

sons I noted above, the experiencers of my microaggressions didn't speak up. So what can we do? How can we stop something that we don't even know we are doing?

For starters, we can become more aware of microaggressions and their impact. So, take a moment. Yes, right now, take this moment. Ask yourself 1) If you have ever made a statement that could have been viewed as a microaggression and 2) if you have ever experienced microaggressions. If you have, take a moment to recognize how that feels. Bringing awareness is the first step. Now that we know better, how can we do better? The answer isn't to dissect every word that comes out of our mouths—that would be exhausting. But, we can take action to bring awareness and create an environment that encourages open dialogue. Here are a few things you can do to get the ball rolling:

► **Educate yourself:** Learn about the different forms of microaggressions and the impact they can have; this can help you to recognize when they occur and understand the reasons why they are harmful. As a business, consider having a speaker educate your team on microaggressions.

► **Encourage others to speak up/be open to feedback:** This can be as simple as letting people know you are open to it. If you have a situation in which you might have experienced microaggressions, share the experience and let others know that you wouldn't want to inadvertently display this behavior. Let people know that informing you of instances of microaggressions would be welcomed.

► **Listen actively:** When someone tells you about a microaggression they have experienced, listen actively and try to understand their perspective. Avoid being defensive or dismissive, and instead show empathy and support.

► **Be aware of your own biases:** We all have unconscious biases, and these can influence our actions and words. Be mindful of your own biases and try to challenge them when they surface.

► **Practice self-reflection:** Take the time to reflect on your own actions and words, and consider how they might be perceived by others. Reflect on any instances of microaggressions you may have committed and think about how to avoid similar situations in the future.

► **Avoid priming for silence:** For anyone compelled to start a conversation with, "Can I be honest with you?" or "I hope you don't get offended," think about why you feel the need to make those statements. It's likely that your next statement will be diminishing or offensive. Think about what you are about to say and ask yourself 1) Why do I feel the need to open with these qualifying statements?; 2) Do I really need to say what comes next? Does it serve a purpose?; and 3) Is there a better way to approach it?

► **Know your audience:** For the joke makers, consider how well you really know the person. Do you think that if the person had insecurities, they would share them with you? Have they shared any with you before? If the answer is no, then ask yourself, "If I had a real insecurity about ___ (e.g. my age, my skills, my gender, working hard), how would this statement come across?" As a leader, consider if there are ways to bring ease and comfort and build community and connection without potential for harm. Vulnerability is often a great equalizer and can help leaders connect more than a joke at another's expense.

It's important to recognize that microaggressions can have a profound impact on the mental health and well-being of those who experience them. It's crucial that we all strive to be more aware of the ways in which our words and actions may be perceived by others, and work to create a more inclusive and respectful environment for all. It surely will not change overnight but if we can shine a light on it, if we can raise awareness in ourselves and others, if we can empower people to speak up, if we take the time to self-reflect, we can slowly change ourselves and by so doing, change our culture. ■



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