

Introduction:

Organizations do not exist within a vacuum. A polarizing social and political climate, coupled with global, traumatic events that directly and indirectly impact employees, have created an imperative for organizational leaders to create internal spaces for Bold, Inclusive Conversations®. As leaders take strides towards organizational cultures that encourage employees to bring their whole selves to work, they will need to ensure they are fostering the skills and competencies conducive to creating these environments. This guide provides an overview of how individuals can begin to engage in Bold, Inclusive Conversations® around polarizing topics.

1. Pre-Requisite: Focus on Self and ‘Other’ Understanding

The ability to engage in Bold, Inclusive Conversations™ is a journey that requires fostering cultural self-understanding, addressing our biases, and understanding the role of power and privilege.

Consider:

- Who am I culturally? Where did I grow up? What was the culture of my community? What did I learn about right/wrong or good/bad?
 - What are my values and beliefs, and how have they changed over time?
- What is my cultural identity? (e.g. race/ethnicity, generation, religion, education, socio-economic status)
 - How does my cultural identity shape who I am and how I think?
- What is my orientation towards difference?
 - “Us/Them:” People are different, but I think my cultural group’s norms are better.
 - “Color-Blind:” We are all the same as humans. We are more alike than different.
 - “Differences Make a Difference:” Differences are normal, inevitable, and something to learn about.

Ask Yourself:

- What is the history of the other group—from their perspective?
- What do I know about the values and beliefs of other groups, and how they were shaped?
- Do I understand power & privilege?
 - Do I belong to cultural identity groups that have traditionally held power/privilege or been historically marginalized?
- What are the underlying systems that impact outcomes for the group(s)?
 - Challenge inclinations or biases that position inequities as the result of ‘cultural flaws’ of the group. Dig deeper.
- What do I know in general about cultural differences?
 - Consider differences that may exist in communication styles, cultural norms, individualistic vs. group-oriented cultures, etc.

2. Assess Readiness: The Winters Group Readiness Assessment

	A Great Deal	Somewhat	Not at all
1. I am culturally self-aware.			
2. I have explored my unconscious biases.			
3. I am comfortable talking about difficult subjects.			
4. I believe that treating everyone the same is not the solution to polarization.			
5. I have studied my own and other culture’s norms and beliefs.			
6. I have a high degree of emotional intelligence.			
7. I readily acknowledge that I don’t know what I don’t know.			
8. I recognize that there are differences that make a difference and I try not to minimize them.			
9. I have regular exposure to difference.			
10. I have meaningful relationships with diverse individuals and groups.			
11. I can separate the person from their position.			
12. My organizational culture is ready to have bold, inclusive conversations.			
13. There is a high level of trust in the organization.			
14. There is a high level of trust within my team.			
15. I am aware of my power and privilege.			
16. I already have a lot of experience with bold, inclusive conversations.			

3. Prepare & Plan for the Conversation – Why? Who? What? How? Where? When?

<p>Why are we having this conversation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What is the main reason for this conversation? <input type="checkbox"/> Why is this important to do? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there shared understanding of the purpose? 	<p>Who should be part of the dialogue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Who will facilitate? <input type="checkbox"/> Who from within the organization will be part of the conversation? 	<p>What is the desired outcome?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What do we want to achieve during this dialogue? <input type="checkbox"/> What will be the next steps?
<p>How should the conversation be conducted?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What are the pros and cons of a virtual or in-person conversation? 	<p>Where should the conversation be held?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> In or outside the office? <input type="checkbox"/> Room size? <input type="checkbox"/> Room configuration? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the space accessible? <input type="checkbox"/> Any environmental concerns? 	<p>When will the conversation take place?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> During or after work hours?

4. Engaging in Bold, Inclusive Conversations® – Guidance

- Create a *Brave Zone*
 - o Give permission to say things that may be courageous, taboo
- Agree on confidentiality parameters
- Listen for understanding
 - o Make mental notes of disagreement. Resist the urge to interrupt.
 - o Only ask clarifying questions: *Could you tell me more about that? I did not understand your last point—could you elaborate?*
- Expect non-closure
- Reflect & Learn after the first meeting
- Cut each other some slack & assume positive intent
- Identify commonalities & shared meaning
 - o *We all want to be safe.*
 - o *Stress can impact employee engagement and productivity.*
 - o *We want everyone to feel included.*
- Give time for reflection before exploring differences
- Practice empathy

Acknowledging Behaviors for Bold, Inclusive Conversations®

- **Acknowledging:** You don't know everything; there is always something to learn.
- **Legitimizing:** Other perspectives are just as valid as yours and should be listened to for understanding, not necessarily agreement.
- **Listening:** Listen to understand. Listen for your own cultural assumptions, perceptions and expectations.
- **Reflecting:** Spend more time reflecting on your own values and beliefs.
- **Describing:** Learn to describe the behavior before providing your interpretation and expand the number of interpretations you consider.

- **Contextualizing:** Consider the circumstances, conditions and history of the topic for which you are having a Bold, Inclusive Conversation™.
- **Pausing:** Take a deep breath. Think about what you are going to say. Pause to be more patient as well. Be patient with mistakes.
- **Accepting:** Accepting does not mean agreeing. You are accepting that there are myriad worldviews and it is important to learn more about them.
- **Questioning:** Be curious, not judgmental about differences.

- **Respecting:** Respect the dignity of every person even when you don't agree with them.
- **Apologizing:** If you say something that offends someone else, genuinely apologize.
- **Connecting:** Making meaningful connections across difference is one sure way of breaking down barriers and enhancing our capacity for empathy and shared understanding.
- **Empathizing:** Sympathy leads to patronization and pity. Empathy allows you to see the situation from the perspective of the other person.