **The Bystander Challenge:** You'll learn how to empower others at your workplace to become thoughtful upstanders as one part of creating a sense of belonging in the workplace.
4. **The Exchange:** You'll learn a conflict resolution process that helps you lead a problem-solving conversation focused on collaboration and future success.

Learning Outcomes



The **Bystander Challenge** continues our exploration of the leader's role in creating inclusive teams. We recognize the pioneering work of the **Othering and Belonging Institute (OBI) at UC Berkeley** and draw on some of the work being done there. OBI explores these complex topics in a wide range of arenas. Here is a **simple and concise article on the topic of othering** that serves as a good introduction.

During this workshop, we will look briefly at the overarching concepts and will then focus on **how workplace leaders have the power to co-create a sense of belonging with their teams.**

Helping yourself and your employees overcome the understandable concerns when faced with situations in which disrespectful behavior has occurred in the workplace is the first step in creating a sense of belonging for employees. By raising **awareness of the experience of others who are targeted and promoting upstander actions** that can be effective in the situation, each of us can make a difference in helping to create a **better environment** for all—the kind of workplace where people want to work!

California Law Regarding Political Activity



FURTHER LEARNING

The Bystander Challenge. This course does not address the legal issues, corporate policies, protected classes, or other possible ramifications of workplace harassment. However, it is important to note the California protections related to political activity.

California's laws against employer political activity or affiliation discrimination, Labor Code sections 1101 and 1102, **prohibit employers** from:

- Setting any policy that prevents employees from engaging in political activity or running for political office, or that tries to **control or direct employees' political activity**,
- **Attempting to control employees' political activities** by threatening to engage in political activity **retaliation**, or
- **Retaliating in any way** (including through wrongful termination) **against an employee** for their **political beliefs** or activities.



REFLECT

How do you create psychological safety so that people on your team have a sense of belonging and can contribute fully?

Avoiding the us/them mentality is particularly important when we look at divisive topics.

Terms that we will be using to discuss this subject include:

- **Othering:** To view or treat (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself (Oxford Dictionary).
- **Breaking:** Breaking occurs when members of a group not only turn inward toward each other but also turn against the “outsider” group (John A. Powell).
- **Bridging:** To connect with someone who’s apparently different on some important characteristic (John A. Powell).

KEY CONCEPTS IN OTHERING

- “Us vs. Them” mentality—“They” are less trustworthy and less capable than “us.”
- Seeing people only through their group or political identities without giving any thought to them as individuals.
- Negating another person’s humanity and seeing them as less worthy of dignity and respect. This is prevalent in how people with strong polarizing topics view followers of other perspectives.
- Thinking that people outside your social or political group are not as intelligent, skilled, or as special as you and your group.

OTHERING

Othering often happens in the workplace through microaggressions.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

“The everyday slights, insults, and negative verbal and nonverbal messages —whether intentional or not—that impede your ability to do your work well.”

- Melinda Epler



The complexity of the othering concept, particularly on the societal level, is beyond the scope of a two-hour workshop. We focus on the impact of othering in the work environment. **Othering has been especially prominent with the political divisiveness we are currently encountering. This has spilled over to the workplace and impacts morale and working relationships.**

The **us vs. them** mentality leads to attributing positive qualities to people who are like you and negative qualities to people who are different from you.

Negating another person’s humanity also can mean believing that people who are different from you pose a threat to you. Political hostilities negate the shared sense of connection that we have toward one another.

Othering means thinking that people outside your social group are **not as intelligent, skilled, or as special** as you and your group. Calling people of the opposite perspective “idiots” is an obvious and common example of this. We offer this brief overview of othering in preparation for our look at creating belonging in the workplace

COMMON MICROAGGRESSIONS POLARIZING TOPICS

- Questioning the intelligence or morality of someone based on who they voted for or what political party or candidate they support.
- Making assumptions about someone's beliefs based on their identity.
- Disregarding someone's input or suggestions because of their viewpoint/ political beliefs.
- Making obviously disrespectful comments, employing a condescending tone, or using dismissive or aggressive body language.



