PERSPECTIVES

Special Edition

August 2022

PHRA

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PERSPECTIVES

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PHRA President's Message
Lenore Seifer, SHRM-SCP, PHRA President

Dear Members,

During the month of August, the PHRA focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB). While this is an area of importance and focus throughout the organization year-round, we give a special and additional focus to it during the month of August. This is an area where we can and should continue to grow in understanding and knowledge, while also helping to ensure that real and meaningful actions are occurring.

Where are you in and around DEIB?

- Are you getting started with DEIB in your workplace?
- Are you a well-versed DEIB expert?
- Or are you somewhere in between the two?

Regardless of where you are in the journey, please join us for one (or more) of the programs below so that we can all advance our knowledge while also learn from each other. The learning opportunities available this month include the following – which ones will you join us for?

PHRA's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Programming

August 3 | **Network & Learn**
PHRA's Book Club! - Subtle Acts of Exclusion: How to Understand, Identify, and Stop Microaggressions

August 9 | **Network & Learn**
Psychological Safety at Work

August 16 | **Network & Learn**
Inclusive Recruitment and Onboarding

August 23 | **Network & Learn**
Vibrant Index: Promising Practices & Measuring What Matters

August 25 | **Network & Learn**
Using Analytics to Create an Inclusive Culture

In addition to the learning opportunities, I hope you enjoy this special edition of Perspectives which will provide you content to help you confidently meet the challenges we encounter in the workplace. PHRA's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging month is dedicated to respect all members of our community and encourage and empower PHRA members to live a life that fully embraces a commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

Lenore Seifer, SHRM-SCP
2022 PHRA President
S.R. Snodgrass, P.C.

We want to include your stories on the impact of bias and what you did to reduce its effects in your workplace in Lorne Epstein's, 2022 Bias Report. Once Lorne has reviewed the survey data, he will set up a website so you can vote on solutions to pick those that are effective.

The purpose of the survey is to share success stories on how people are reducing bias and learning about its impact in your workplace. Once the survey is complete, you will be invited to vote on the best ideas. Here is the survey link.

Ageism Never Gets Old: Tackling Age Bias In A Post-COVID Labor Force

By James E. Taylor, Ph.D., Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer and Chief Talent Management Officer, UPMC

When you hear about age discrimination, it usually pertains to an older job candidate not being selected due to their age. The truth is, ageism can potentially affect all ages and points in an employee's life cycle. As I write this article, I'm reminded that I'm now older than the average employee age in my organization. As I get closer to being in the "older workers" category, this topic hits home for me and my generation, but also, I realize just how much stereotypes on age affect our daily lives. While the law prohibits discrimination in any aspect of employment — "hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, benefits, and any other term or condition of employment," ageism undoubtedly still occurs.

Over the past several years there has been public light shed on younger generations increasingly experiencing discrimination in the workforce, oftentimes in subtle ways. Being told you're "too young" for a promotion or "experience needs to come in the form of years on the job" occurs far too often. At the other end of the spectrum, older generations are depicted as "scared" of new technology or are "counting down the days to retirement." These are just a few of the harmful myths that plague the workforce, as I'm sure we've all heard at least one of these so casually mentioned before. As the job market continues to stumble back post-COVID, tackling ageism is a must.

What Is Ageism?

Ageism, a term coined in 1969, was first described as "prejudicial attitudes towards older people, old age, and the aging process." Today, ageism is known as discrimination or prejudice based on someone's age — young or old. This updated understanding shows how ageism affects everyone — as long as stereotypes around age exist.

While the law is still directed towards protecting older generations with the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) forbidding age discrimination against people who are age 40 or older, some states, like New Jersey, protect workers age 18 and older from being discriminated against for being considered too young.

Ageism Affects More Than Just Hiring

While hiring decisions is often where most perceive ageism primarily occurs — this article from NY Times suggests that only a handful of lawsuits concerning age discrimination are reported during the hiring process. Consider, for example, that Millennials are citing instances of age discrimination beyond hiring, and at higher rates than those older than them, according to NY Post. In fact, more than half — 52%— of American workers aged 18 to 34 say they have witnessed or experienced ageism in their jobs, according to Glassdoor's 2019 Diversity and Inclusion Survey. That's compared to 39% of workers 55 and older who say the same in an online survey of more than 1,100 American workers.

To put things into perspective, for the first time in our history, there are five generations in the workplace. According to Pew Research, the generations are:

Ageism Never Gets Old: Tackling Age Bias In A Post-COVID Labor Force (cont.)

By James E. Taylor, Ph.D., Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer and Chief Talent Management Officer, UPMC

- Traditionalists—born 1928 to 1945
- Baby Boomers—born 1946 to 1964
- Generation X—born 1965 to 1980
- Millennials—born 1981 to 1996
- Generation Z—born 1997 to 2021

I'm stating the obvious but that is a wide range of ages. In large companies, it is common to have individuals from each generation represented on the same team.

In 2019, the median working age was 42.3. In the US, Millennials account for over a third of the US Labor Force. Early last year, I touched on working with Generation Z as their presence will only grow in the coming years. Manpower Group predicted Gen Z would make up 24% of the workforce in 2020, though, many workforce predictions from the past year are undoubtedly skewed given COVID. Additionally, workers age 55+ are expected to make up a quarter of employed U.S. adults by 2026.

How Ageism Often Goes Unnoticed

Ageism can sometimes be hidden behind things like "culture fit," which I have touched upon before on my blog. I shared, "Often times, hiring managers will weigh a candidate's potential fit over talent, credentials and experience — a dangerous tactic that can lead to inadvertent (and sometimes illegal) discrimination based off demographic differences or personality traits." Some examples of those myths or assumed personality traits might include:

- Older workers are just counting the days until retirement.
- Older workers don't have today's technology skills.
- Older workers won't report to younger managers.
- Older workers will only accept high salaries.
- Older workers aren't creative or willing to adapt.

