

12 Essential Behaviors for Leaders Wanting to Bridge the Divide

The world would be a very boring place if we all agreed with each other. From a business perspective, innovation happens when people have the ability to bring their full selves to work, applying the whole spectrum of approaches and thinking to the problems at hand.

Becoming a more inclusive leader is not a destination. It's a never-ending journey, a process. It is more about BEING as a form of DOING. There is no specific "recipe" for how a leader can effectively engage colleagues across the political divide—or any divide for that matter. There are, however, a number of behavioral self-reminders to keep top of mind so you can "be the change you wish to see on your team and/or in your organization."

The 12 behaviors listed below are developmental, meaning what you need to focus on over time to continue to affect change and to model engagement. When sharing our personal experiences, we engage with people at the heart level and begin to see our connectedness as humans.

BEING AN AGENT OF CHANGE

(1) I recognize that when I commit to being a change agent, I am going to change, too.

COURAGE

(2) I consistently speak my truth in a way that acknowledges it as MY TRUTH, not THE truth.

(3) I show vulnerability that creates openness and authentic connection with others.

(4) I lean into any discomfort (mine or others) as a way to deepen my learning and understanding.

LISTENING

(5) I attempt to fully hear and accept/validate others' viewpoints, especially when they are different from my own.

(6) I notice and interrupt my own reflex to debate, tune-out or misinterpret another's behavior while in conversation.

(7) I recognize when I am just observing behavior and when I am attributing to another my own interpretation of their behavior.

SEEING AND THINKING SYSTEMICALLY

(8) I understand I am part of many different social identity groups and that this affects both my experience of the world and how others see me.

(9) I learn to better understand my own privilege/systemic advantage and the way it affects how I hear others and how they hear me. I don't get stuck when issues of shame or guilt arise. Instead, I take responsibility for making a difference now.

BALANCING KEY PARADOXES

(10) I consistently lead by using an “and/both” mindset that allows for multiple viewpoints or options. This is different from seeing most choices as “either/or.”

(11) I resist the urge to oversimplify situations. I work through complexity with an open mind.

(12) I remain curious by asking open-ended questions to both myself and others—to discover new perspectives that challenge my thinking.