One common way that othering occurs in the workplace is when individuals commit microaggressions against their coworkers.

According to Dr. Derald Wing Sue, **microaggressions** are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their group membership, including and complicated by political party affiliation.

According to an analysis by the Pew Research Center, “Divisions between the two parties have intensified over time as **various types of identities have become ‘stacked’ on top of people’s partisan identities**. Race, religion, and ideology now align with partisan identity in ways that they often didn’t in eras when the two parties were relatively heterogenous coalitions.”

These “stacked” partisan identities can lead to further political polarization and microaggressions as individuals make assumptions about and correlate multiple personal identities with political partisanship.

BREAKOUT

Practice responding respectfully. Each person will share an experience when they were “othered.”

The other person responds respectfully:

- Demonstrate Understanding
- Acknowledge Impact
- Identify Needs and Values



Breakout Discussion



BREAKOUTS

- What stood out for you in the video from the Othering and Belonging Institute?
- What are your greatest concerns/fears in helping employees bridge despite their differences on hot topics?

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT:

Bridging: Towards a Society Built on Belonging

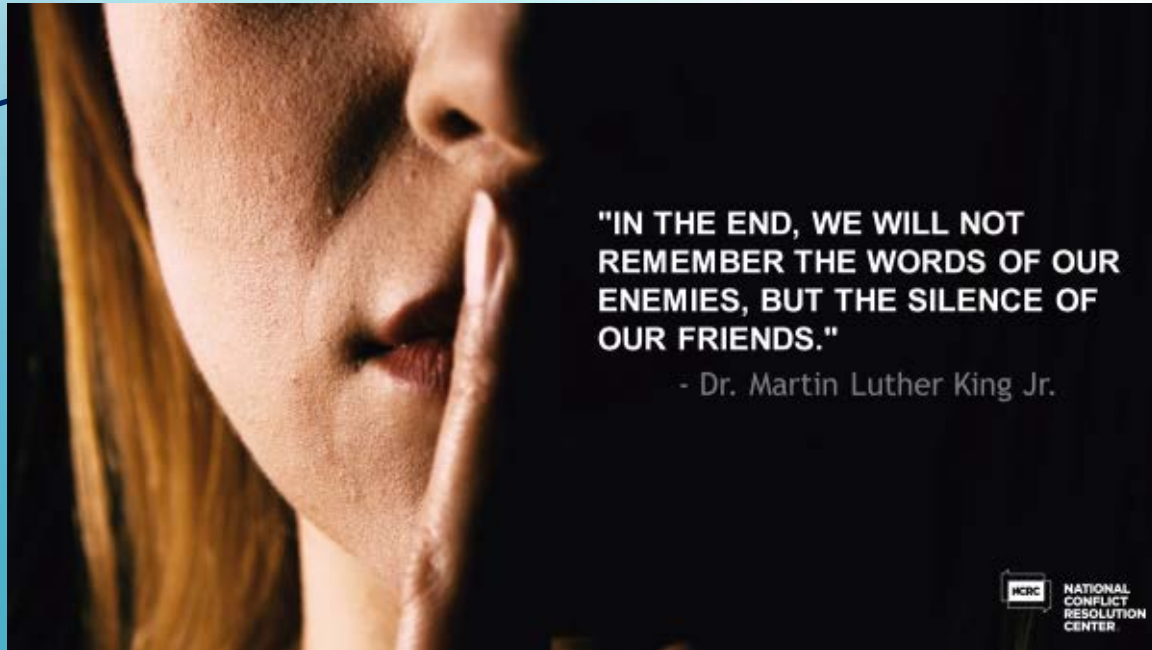
Narrated by Director John A. Powell | Othering and Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley

Of all the forces shaping politics and power around the world, perhaps none is more important than our sense of who we are, and who we are becoming. We are in a period of accelerated change in at least four areas: globalization, technology, the environment, and demographic change. We can only process so much change in a short period of time without experiencing anxiety, which is a normal biological reaction.