On the other hand, for the younger age group, some myths include:

- Younger workers are lazy and don't work enough.
- Younger workers are too casual.
- Younger workers don't have in-person skills.
- Younger workers aren't serious enough.
- Younger workers are entitled and think they know it all.

"Discrimination has common roots in fear of differences," Dr. Peter Cappelli, an expert in human resources, public policy, and talent management, explains. "Myths persist when we don't see evidence, and we haven't had a contradictory experience ourselves." So, how do these harmful myths translate into discriminatory actions?

Ageism Never Gets Old: Tackling Age Bias In A Post-COVID Labor Force (cont.)

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It happens when learning opportunities, like conferences, certifications, or networking events are exclusively offered to younger employees. Or when assumptions are made that you don't need time off because you don't have young kids at home which also serves as a factor in why your manager selects you to travel all the time. It can also come into play with promotions when there's a cap on experience levels or the number of years needed to advance. This isn't to say that years of experience aren't important; it's merely to remember that it's only one factor — two people can learn dramatically different things in one year.

What Can Be Done

If you're heading into an interview — whether as an interviewer or interviewee — check out my previous blog post detailing best interview practices. If, like me, you're a member of an older generation and you're looking to update your resume, Indeed has great examples and step-by-step guides.

Because I thought that ageism was uncommon, I haven't been thinking about ageism nearly enough, especially when considering how it can affect people long after the hiring process. As I'm inching closer to not being in the "younger" crowd, I personally will be more proactive in calling out ageism. I hope by sharing this blog that you will do the same.

Being Anti-Racist Is Not Optional

By James E. Taylor, Ph.D., Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer and Chief Talent Management Officer, UPMC

Dealing with a pandemic like COVID-19 presents a set of challenges. Add on to that — the American Psychological Association says we are living through another pandemic as well — a racism pandemic — and its epicenter might just be the United States.

As with the novel Coronavirus, we have to intentionally work to end up on the other side.

When the Black Lives Matter Movement originated in July of 2013, some people thought, "Finally people will start talking about the systematic racism in our country." While the conversation has been initiated and has yielded meaningful progress, not everyone is woke. In fact, we're still facing the struggles of performative allyship, especially in the workplace. More than ever, companies are sharing their pledges to "do better," but not many are providing insight into a concrete plan for how they'll actually ignite change.

Widespread acknowledgment of racism and the pledge to do better is more action than we've seen in years. But by not making the active effort to become anti-racist, and therefore holding ourselves accountable to these pledges, this cycle of activism and "allyship" will continue with no significant change. Bonin Bough laid out the repercussions of false promises companies face in this article that I encourage you to read. As Bough says, "the reality is that change starts at home," referring to home, in this instance, as an organization.

We cannot tackle racism, in its entirety, at once; therefore, I suggest we focus on holding businesses accountable to their pledges by enacting anti-racist behavior in the workplace.

What Is Anti-Racism?

According to NAC International Perspectives: Woman and Global Solidarity through ACLRC, anti-racism is defined as the active process of "identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably."

Ijeoma Oluo, author of So You Want to Talk About Race, once tweeted, "the beauty of anti-racism is that you don't have to pretend to be free of racism." Instead, she shares that "anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself." In other words, anti-racism doesn't happen spontaneously, and it's not only meant for the workplace or classroom but within our thoughts and biases as well.

When someone identifies themselves as non-racist, they're often talking about their interpersonal racism. This racism occurs between individuals as "public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, or hateful words or actions." So, if someone doesn't engage in these expressions, they believe themselves to be a non-racist. But, this is only one form of racism. Other forms include institutional and structural, which make up the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These forms, which can be read about in depth here, must actively be taught and worked through as people often perpetuate racism in unconscious ways that provide privilege and entitlement to some, but not to all.

For some of us, anti-racism involves not only changing interpersonal racism but also acknowledging and understanding our privilege and interrupting all forms of racism. For others, anti-racism involves challenging legacy systems and interrupting forms of racism towards other racial groups.

Why We Need To Be Anti-Racist In A Professional Setting

For so long, it's been taboo to talk about race in a professional setting. But we must ask ourselves why. Why do we not hold companies responsible for addressing the structural and social mechanics of their own organizations? By ignoring or brushing race to the side, there are people within organizations who feel secluded. We need not to just "include" underrepresented populations, but instead have their presence feel second nature.

It is the responsibility of all leaders and employees to learn how to respect, listen, and actively include their diverse colleagues. When you are given opportunities because of your privilege, speak up. Someone who practices anti-racism is someone who works to become aware of their own racism and the racism of others and understand how this privilege affects those who are oppressed.

This article has great resources for those looking to dive into confronting racism at work. Take an implicit bias test on race to see your starting point. You may be surprised by how much racism has been ingrained in your decision-making processes. Then, educate yourself by examining historical roots of racism. Listen to the stories of people of color about their experiences. There are many amazing resources, like those found in this document, for continued anti-racism work.

We can always do better — all of us. Just like with anything in life, anti-racism isn't something we can "check off" and become masters of. It takes constant education and practice. Going back to Ijeoma Oluo, she tweeted recently, "I am happy people are reading my book. Truly, I am. But if you read my book and think 'oh – now I understand racism!', you have a lot more books to read."

As Angela Y. Davis said, "In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist." By not being actively anti-racist, you are choosing to live with your privlege and continue supporting a society that oppresses those around you.

