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 outward in these situations, you can better connect with team members, treat them fairly, and enable them to flourish. Choose your words thoughtfully to build an inclusive work culture in which people are heard, valued, and connected—because change starts with you.

### Lead Outward to Create an Inclusive Workplace

#### Accountability
You hold team members responsible for their behavior, development, and work processes.

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#### What People Think, Say, or Do

**“They should already know this.”**

**How It’s Not Accountable**
People’s different interpretations of situations and differing learning styles can get in the way of what you think someone should know. Ban the word “should,” and suspend your judgments.

**What to Think, Say, or Do Instead**
“I think we may be seeing things differently. I’d like to talk about what happened and get your thoughts on how we can handle this next time.”

#### Explicitly discuss expectations, missteps, and what can be done to improve things in the future.

**“If they don’t care to hear my feedback, I simply won’t give any.”**

**How It’s Not Accountable**
Don’t assume people don’t care. When you withhold constructive feedback, people cannot learn from mistakes and be accountable for achieving goals.

**What to Think, Say, or Do Instead**
“I care about your success. May I offer some feedback to help you achieve your goals? Some of it may be tough for me to say, and I appreciate it may be tough for you to hear.”

Check your biases when you give feedback to make sure everyone gets the same depth of constructive and corrective feedback.
Employees need to feel their voices are heard, even if their ideas are not ultimately enacted. Don’t dismiss employees’ ideas or solutions as unimportant or valueless because you think they are not aligned with your priorities or are self-promoting.

Show authentic appreciation and ask supportive questions to help team members have ownership of their roles.

Help employees to take ownership by defining your expectations and outlining ways to approach and communicate missteps.
**NOT ALLYSHIP**

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

“NEVER MIND; I’LL JUST DO IT.”

**HOW IT LACKS OWNERSHIP**

This conveys that you don’t value your employee’s contributions or believe in their ability to deliver, which can be demoralizing.

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

“What do you need to successfully deliver this on time? How do you best like to receive feedback? What do you think is working well here, and what do you need help with?”

**NOT ALLYSHIP**

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

“I HAD A WOMAN MANAGER WHO WAS GREAT.”

**HOW IT’S NOT ALLYSHIP**

“Think leader, think male” stereotypes are still pervasive. Specifying or qualifying a manager as a woman reinforces this bias.

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

“I am grateful to have had opportunities to work with people who don’t look like me, but I can do more to support those in non-dominant groups.”

**NOT ALLYSHIP**

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

“I DON’T HAVE A RACIST BONE IN MY BODY.”

**HOW IT’S NOT ALLYSHIP**

This denial shuts down candid conversation and says that you are unwilling to explore your potential blind spots. It also ignores the ways that unconscious bias affects us all, regardless of intent.

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

“I strive to be inclusive and unbiased, but as a human I have blind spots. I welcome feedback about the things I may not see about myself and others so I can continue learning.”

**ALLYSHIP**

You actively support people from underrepresented groups.

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

“Think leader, think male” stereotypes are still pervasive. Specifying or qualifying a manager as a woman reinforces this bias.

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

“I am grateful to have had opportunities to work with people who don’t look like me, but I can do more to support those in non-dominant groups.”

Practice allyship by learning more about gender stereotypes that confine our options for “acceptable” behavior.

Be open to hearing how your words or ideas might be hurtful in ways you didn’t intend.
What People Think, Say, or Do

“THAT CANDIDATE IS NOT THE RIGHT ‘FIT.’”

People tend to like others who are familiar and similar to themselves, and we often define those who “fit” as those who reflect our own image. In addition, the unconscious association of leadership behaviors with characteristics attributed to men can make it harder for others to be seen as “fitting” and block their access to opportunities.

What to Think, Say, or Do Instead

“Although this person doesn’t fit the mold of what I am used to, let’s talk about how we could leverage their differences as an added value to our team.”

Participate in unconscious bias training for yourself and your team.

Own Your Influence

Acknowledge that as a leader, you are a role model. Create constructive processes to hold employees accountable, guide them in making their own decisions, and support their success equitably.

Own Your Impact

Hold yourself accountable for the impact of your attitudes, thoughts, and actions. When you make missteps, apologize and let team members know how you will act differently next time.

Trust Your Team

Involve employees in decision-making to enable them to feel influential in their roles. Displaying trust in this way is a hallmark of inclusion, which can foster engagement.

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