But how we respond to this anxiety is social. Our response is greatly shaped by the stories presented by leadership and through culture. These stories speak to our deepest values and our core beliefs about who we are—many of which operate at the subconscious level.

We can respond to these changes either as a threat or as an opportunity. The first response is breaking, the latter is bridging. Breaking can create a deep fear of other groups, making it easier to accept false stories of “us vs. them.” Breaking perpetuates isolation, hardens racism, and builds oppressive systems, while driving our politics and institutions toward anti-democratic and inhumane practices.

The other response is bridging, which calls on us to imagine a larger, more inclusive “we.” When we bridge, we see demographic change and our diverse identities as positive and enhancing who we are. Bridging calls on us to engage in healthy dialogue and requires us to listen deeply. Bridging does not mean abandoning your identity. Bridging means acknowledging our shared humanity, rejecting that there is a “them,” and moving towards a future where there is instead a new “us.” For when we bridge, we not only open up to others, we also open up to change within ourselves—where we can participate in creating a society built on belonging.



When the National Conflict Resolution Center develops workshops, we research the topic, analyze effective approaches to teaching about the topic, and conduct interviews with people.

In our research to develop the NCRC Bystander Challenge, we interviewed dozens of people who had experienced being a target of microaggressions in the workplace. In these interviews, targets remembered how the encounter made them feel, but what hurt them even more than the microaggression was that their coworkers didn't speak out against the situation. A typical response was, "Where were my coworkers? How did they knowingly allow someone to treat me so badly? **Why didn't my manager intervene?**" The impact of this type of behavior and lack of support is known to cause psychological harm to the target (in addition to the person responsible and bystanders.) Conversely, those who did receive support and found allies were able to move forward more successfully from a generally traumatic event.

This quote by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. captures this unfortunate experience.

Ineffective Responses

TYPICAL INEFFECTIVE RESPONSES



Accommodate



Avoid



Attack



These ineffective responses can cause problems when the bystander is a colleague. And these responses are even more detrimental when they are done by workplace leaders. Here, the repercussions are far worse, as they send clear messages to all employees, threatening the psychological safety of everyone in the workplace.

When a leader **AVOIDS**, they send a message that this type of disrespectful communication is accepted in the work environment.

When the leader **ACCOMMODATES**, they ask that the team put up with the inappropriate behavior of the person responsible, perhaps because they are otherwise good at their job. Many leaders find it easier to simply ignore this behavior because they value the employee's other contributions and want to accept that "this is just how they are." The leader is communicating that the person responsible is more important than other team members and that the right of others to psychological safety in the workplace doesn't matter. The negative impact on morale is significant in these situations.

ATTACKING clearly sends the message that people cannot make mistakes. Further, attacking also heightens the conflict, making it harder to have a productive conversation with the person responsible.



A LEADER'S ROLE IN CREATING BELONGING

A leader's attitude profoundly impacts whether there will be a culture of othering or a culture of belonging. [Gordon Allport's 1954 research](#) that led to the "contact hypothesis" found that simply bringing different people together was not enough to improve relationships. These settings must meet several conditions to succeed, and leaders play a key role:

- Authority figures support efforts to bridge.
- The people engaging in efforts have equal status.
- The team has interdependent goals they are working toward together.

Further research by [Brewer and Gaertner \(2004\)](#) found that interactions are more effective if they occur in a natural, non-forced setting. **As a leader, do you foster belonging and celebrate differences regularly?**



Four Effective Responses



There are four effective interventions by **upstanders**. Two of these interventions are in the moment, and two are done after the situation has transpired.

Depending on the issue, the person's role and their personality, the dynamics of the group, and other factors, there will be an upstander response that can be effective for most situations. For workplace leaders, it is especially important for upstander action to occur. Download your guide [HERE](#).