ADVANCING THE DIALOGUE

Resources

Acts of racial injustice can trigger strong feelings. We may be unsure of how to respond to and process these feelings. Learning from and talking with others can help. These resources can help you build a greater understanding of the issues and support meaningful dialogues.

Additional Resources from Cigna
Cigna.com/BetterTogether

MULTIMEDIA

› **TED Talks to help you understand racism in America**
www.ted.com/playlists/250/talks_to_help_you_understand_r

› **The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture Talking About Race Portal**
nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race

› **Code Switch. Race. In Your Face – NPR podcast series**
www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch

› **Small Doses with Amanda Seales – podcast series**
https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/small-doses-with-amanda-seales/id1333316223

› **Activating Your Ally Voice – Jennifer Brown podcast**
www.jenniferbrownspeaks.com/2018/01/12/allyship-in-2018-activating-your-ally-voice

BOOKS

› **My Grandmother's Hands:** Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies
By Resmaa Menakem

› **Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome:** America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing
By Dr. Joy DeGruy

› **So You Want to Talk About Race?**
By Ijeoma Oluo

› **The Little Book of Racial Healing:** Coming to the Table for Truth-Telling, Liberation, and Transformation
By Thomas Norman DeWolf & Jodie Geddes

› **The Origin of Others** By Toni Morrison

› **Witnessing Whiteness:** The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It
By Shelly Tochluk

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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

Recent and past events have encouraged us to hear and understand the stories of people who hold different perspectives from us. Many of us are taught that topics like race, politics, and other "charged" subjects are best to be avoided. For some of us, this may be our first time talking about these topics. These issues may be complex and deeply personal. As these discussions find their way to our homes, workplaces, and more, it is beneficial and necessary to be able to reach out and listen to each other with respect and sensitivity. With the right mindset and communication skills, real learning and growth can occur even when the differences may seem too vast to bridge. Below are some strategies that allow for you and others to connect with and understand each other:

Prepare your mindset

› **Understand your own lens**. Our perceptions of any issue or situation are shaped by our background, experiences, culture, subculture, privilege, etc. Understand the factors that inform your perception and how you make sense of the world.

› **Be curious.** At the same time, other people's views are informed by their own lens too. Approach these conversations from a place of curiosity and respect. Your goal is simply to learn about new perspectives, not to win a debate.

› **Keep perspective.** Your conversation won't "fix" anything. Complex issues like racism and injustice require *many* conversations. These conversations open our minds to new perspectives. Think of difficult conversations as a process, a step along the pathway to change.

› **Be courageous.** Many of us have no (or perhaps negative) experience engaging with others about these topics. It may feel like we don't have the words. This can create anxiety that we will say the wrong thing. We may be afraid of offending someone, or feeling offended ourselves. For others, these topics are very private, not to be discussed with those outside the family. Stand up to these fears. Taking risks, not being silent, is how we change the "status quo." The more risks you take, the more opportunity you have to learn.

Emotional awareness

› **Expect and accept discomfort.** Conversations around these topics may expose our own or others' "blind spots." It's not comfortable to learn that we or others have biases, that long-held beliefs may not be based in truth. Resist the urge to lessen the discomfort; learn to sit with it. Go deeper by examining why you're uncomfortable. Accept discomfort as a necessary part of the process. Know that you can take a break if it becomes too uncomfortable and come back to it later.

› **Manage defensiveness.** When you "put yourself out there," you may feel vulnerable and exposed to judgement. Remember that others do not have to understand or agree with you, and that is okay. If you feel the rise of anger, hurt, or the need to defend yourself, stop for a few moments, and draw your attention to your breath. You do not need to explain what you meant or prepare a comeback. Simply listen and consider what you can learn from their feedback.

› **Be empathetic.** Tough conversations may bring up strong emotions, such as guilt, shame, sadness, or outrage. Try to connect with the other person and their emotions, acknowledge their experience. Phrases like, "I see why you would feel that way," or "I understand how that could make you feel angry," communicate that you are open and receptive to their view. Try to put yourself in their shoes if they have a different perspective or reaction than you would.

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Having the conversation

› **Listen to understand**. Listen to others' stories to help you form a picture of how they experience the world. Paraphrase what you've heard to ensure understanding: "I heard you say this. Is that right?" Don't make assumptions about their viewpoints or background – listen for their truth. Don't think about how you will respond as they are speaking. Just challenge yourself to truly hear the full story. It's okay if you don't know how to respond. Silence can help you process what you've heard.

› **Suspend judgments.** Always assume the other person is speaking with positive intent. Try to recognize when your own biases and assumptions have come into play and bring your focus back to what they are saying. Don't let individual words that may be insensitive or offensive derail the conversation. Look for the meaning behind the words.

› **Look for commonalities.** You might be surprised by how much you have in common with someone who may seem like your polar opposite. Look for common themes between your stories: a strong bond with family, or concern over the safety of loved ones, for example. Use that common ground as an anchor if your conversation begins to sound more like a debate than a discussion.

› **Create a dialogue.** Ask open-ended questions to get the full story: "Can you say more about why you felt that way?" Offer your own perspective – "this is my experience" – and allow them to respond. Create a back-and-forth that allows you both to share and appreciate each other's viewpoints.

› **Speak authentically and honestly**, from your own experience. Using the words "we" or "you" to refer to "people in general" is a way to avoid taking responsibility for your own views. Take ownership of your own feelings and opinions by using "I" statements versus "we" statements. For example, "I grew up believing..." vs. "we were taught to believe…"

› **Mind your non-verbal communication.** Keep a calm, compassionate tone to help others feel safe in opening up to you. Be aware of what your facial expressions are saying. An eye roll or a frown can shut down a conversation. Keep an open and relaxed posture, and avoid aggressive body language like crossed arms or an aggressive stance. If you notice negative nonverbal communication in the other person, ask them if they'd like to share their feelings.

