

Personal Things to Do to Bridge “The Divide”

There are many ways to practice bridging the “divide.”

It all starts with you making it a priority for yourself—something that is important for you to work on. Learn to see your work as developmental. See it as a never-ending journey rather than a finite pass/fail checklist of “tasks to do.” Expect to disappoint (yourself and others) and make mistakes along the journey. Plan for this.

There are an infinite number of other “things you might do,” limited only by your ability to think of them. Be creative. Ask others. Experiment. If not sure where to start for yourself, try the following four. Enjoy your journey.

1. **Track your own partnership journey over time.** Keep a journal of your own perspective, what you believe and the interactions you have. The interactions could be one way—your response to a program on TV, a conversation with a loved one or colleague or witnessing interactions in a group meeting.

Notice shifts over time in your thinking. Note when in conversation you are triggered and what is triggering you. Be able to articulate to yourself the patterns and trends in how you and others feel seen and heard (to contribute to a sense of belonging). What do others do to help you/others feel heard, seen? What do others do that has the opposite effect—someone feeling ignored, unseen, unheard?

Use this data to explore your own skills to engage those who you normally disagree with, judge and move on. Practice the new skills to learn to better listen to understand, without feeling you also need to agree.

2. **Practice claiming your beliefs/mindset as your own.** Notice when others state their beliefs as irrefutable facts. Notice how that impacts you and others who share a different reality. Learn to practice speaking your truth and then asking others to share with you theirs.
3. **Explore your relationship with your own discomfort and confusion.** Learn to better embrace your own discomfort. Ask yourself: What is underneath my discomfort or confusion? What is really going on for me? Then address that.

Start by naming what you are feeling as you notice it. Just name it so you are able to live more often in the present, noticing your feelings and naming them. Learn to more quickly and easily see any discomfort or confusion as an invitation to explore your curiosity.

4. **In a conversation, track how many exchanges are open ended questions and how many are declarative statements.** Notice when the conversation is a connective one versus a confrontational/positional one. What's the difference? Notice the nuance of how others inquire and ask open ended questions of others. From all this, learn to be more genuinely curious of others, particularly when their position or beliefs are so different from your own. Growing your "inquisitive muscle" is an important part of healthy partnerships across difference.