REFLECT

Think about those situations in which you witnessed microaggressions but did nothing. As you learn about the four effective methods, consider which of these actions might have been effective for you in those situations.

Effective Responses in the Moment: Distraction



REFLECT

If one of your direct reports asks for approaches to be an upstander but worries about their power, how would you coach them?

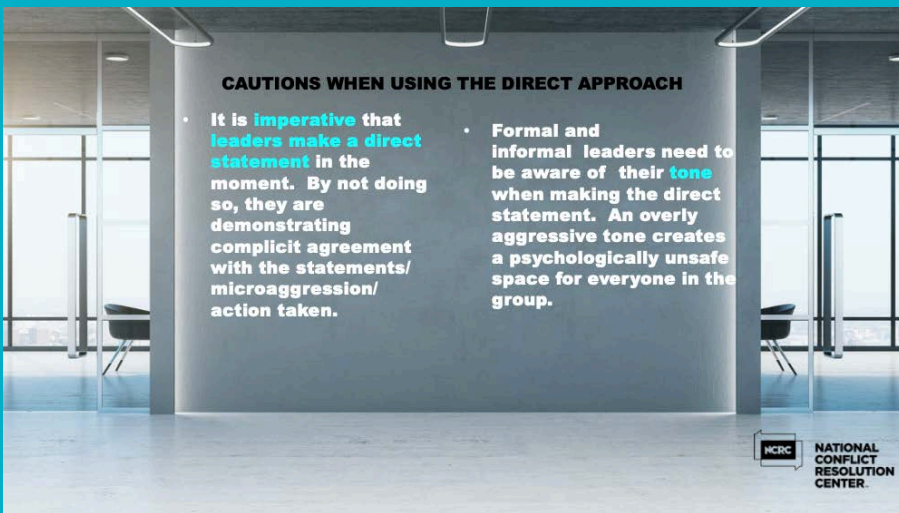
Distraction is a great tool for someone who doesn't feel safe making a direct statement. Often, they want to do something, but they don't want to be seen as a "problem" in the group. Distraction is particularly helpful for those who feel that they are a low-power individual who isn't empowered to make a direct statement. Being able to use the distraction technique might make a difference in the dynamics at the time that the microaggression occurs.

What about leaders using the **Distraction** method? Even though this approach could be an effective response for peer-to-peer interactions, it is generally seen as **an ineffective response for leaders** because, by not addressing the action directly, the leader can send the message that the behavior is acceptable.

Types of Distractions Used by Upstanders

Utilizing humor to lighten the mood. Often, self-deprecating humor is used to take the attention away from the offensive comment about the target and the microaggression that has just occurred.

Storytelling to change the focus. The upstander picks up one element of what was said to change the subject ("That reminds me of the time when I went...").



SENTENCE STARTERS

- Let's do a check-in about what just happened...
- It is important to me that we treat team members with respect, so let's talk about that comment...
- I understand that it is sometimes challenging to... Yet, everyone should know that my expectations are...

EXAMPLE

INAPPROPRIATE JOKE: I like the fact that we work on a team where we can laugh together, but we need to be sure we tell jokes that are appropriate for all. Is that clear to everyone?

It can be hard to know what to say in the moment to make a **Direct** statement. We have found that many people benefit from developing a few sentence starters. These sentence starters help them find the diplomatic response even when triggered. Refining your own to fit your personality, role, and style will help make being an upstander easier and more natural for you.

Why do we promote a diplomatic approach? Because we find that to maintain relationships, to have a greater impact, to maintain positive group dynamics, and to respect your own sense of integrity, a diplomatic approach is more successful. The person responsible is your colleague, not a stranger. You will be interacting on projects, teams, and work in the future. Burning the bridge to a decent working relationship is very costly. This is especially true for leaders.