› **Give respect to get respect.** Ask yourself how others might hear your message. Choose your words thoughtfully, with compassion, while still speaking your truth. Know the difference between proactively sharing your perspective and reactively defending your position. Be humble. Respect others as the "expert" of their own experience, just as you are of yours.

› **Take breaks.** These conversations can be hard emotional labor. It is okay to take breaks and focus on something else. Your relationships do not need to focus around difficult conversations all the time, but these skills allow you the ability to have them.

When conversations get heated

When conversations escalate into heated debates, it can be hard to listen. Here are some tips to keep your composure:

› Check your emotional response. Take a breath. Decide if you need to respond. Reacting with anger, hurt, or negative emotions can quickly spiral into personal attacks.

› Do not accuse the other person of ill intent (i.e., racism, sexism, etc.). This can spark defensiveness.

› Explain the impact their comment, phrase, or wording has on you on others: "When you said __, it made me feel __."

› Ask for clarification: "What did you mean when you said this?" or "Can you tell me more about your thoughts on this?" They may simply not understand how they are being perceived.

› Use kindness as a reset: "I can tell that this is really important to you. It's really hard to have this conversation but I'm glad we are."

› Know when to end the conversation. It's okay to "agree to disagree" and return to it at a later time.

References: APA (2019) Managing conversations when you disagree politically. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-conversations
Gallo, (2017) How to Respond to an Offensive Comment at Work. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2017/02/how-to-respond-to-an-offensive-comment-at-work
Kelly, C. (2019) Keeping It Civil: How To Talk Politics Without Letting Things Turn Ugly. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2019/04/12/712277890/keeping-it-civil-how-to-talk-politics-without-letting-things-turn-ugly

TALKING TO CHILDREN

The Impact of Racial Injustice

When and how to have a conversation with your child about racial injustice is a very personal decision. The strategies and resources in this handout can help you to feel more prepared when you're ready. Note that if your child has been exposed to the news and is having a hard time understanding what is happening or is fearful, you will want to address their questions and emotional reactions right away.

Helping children cope with emotions

Start by asking them what they have heard/seen. What worries them? Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings about the event(s). Really listen without trying to make it okay.

Let them know that it's good to ask questions and that feeling strong emotions is okay. Very young children may not have the verbal skills to express their feelings. They may show them through playacting or drawing. They may experience physical symptoms, such as tummy aches. You can help them name what they're feeling**.**

Give realistic reassurance. Rather than saying, "I'll never let anything bad happen to you," you can tell them that you'll always do your best to keep them safe. Consistency and routines also help them feel safe. Make time for soothing activities such as reading or playing games together. Give extra hugs.

Share information honestly, but at a level they can understand. A general rule is to offer only as much information as they request, but be prepared to go deeper with older children. As with adults, unknowns can be scarier than the reality. Think about and have answers for hard questions, such as whether they need to be afraid of the police or someone burning down their house or school. Age-appropriate resources *(see next page)* may be helpful to bring understanding about the broader issues.

Talk about positive ways that people are responding and what you might be able to do. Looking for any sort of positive actions that others are taking, or that your family might do right now, can be empowering and help counteract some of the negativity and feelings of helplessness.

Limit your child's exposure to news and social media. Watching repeated images of the event(s) can be as disturbing to a child as if it were happening anew each time. Supervise what you want them to see and plan time to talk about it afterwards.

Be aware that your child is watching you to understand how to process this experience. Be honest with words, feelings, and actions, but be mindful of *how* you are communicating them. It can be frightening for a child to feel that you are overwhelmed.

Talking about the issues

Think about what you want to communicate and when. This is a personal decision each family will need to make for themselves. Talk with someone you trust, whether it be a co-parent, friend, or family member, to review factors that might have an impact, such as your child's age and maturity level. It may mean weighing a loss of innocence against empowerment. Many families of color haven't had the privilege of waiting to have this important conversation. Talking, not only about injustice, but also about very specific directions on how to interact with law enforcement or deal with confrontations, can be a matter of safety.

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Do your homework. Take time to learn about systemic oppression – past and present. Explore a variety of resources to get a true and full picture of the issues. This can help shape your conversation.

Be open and direct. You can acknowledge that talking about race and injustice can feel uncomfortable, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about it. Dig deeper into your own perspectives and examine your attitudes and positions before talking with your child.

Share stories. Help children understand the human stories behind the headlines and news coverage. Be sure to include stories about people who have made a difference, people who have stood up and taken risks to bring change, and those who do so today. Age-appropriate storybooks and other resources specific to talking about racism and injustice, such as those listed in the box to the right, can help you tell these stories.

Understand that you don't have to be the expert or have all the answers. We all grapple with challenges and issues around race, discrimination, and injustice, but talking is a way to bring this topic out into the open. It gives you and your child a way to share thoughts, feelings, and questions. It's also an opportunity to learn more together about what has happened in the past, as well as current events. And to talk about how your family can respond.

