Sometimes, you may do things that are divisive, dismissive, or demoralizing without even realizing it. Though your intent may be positive, the outcome of your words and actions may be harmful. But by intentionally leading inward in these situations, you can harness your ability to act courageously, learn, and reflect.¹ Choose your words thoughtfully to build an inclusive work culture in which people are heard, valued, and connected—because change starts with you.²

**FLIP the script**

**LEAD INWARD TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE**

**CURIOSITY**

You proactively seek to understand different points of view.

**NOT CURIOUS**

**WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO**

“I DON’T HAVE TIME FOR THIS.”

**HOW IT’S NOT CURIOUS**

A lack of curiosity about issues team members raise is dismissive and can diminish trust with colleagues.³ While it may be understandable that now isn’t the best time, be sure to make time in the near future.

**WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD**

“I appreciate your raising this concern/issue/idea and, while we have priorities we are managing, I want to learn more. Let’s set up a time to discuss and assess how they may affect our priorities and deliverables.”

Authentically seek to understand other people’s views, either in the moment or later.

**WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO**

“ARE WE REALLY STILL TALKING ABOUT THIS? WHY CAN’T YOU JUST LET IT GO?”

**HOW IT’S NOT CURIOUS**

This sentiment is demoralizing and shuts down your ability to learn. When people express what appear like similar ideas, concerns, or questions multiple times, it suggests that they didn’t feel fully heard or understood, or that their concerns were not truly addressed.

**WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD**

“I seem to be missing something. Help me understand why this is important to you. How is it important to our company?”

Be curious by exploring the opinions and ideas of your team members.⁴ There is always something to learn.
HUMILITY
You take ownership for mistakes and learn from missteps.

NOT HUMBLE
HOW IT’S NOT HUMBLE
When something doesn’t go the way you expect it to, it’s important to own up to it and demonstrate how you’ve learned from the experience. This isn’t about assigning blame but about recognizing your own room for growth as a member of the team.

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“Here is where I made a misstep: ___. Here is what I learned: ___. This is what I can do to help the team next time: ____.”

Take action with three steps: 1. Identify what went wrong, 2. Share what you learned, and 3. Discuss what you’ll do differently next time.

WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO
“OH WELL, NOBODY’S PERFECT!”

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“Here is where I made a misstep: ___. Here is what I learned: ___. This is what I can do to help the team next time: ____.”

WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO
“I/MY”

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“Our team.”

Use “I” and “my” sparingly to foster an empowering environment, and be intentional when you do.

WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO
“I WORKED HARD TO GET WHERE I AM—THEREFORE, I AM NOT PRIVILEGED.”

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“While my background may be complicated, it is my responsibility as a leader to acknowledge and recognize the systematic ways in which I may have benefited.”

WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO
“Here is where I made a misstep: ___. Here is what I learned: ___. This is what I can do to help the team next time: ____.”

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“Here is where I made a misstep: ___. Here is what I learned: ___. This is what I can do to help the team next time: ____.”

HOW IT’S NOT HUMBLE
Using I/my is one way to stand up for what you believe in and show personal accountability. But often it is also used to claim credit for something that was achieved collaboratively or assert power.

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“Our team.”

Use “I” and “my” sparingly to foster an empowering environment, and be intentional when you do.

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WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“While my background may be complicated, it is my responsibility as a leader to acknowledge and recognize the systematic ways in which I may have benefited.”

HOW IT’S NOT HUMBLE
Working hard doesn’t mean you don’t have privilege too. It is possible—in fact, likely—that you worked hard to get where you are and that you have benefited from some systemic advantages.

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“While my background may be complicated, it is my responsibility as a leader to acknowledge and recognize the systematic ways in which I may have benefited.”

Be open to learning about other people’s experiences without getting defensive about your own.
COURAGE
You act in accordance with your principles, even when doing so involves personal risk-taking or is uncomfortable.

LACKING COURAGE
WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO
NOTHING. [AND SIT IN SILENCE.]

HOW IT'S NOT COURAGEOUS
Silence supports the status quo by allowing bad behavior to go unchecked. It implies agreement with what just happened and allows issues to fester.

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“I’m tempted to stay quiet, but I wouldn’t want my silence to be mistaken for agreement. Although it is hard, I need to speak up.”

Have the courage of your convictions and speak up when you witness injustice, bias, and bad behavior.

WHAT PEOPLE THINK, SAY, OR DO
“I HEAR YOU, BUT NOTHING IS GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”

HOW IT'S NOT COURAGEOUS
Assuming that change is not possible is demoralizing and tells others that speaking up for inclusion is futile. If you don’t use your own voice to speak truth to power, how will others learn to use theirs?

WHAT TO THINK, SAY, OR DO INSTEAD
“I find this situation difficult as well. What are some of the unspoken issues? Let’s work together to see if we can come up with some new, creative ideas that might have an impact.”

Be willing to challenge a situation even when you are disheartened or think that your efforts will go unrewarded.

SELF-REFLECT
Recognize that change starts with you. Leading inward is a journey of humility that involves discovering how you can think, say, or do things differently to cultivate inclusion.

LEARN
Create space for dialogue with colleagues through your words and actions. Purposefully look for different ways to connect and build trust. Rethink the “I tried once, and it did not work…” mindset.

BE COURAGEOUS
Pinpoint small and big actions you can take to make your workplace more inclusive. Don’t be afraid to make waves if a situation needs to be called out.

2. Catalyst, *Engaging in Conversations About Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace* (October 4, 2016); Catalyst, *Conversation Ground Rules* (October 17, 2016).