We created [10 Tips for Managing Conflict](#) that many find useful to reflect upon and alter their thinking about conflict. One that is pertinent here is: "Ask yourself: How can I tell them what I want to tell them in a way that they can hear it?"

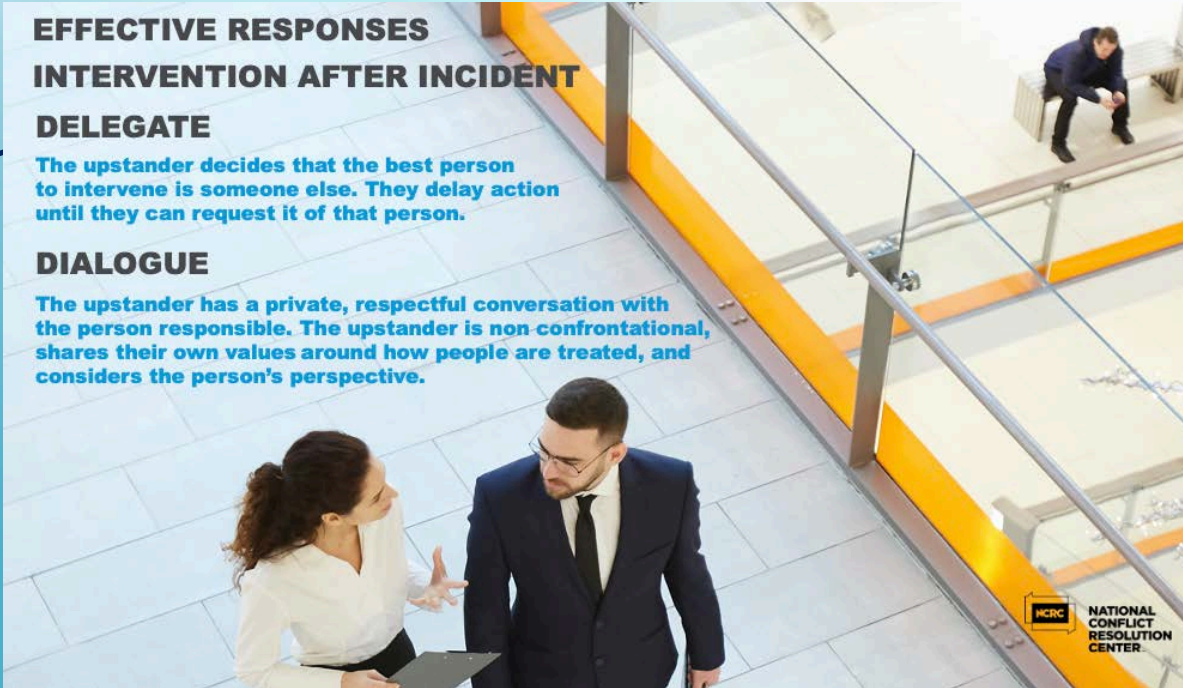
EFFECTIVE RESPONSES INTERVENTION AFTER INCIDENT

DELEGATE

The upstander decides that the best person to intervene is someone else. They delay action until they can request it of that person.

DIALOGUE

The upstander has a private, respectful conversation with the person responsible. The upstander is non-confrontational, shares their own values around how people are treated, and considers the person's perspective.



Delegation is the decision that the most appropriate person to manage the encounter is not the upstander. The upstander may decide to report the situation to human resources, or they may believe someone else in the organization is better suited to address the issue because of their power in the organization or their relationship to the person responsible. Hence, the upstander actively delegates the response to that person.

They follow up by talking about their concerns in a private conversation with HR or their colleague who has better rapport with the person responsible. When it is a colleague, the bystander may even ask how they can provide support in planning how to have the conversation. They work together to find the best approach.

If someone delegates management of such an encounter to you, they may want to know what you have done. This is tricky for workplace leaders, since some actions must remain confidential. Letting them know why you need to maintain confidentiality will build trust.