Resources

Center for Racial Justice in Education
www.centerracialjustice.org/resources/resources-for-talking-about-race-racism-and-racialized-violence-with-kids/

Embrace Race: Raising a Brave Generation
www.embracerace.org/resources

Teaching Tolerance: Beyond the Golden Rule
www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/beyond_golden_rule.pdf

Sesame Street and CNN town hall:
How to Explain Racism to Kids (video)
www.cnn.com/videos/us/2020/06/06/entire-june-6-cnn-sesame-street-racism-town-hall-part-1-vpx.cnn

Social Justice Books
www.socialjusticebooks.org

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES IN STRESSFUL TIMES

This is a time of immense challenges: we have just witnessed another traumatic death of a person of color at the hands of police, on top of fears for our physical health and safety in the midst of a pandemic and sweeping changes in our daily routines and work lives. These events may trigger a variety of reactions. They might include intense emotions, like outrage, grief, profound sadness, anxiety, or fear. You might notice physical reactions like trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, or exhaustion. The severity and duration of these reactions can be more easily managed when you practice good self-care. Here are some self-care reminders that may be helpful:

Mental and emotional coping strategies

› **Take a break from worries.** You may find that these events dominate your thoughts, making it difficult to focus on anything else. You may feel that you aren't doing or caring enough. Give yourself permission to emotionally separate to help you de-stress. Close your eyes and take a few breaths. Name three things you can see, touch, and hear in the moment.

› **Focus on what you can control.** Create routines to help give you structure in what may feel like chaos. Schedule blocks of time to focus on one task, then move to the next. Concentrate on concrete, achievable tasks.

› **Recognize the difficulties of the current situation, and know that you may not be functioning at your best right now.** Lower expectations of what you "should be doing." Be gentle with yourself. Your personal best will vary according to your mental, emotional, and physical health at each moment.

› **Reflect on challenges you've encountered in your life and how you overcame them.** Self-statements such as "I can handle this" and "I've gotten through so much already" can help you continue to tap into your natural resilience.

› **Reach out to people** you can trust with your feelings and fears. Learn more about the mental and emotional benefits of counseling. Add a licensed therapist to your support team.

› **Connect with friends and family,** or do something that is uplifting to you. Engage in activities that allow you to unwind and emotionally recharge.

› **Be kind to yourself.** Recognize what you've done to support others and yourself. Treat yourself like you would a friend or family member in challenging times.

Physical coping strategies

› **Getting enough sleep to feel rested** is a key ingredient of managing stress and anxiety. It impacts both mood and energy level. Establish a routine that helps you to wind down and get adequate sleep.

› **Physical activity** is a good way to reduce feelings of tension. Practice something you enjoy outdoors, or find workout videos online. Talk with your doctor before starting any exercise routine.

› Eat **well-balanced meals** at regular times of the day. Prep healthy meals ahead of time for lunch. When making healthy meals at home, make extra to put in the freezer and stock up on healthy snacks for when you are pressed for time.

› **Do something calming and relaxing** whenever you can. Deep breathing, meditation and progressive relaxation can help you de-stress. Take a warm bath, or get outdoors in nature. Doing simple, repetitive tasks like folding laundry, washing dishes, or sweeping the floor can also help release tension.

› **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope. These are temporary fixes that can make it harder to manage the stress.

COPING WITH THE IMPACT OF RACIAL INJUSTICE

When, once again, we face news that a person of color has lost their life at the hands of those charged with protecting the public, the impact is broad and deep. We may struggle with our emotions and deep concerns about injustice and discrimination against people of color that has persisted over many decades. How do we maintain our well-being as we try to come to terms with what we're seeing and feeling? Understanding your reactions and having strategies to manage the stress may help.

Common/normal reactions

The intensity and range of reactions we might experience can sometimes be surprising or feel overwhelming.

› **Emotional reactions** may start with a feeling of shock or numbness. As the experience begins to register, the floodgates open, and we may feel unfamiliar or deeper emotions, such as: profound sadness, anger, outrage, grief, anxiety, and fear. These feelings may build in intensity or perhaps ebb and spike with repeated news accounts and disturbing images.

› **Our thoughts** can race and strain to find a place to land. Many people find that they can't stop thinking about what has happened or have trouble concentrating. We find ourselves constantly drawn to news reports.

› **Physical reactions** may be less expected. People sometimes can't stop crying or are unable to sleep. There may be a strong feeling of restlessness, as if you can't sit still. You might experience an upset stomach or a pounding heart or trembling. Sometimes loss of appetite or feeling deeply exhausted can be a response.

These are just some examples; you may react differently. But know that it is normal to have intense reactions in a situation as impactful as this. It does not suggest mental or physical health problems. It is the way that our bodies and minds respond to a difficult event. It is okay to feel what you feel.

Understanding reactions

These reactions are all part of a normal stress reaction. They tell you that this matters to you. For some people it can trigger memories tied to past traumatic experiences. You may find yourself reliving the emotions of those events.

While each person has their own lens, we're all affected. Whether we're connected by location, skin color, or just as people who honor the value and rights of every human life. Racial injustice can shake the core of our moral code and beliefs, especially when history shows a pattern of similar events. Those who live with systemic racism every day may feel buried by this undeniable, relentless truth. Destruction and disruption in the community can add another layer of difficult emotions.

For many, there is a push-pull between wishing the struggle and discomfort would go away and embracing the anger and sorrow as drivers of change. This tangle of thoughts, perspectives and emotions can be overwhelming.

It's important to honor these feelings and understand that they are challenging for a reason. While we can't control how we feel, we do have control over regulating our emotions. Doing this can help us to better manage what we're feeling and respond to it in meaningful ways. Targeted coping strategies can help.

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<figure></figure>Cigna.

Co-opted thoughts

While we do need information to process this experience, we risk being overwhelmed, flooded with our emotions, when our thoughts are shaped by repeated, graphic media accounts of each event. Putting yourself in the victim's place and imagining their fear and helplessness can feel overwhelming. This image can play over and over in your mind, intensifying your reactions.