DIALOGUE WITH THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE

- ▶ Opening the Conversation
- ▶ Clarifying Your Concern
- ▶ Closing the Conversation



BREAKOUTS

Dialogue with the Person Responsible:
One person will be the manager and the
other person will play Dara.



FURTHER LEARNING

The Steps in Dialogue

We will not be covering this in class, but we will provide you with tips for dialogue in the next few pages of the companion learning guide.

There are many benefits to engaging in a private conversation. It creates space for more thoughtful dialogue between two individuals. It allows the **Person Responsible** to express their point of view in a safe way and allows the **upstander** to share their view in a nonconfrontational way.

Thoughtful preparation is worth the effort. These conversations can be challenging, so before addressing the issue, take some time to prepare your ideas and how you want to say things and consider your own emotions in the situation.

This self-care in grounding yourself before dialoguing will help you, as the upstander, remain rational and thoughtful, not take things personally, and remain focused and respectful in the conversation.

OPEN THE CONVERSATION

- ✓ Diplomatic
- ✓ Respectful
- ✓ Authentic



FURTHER LEARNING

Dialogue: Open the Conversation

How one enters a conversation about someone else's behavior makes a significant difference. If the **upstander** attacks the person responsible, the conversation will likely escalate, with the **person responsible** reacting extremely defensively. We often attack out of understandable anger, but channeling that anger often means being strategic rather than "letting it all out." As suggested earlier, we recommend a diplomatic approach in the conversation. This approach often leads to the best outcome.

As with the **direct approach**, developing some **sentence starters** helps with opening. For leaders, clarity and formality about the conversation will often be necessary.

- *I'd like to meet to talk about something tomorrow.*
- *I wanted to meet to chat about a few things...*

Once in the meeting, building rapport in an authentic way first makes a tremendous difference in creating a comfortable atmosphere. After this, phrases to begin the dialogue that don't start with an attack are helpful.

- *I wanted to talk to you about what happened yesterday.*
- *I have been noticing that ...*

A key aspect of successful communication while giving constructive feedback is the tone of our voice and our control over our body language. If our tone of voice is accusatory, aggressive, or belittling, the likelihood of the situation escalating increases. A firm yet kind voice communicates respect and a willingness to maintain a good working relationship. The other important message that is communicated is one of nonreactivity, which tends to de-escalate the situation.

CLARIFY YOUR CONCERNS

- ✓ Tell the person what is troubling you without attacking
- ✓ Use neutral language
- ✓ Identify your interests and values
- ✓ Ask questions and listen

DIALOGUE WITH THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE

- ▶ Opening the Conversation
- ▶ Clarifying Your Concern
- ▶ Closing the Conversation



FURTHER LEARNING

Dialogue: Clarify Your Concerns

After you have opened the conversation, it is important to identify the issue or situation that concerns you. It could be as simple as referring to the conversation in which the microaggression occurred.

- *“Remember during our meeting yesterday when we were talking about...?”*

In identifying the issue of concern, the approach we would recommend is to simply state the issue without assigning escalating language around it, such as “You were racist when you said...” Instead, use neutral language that simply describes what you heard and what it meant to you. “When I heard you say..., I felt uncomfortable because it could be taken...”

Another way to express your perspective in a nonconfrontational way is to identify your interests and values. If your organization or department has a clear set of values that have been promoted, leaders can use them to clarify expectations. Both neutral language and expressing your interests and values focus on what is true for you, rather than attacking the other person. Most people respond better when this approach is taken.

“I wanted to talk to you about this because one thing that is our value here is to accept everyone for who they are and show respect to them.”

Sharing your values and how those values pertain to the situation at hand can help the person responsible better understand your perspective. Though it is difficult, being willing to hear their perspective and acknowledge their point of view can and does help the person move forward.

CLARIFY YOUR CONCERNS

- ✓ Tell the person what is troubling you without attacking
- ✓ Use neutral language
- ✓ Identify your interests and values
- ✓ Ask questions and listen

FURTHER LEARNING

Dialogue: Clarify Your Concerns and Questions

Many times, when upstanders **clarify their concerns**, it is challenging for them to ask questions that come from an open perspective. When one is upset about what was witnessed, our questions often sound defensive and aggressive. These defensive questions are often used as attacks or are asked simply to prove that one is right. How a question is asked (tone of voice is not to be underestimated!) is often more important than what (content) is asked. Some types of questions are particularly effective. Others will make progress more difficult.

As much as possible, try to maintain a **curious stance** about the other person's perspective. **Humble inquiry** plays (from The ART of Inclusive Communication) can be useful to adopt here. In this way, your questions will reflect a genuine desire to gain an understanding of their perspective, rather than being a series of questions that antagonize the other person.

Open-ended questions are those that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no response—they invite the person to share more information. Some examples of open-ended questions are: *How do you see the situation? Would you tell me your point of view of what happened? What was your intention? Have you thought that perhaps your intention and the impact could be different?*

There are several advantages to open-ended questions:

- *The person responsible will probably feel more comfortable telling the story without interruptions, and this will help you to establish rapport.*
- *The person responsible will provide the context, so you will hear the story from their viewpoint rather than your own.*

DIALOGUE WITH THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE

- ▶ Opening the Conversation
- ▶ Clarifying Your Concern
- ▶ Closing the Conversation



CLOSE THE CONVERSATION

- ✓ Appeal to shared values
- ✓ Let them know what you'll do if behavior continues
- ✓ Reinforce working relationship

DIALOGUE WITH THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE

- ▶ Opening the Conversation
- ▶ Clarifying Your Concern
- ▶ Closing the Conversation



FURTHER LEARNING

Dialogue: Close the Conversation

After you have shared your perspective and heard theirs, it can be very helpful to appeal to any shared values that you have in common; for example: “We both care a lot about this company” or “I know you have a strong work ethic, just like me.”

In addition, for managers and workplace leaders, referring back to organizational or team interests again can be very helpful; for example: “Not only is fair treatment important to me for our team, but also, our company has made a commitment for ensuring psychological safety to everyone who works here.”

Sometimes the person responsible doesn't want to hear the feedback or reacts in a way that shuts out your perspective. These types of questions may help the person responsible think more deeply about the consequences of their behavior.

- *Have you thought about the impact of these statements on others?*
- *What if someone said that to you?*
- *How do you think our manager might see this situation?*
- *What do you think will happen if the situation doesn't change?*

Leaders looking for ways to improve the behavior may want to assess the situation on several levels, including what would be in their interests, what meets the needs of the other employees, and what would meet the needs of the department and/or company.

Lastly, reinforcing the working relationship helps reset the parameters of working together and helps build toward a positive future working together.



FURTHER LEARNING

We encourage you to practice dialogue to gain confidence. Rather than seeing it as a confrontation to call someone out, you will begin to see it as an opportunity to share your perspective, values, and empathy for others. You can “call in” the person responsible. In social justice circles, ***calling in*** refers to **“the act of checking your peers and getting them to change problematic behavior by explaining their misstep with compassion and patience.”** (dictionary.com)

So, utilize this practice to gently discuss your concerns with the person responsible. Absorb some of the natural defensiveness, then reinforce your point of view. This is not a battle to be won; it is about being true to your concerns, hearing the person responsible out, and reestablishing rapport.

We cannot guarantee that it will turn out exactly how you want each time, but we can assure you that this approach has been effective for many upstanders. As a workplace leader, at some point you may find that the pattern of behavior by the person responsible is something that is not tolerable or fair to others in the workplace, but many times, this early intervention and reinforcement of workplace values and expectations help you create the kind of workplace that people want to work in, and a culture of respect is established.

The Role of Leaders

Bridging to Create Belonging in the Workplace



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CREATING BELONGING IN THE WORKPLACE

Workplace leaders today have an unparalleled opportunity to foster an environment of belonging, despite political and other divisions.