Coping strategies

Take control of your news exposure. Seek multiple sources to get a more accurate and complete picture. Even though it may feel reassuring to be tuned in 24/7, try to take breaks from it to bring your emotional temperature down.

Shift your thoughts. Mental images can trigger the same level of stress as the actual situation. Look for activities that can draw your thoughts to a neutral place for a time. Turning away doesn't mean you don't care, it's simply a way to bring stress levels down.

Fear of the unknown

We all come with a hard-wired threat response. Lethal events of racial injustice have the power to trigger it repeatedly. From the fear that we or loved ones are at risk, to the worry that there will never be meaningful change. Seeing footage of chaos and destruction can add another type of fear. All the unknown "what ifs?" can fuel an unhealthy level of uncontrolled anxiety. It's important to do what we can to address worries and stop feelings of freefall.

Coping strategies

Take steps to feel safe. Take precautions specific to the risk in your community. Check in with family and friends to confirm that they're okay or make plans to bring them to a place of safety.

Focus on what you can control. We can only manage the "here and now," not all the "what ifs." Look for what is within your power right now. It might be just managing your emotions and stress levels or reaching out for support.

Remind yourself of positive actions being taken. Seek out stories about constructive and hopeful responses to rebalance.

Trying to make sense of it

We may find ourselves questioning life's meaning in a world where injustices keep repeating themselves. We try to make sense of events that feel so senseless. For some, this results in a sad and angry validation of their life experiences. For others, it's dissonant and confusing. We can all be left with stressful, unanswerable "Whys?" Focusing on questions without answers can leave you feeling powerless and unable to move forward.

Coping strategies

Change your perspective. It may be helpful to ask a different question: "How can I respond to this in a meaningful way?" The answer might be marching, painting a mural, engaging with public officials or getting involved in a group that supports change.

Learn more. Educating yourself about systemic oppression – past and present – can bring greater understanding and offer solutions to support change. Becoming familiar with movements and organizations that are working for change can help you determine how you can take meaningful action.

Desire for action

The combination of powerlessness and outrage can set off extreme feelings of stress. Ongoing investigations and legal proceedings may deepen those feelings. It can spark a need to make the world sit up and take notice. We can feel a strong urge to do something, but struggle to know what that is.

Coping strategies

Turn negative thoughts and reactions into constructive acts. This honors those we've lost and can help channel your emotions. Many find that supporting others and investing energy into making a difference can help redirect the power of anger in positive ways.

Speak up; don't be silent. Use your voice to support racial justice on social media, with friends, family, at work, and in the community.

Listen to understand. It may not seem like an action, but it is. Challenge yourself to really hear without defending your viewpoint. Allow the discomfort and strive to be open to learning.

Taking care of yourself

The reality is that this is hard on many levels. There's no easy way through it. There may be additional issues that spin up out of this incident, bringing added stressors. There may be ongoing developments that cause distress. You may be faced with opinions, comments, or actions from others that increase stress. This may be on social media, but it may be from friends or family as well. It's important to take care of your well-being as you find your way.

There's no right or wrong way to feel, nor is there one right or wrong way to feel better. There are rarely easy answers to our many tough questions. It can feel necessary to hold onto anger. You may need to cry, grieve, vent. Give yourself permission to feel good or happy too. It's okay to be where you are right now. Remember, physical activity can be one of the best ways to ease some of the emotional stress you may feel.

Know that it will take time to process and find your balance. For some, it can be helpful to rely on regular routines, others might need to take a "time out." Being actively involved in the movement for change may be the most helpful for some. Do take time to reflect. Journaling your thoughts, feelings, and experiences or talking about them with others can be a useful way to reflect and release. A professional counselor may be able to suggest strategies tailored to your needs and experience. Recognize that the impact of this incident may never completely go away, but you can manage your emotions and stress.

Be aware that living with other, ongoing stressors can make it more difficult to manage your reactions. A major stressor, such as the restrictions and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could be a significant factor.

Be good to yourself – physically and emotionally. Turn to the positive coping skills and strengths that have gotten you through hard times in the past. Be patient with yourself and get the support you need.

It is important to seek help if your reactions to the event feel unmanageable, continue long term, or become overwhelming. Your EAP can provide professional help and connect you with resources for support in your community.

Dignity & Respect – Cornerstones of Diversity & Inclusion

By Frank Duzicky, People & Culture Senior Manager, BDO USA, LLP

Every one of us deserves dignity and respect. Dignity and respect are crucial to building and sustaining an environment in which everyone feels included, valued, and appreciated.

Dignity and respect go hand in hand. Fostering an environment of dignity and respect for all is not only morally correct, but it is also a good business practice. Employees who feel that their dignity has been compromised or that they are not respected become de-energized. De-energized employees are less productive. Less productive employees are less profitable.

It is human to have more of a natural connection with those who are like us. However, the dignity and respect that we extend to others should know no exceptions, including but not limited to: persons with/from a different culture, national origin, physical ability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, race, generation, religious affiliation, socio-economic status, political affiliation, personal experiences or ideas. This is more important than ever in our present climate. When I meet someone with markedly different views and/or a dissimilar background, I think to myself "how interesting" and am eager to learn more about them and their perspective.

The pressures of working through a pandemic and in times of uncertainty can make it challenging at times to consistently treat others with the courtesy, politeness and kindness that they deserve. We should, however, strive to be as considerate on our worst day as on our best.

Below are a few ideas for promoting dignity, respect and, by extension, inclusion to consider sharing with employees at our organizations:

- People feel respected when they know you are listening to their points of view. Giving someone your undivided attention is in and of itself a huge positive reinforcement.

- Say "Thank you!" Gratitude is a gift that is never too small to give and is often much appreciated. There are any number of ways to show appreciation for a job well done. It is interesting that the quickest and least expensive (just saying "Thank you!" and/or "Well done!") is typically the most appreciated and heartfelt.

- Do not constantly criticize little things. A series of seemingly trivial actions will add up to a very large negative over time.

- Treat others the way they want to be treated. As we are all different, make an effort to learn what respect means to your team members and how they like to work. One team member may prefer/need extra face time with you. Another team member may require a higher level of detail instruction. Yet another may not like excessive interruptions. Find out what others need and find a way to best work together. Our batteries burn down more quickly when we must continually work/communicate in ways that we are not wired for.

- Listen to what others have to say before expressing your viewpoint. Never speak over or cut off another person.

- Remember that we all make mistakes. Rather than being excessively critical, help others learn from their mistakes. Take the opportunity to have teaching moments with others regarding their mistakes. The person who doesn't make any mistakes is probably sitting around doing nothing.

- Help to create a warm, supportive environment of mutual respect.

- Compliment other people. When we think negatively about ourselves, we often project that feeling on to others in the form of insults and gossip. To break this cycle of negativity, get in the habit of praising other people. Refuse to engage in gossip and make an effort to compliment those around you. In the process, you'll become well liked and build self-confidence. By looking for the best in others, you indirectly bring out the best in yourself.

- Be considerate. Know that your words and actions affect others. Communicate respectfully. It's not just what you say, but how you say it.

- Make a deposit in someone's emotional bank account. We all leave home in the morning with a number of tokens, if you will, that get debited throughout the day when things don't go well (sometimes we have a few debits before we even leave home). When good things happen (positive reinforcement, appreciation, words of kindness) our accounts are credited. If we get to the point in the day that our account is depleted, we are in a bad place and a point of real non-productivity.

- Demonstrate mutual respect. Be respectful of others regardless of position or title.

We all deserve to work in an environment where diversity is promoted, we feel included and we are treated with dignity and respect. Such an environment helps to bring out the full potential in all of us as people and employees, which, in turn, contributes to our success of our organizations and society.

Diversity In Healthcare

By: Erin Viale, SPHR

We know that diversity among healthcare practitioners leads to better outcomes among diverse patients. But I would argue that we must convince diverse individuals to enter the healthcare field in order to achieve better outcomes for all patients.

We have seen in recent years that staffing shortages in healthcare settings are leading to lack of access, and lowered patient outcomes across all populations . The question is, could engaging diverse candidates be the key to overcoming the labor crisis in healthcare? Could we perhaps improve outcomes for all patients by engaging diverse candidates to fill vital healthcare roles?

Currently, in the United States, there are 194,000 RN jobs open (Median income $77k), 22,000 Physician jobs open (Median income $208k) and 41,000 Advance Practice Provider jobs open (median income $123k).

In a recent study for the Journal of the American Medical Association, findings showed that minorities were underrepresented in these key employment areas. In the United States workforce overall, 12% of workers are black and 18% are Hispanic. However, for Advance Practice Nurses, only 7% of the workforce is black, and 5.5% are Hispanic. For Physicians, 5.2% are black and 6.9% are Hispanic. For Registered Nurses, 11% are black and 7.8% are Hispanic .

The disparities seen here are problematic in several ways. The first is related to patient outcomes. Studies show that diverse patients are better served by diverse practitioners. Interactions become more patient-centered when cultural competency is present, and this can lead to long-lasting effects: minority patients are more likely to receive vaccines, important health screenings, and compassionate end of life care when treated with cultural competency. Additionally, according to one study, more diverse physicians and scientists could result in better recruitment of minority participants in clinical trials, which would lead to greater impact of research.

Another significant disadvantage of this disparity is the consequence for the healthcare system. During the pandemic, the country realized that our healthcare system is limited, not by physical beds or equipment, but by personnel. Often, hospitals that were 'at capacity' were not physically full, but lacked sufficient staffing to care for additional patients. The reality of the data surrounding diversity in healthcare reveals that minority candidates are not entering healthcare positions, and it's a detriment to our systems and to our overall health as a result.

So how do we convince more diverse candidates to enter the healthcare field? Ongoing efforts include an emphasis on finding more diversity in school faculty, implicit bias training for selection committees, and reevaluating selection standards to become more inclusive.   But we need to do more than create a pathway for diverse students to enter healthcare training programs. We need to first convince diverse students to enter those programs.

As a healthcare recruiter, it seems to me that the solution to this problem is the same solution that many recruiters have adopted during the labor crisis: start younger. Instead of going to colleges to speak to students who are established in a course of study, we must go into high schools and make a case for healthcare careers. We must convince the next generation that healthcare careers are lucrative and rewarding.

Our healthcare system depends on people. It is a service-based industry for which automation is impossible in most situations. In order to maintain capacity across our systems, we must continue to find and train people. This lack of diversity that we see should establish a logical conclusion: we should start by finding diverse individuals and convincing them to join us.

Luckily for our area, Pittsburgh Public Schools demographic makeup is 55% black and Hispanic. Therefore, recruiters won't have to go far to find a population that is statistically less likely to enter these needed healthcare fields.

[i]The Clinical Case for Adequate Nurse Staffing Levels, Link

[ii]Income Information and vacancy Information, Bureau of Labor Statistics

[iii]JAMA Study

[iv]"The Urgent and Ongoing Need for Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in the Cardiology Workforce in the United States," National Library of Medicine. Link

[v]"Health Care Workforce Challenges Threaten Hospitals' Ability to Care for Patients" Link

[vi]Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Medical Schools — Why Aren't We There Yet? Link

[vii]Pittsburgh, Public School Distric, US News Link

Employers Need to Get Comfortable with Autism

By Brian Kluchurosky, brian@progresscity.net

Autism Employment Network, Progress City LLC
A few weeks ago I reached my 'social adaptability limit' during a Sunday afternoon with my family, which brought my autism characteristics to the surface.