"People will typically be more enthusiastic where they feel a sense of belonging and see themselves as part of a community than they will in a workplace in which each person is left to his own devices."

- Alfie Kohn, American Education and Parenting Expert



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The othering around divisive issues that occurs in our communities, including our workplaces, is impacting morale, group cohesion, and our sense of shared purpose.

Arthur Brooks has thought a lot about bridging between political parties. In his article ["Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America From the Culture of Contempt,"](#) NCRC President Steven P. Dinkin considers lessons learned from Dr. Brooks about how "we must learn to disagree better."

As a workplace leader, you may need to turn off (or turn down) the "outrage industrial complex" in your workplace. You may need to "upstand" with your colleagues to address the eye-rolling, sarcasm, and insults (all potential microaggressions) that are raising the temperature of the discourse.

Your team's productivity depends in part on the extent to which you can stop othering and create belonging.

BREAKOUT

BREAKOUTS

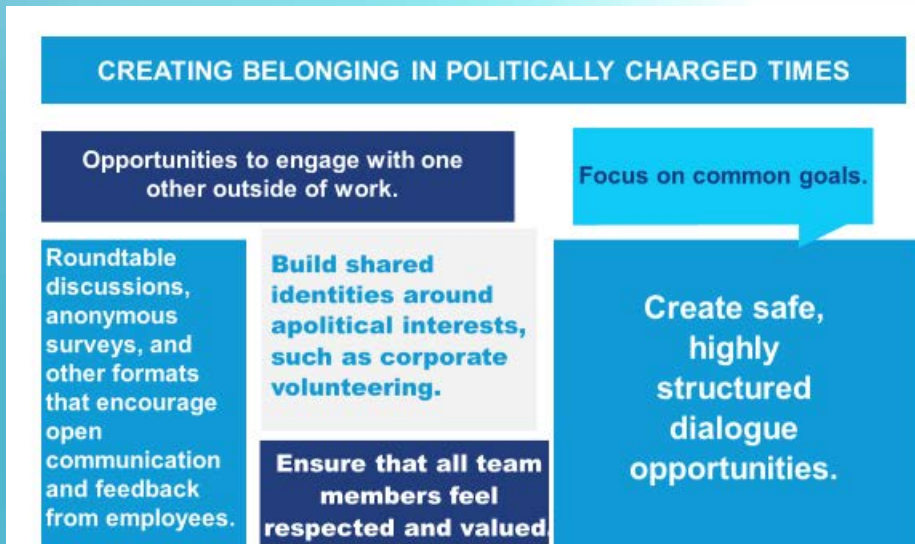
- **Share specific ways that you have created a sense of belonging at work. What are additional actions you can take?**



This will be an opportunity to think together about your efforts to build belonging and respect in your workplace.

FURTHER LEARNING

Benefits of creating a sense of belonging in the workplace



There are several ways you can **build bridges** to **create belonging** in your team:

- **Create opportunities to interact** with one another outside of a work context—Eating lunch together or social events after work.
- **Develop common goals**—Shared project objectives, quarterly targets, and annual goals.
- **Build collective identities** independent of political interests—Corporate volunteering programs.
- **Listen to your employees** to gain a deeper understanding of where they come from, their interests, and, importantly, their values—Roundtable discussions, anonymous surveys (For more, consider this article from the [Harvard Business Review](#).)
- **Host safe, structured dialogues** for employees to engage with one another, share their perspectives, and build mutual understanding. NCRC can help you to facilitate such dialogue encounters. (For more, consider "[Healing the Political Divide](#).")
- On a personal level, Peter Coleman suggests that you “seek out three respected thinkers who are on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum... follow them on Twitter or Facebook. Make a point of interacting with people whose lives and backgrounds are very different from your own.”

Conclusion



Thank you for your participation in The Bystander Challenge. We look forward to seeing you in The Exchange.



Empowering People. Transforming Cultures.