So many things were happening at that moment: hot and humid weather; 5 children splashing and yelling in a pool; 2 dogs running around and barking; loud planes in the sky; music playing.
In the midst of all of this, my youngest daughter jumped into the pool and splashed a few drops of water on my shirt. My reaction was impulsive, and therefore immediate: I yelled and raised my voice, causing everyone else to stop and notice what was happening. My wife commented for me to calm down and stop making such a big deal over the matter. I knew she was right, but could not contain the emotion of the impulse. I continued to yell and have my daughter (who cried non-stop) sit outside of the pool for the next 5 minutes.

Once the moment had passed and my 'social adaptability limit' no longer compromised, I reflected on my earlier actions. Here is what I recognized: the anxiety of all of the unexpected change (running; screaming; jumping; noises) diminished my ability to adapt to the social environment, which resulted in communication difficulty, lack of social awareness, and rigid thinking.
This was my autism.

Autism continues to face a civil rights battle with regards to mass stigma of misinformed and alienated thinking on the disability. I often wonder, if you ask 10 different people to describe autism in 30 seconds, you will likely get 10 very different responses. Unfortunately, over-sensationalism of the disability through various social media platforms continue to pigeon-hole mass understanding of the truth and accuracy of autism.

And the truth is simple: we are all on the autism spectrum.
To put this point into proof, let's look at vision. We can agree that we are all on a 'vision spectrum.' Each person is born with a unique DNA code for natural vision. That code is combined with the environment the person grows up in. Together, code and environment create the 'individual experience,' which puts the person in their very own spot on the vision spectrum. Over time, that spot can change with additional experiences and external support.

Autism is a disability defined by communication difficulty, social awareness difficulty, and rigid behavior/ thinking. Factors that bring about these characteristics include: lack of inhibitory control (understanding/ controlling our emotions); cognitive flexibility; perspective taking; and contextual awareness. In other words, when a person cannot adjust/ adapt to his/ her environment as it changes from moment to moment, he/ she will act on impulse.

Similar to vision: We can agree that we are all on an 'autism spectrum.' Each person is born with a unique DNA code for natural social adaptability. That code is combined with the environment the person grows up in. Together, code and environment create the 'individual experience,' which puts the person in

their very own spot on the autism spectrum. Over time, that sport can change with additional experiences and external support.

To summarize:
We engage vision by how well we individually adapt to light as it changes from moment to moment. And our limits for vision adaptability will always exist and can change over time with external support (e.g. glasses; contacts).

We engage autism by how well we individually adapt to our social environment as it changes from moment to moment. And our limits for natural social adaptability will always exist and can change over time with external support (e.g. social skills services; counseling).

Employers are navigating in unprecedented times with finding workers who are reliable. Many companies are looking for additional avenues to explore for hiring. The autism community, and the neurodiverse community as a whole is ready to respond to fill these hiring needs.
But accuracy of understanding of autism must come first.

A foundation of commitment, value, and fulfillment can be built through getting comfortable with autism. The Autism Employment Network (AEN) exists to train/ consult employers on autism, while developing individuals for competitive employment opportunities. Lets work together to establish a productive and fulfilling employment pathway for neurodiverse individuals.

Employers: take the time to learn the truth; take the time to get comfortable with autism.

FLIP the script

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Words reflect workplace culture. Even when we have the best intentions, our words can reinforce negative stereotypes around sexual orientation. We must recognize that our words matter and take action by using words that create inclusive environments where people feel both that they are valued and that they belong.

IMPACT

RESEARCH SAYS

"TALKING ABOUT YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS NOT PROFESSIONAL."

Not being able to bring their whole selves to work can isolate lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees and chip away at their ability to forge valuable relationships with co-workers

Straight workers often make casual references to their sexual orientation with colleagues during routine small talk. Similar sharing by LGB individuals can be unfairly deemed inappropriate or unprofessional.[1]

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Use inclusive language such as "partner" or "spouse" rather than "husband" or "wife."

IMPACT

RESEARCH SAYS

"YOU KNOW THEY'RE GAY, RIGHT?"

Depending on the situation, outing colleagues can have serious repercussions on their emotional and/or physical well-being, employment, economic stability, personal safety, and/or religious or family situations.[2]

Coming out is a deeply personal individual choice and process that rarely happens just once. Approximately three-quarters of all lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) workers hide who they are in the workplace to some extent, with nearly half choosing to be open with some colleagues but not others.[3]

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Ask colleagues how you can best be an ally for them while respecting their privacy.[4]

IMPACT

RESEARCH SAYS

"THAT'S SO GAY."

This phrase can demean LGB employees, make them feel unsafe and unwelcome, and may lead them to become less engaged at work.[5]

Over 40% of LGBT employees have experienced some form of discrimination on the job[6] or take actions such as hiding who they are to avoid it.[7]

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Interrupt derogatory language, offensive comments, and "jokes" to let people know that this kind of language is not okay.[8]

IMPACT

Stereotyping can exacerbate bias and discrimination[9] and may heighten experiences of "otherness" for LGB employees.[10]

"HE'S GAY, SO OBVIOUSLY HE'S NOT RIGHT FOR THIS."

RESEARCH SAYS

Stereotyping may limit employees' ability to innovate and perform to their full potential. Stereotypes related to sexual orientation that conflict with prevailing leadership norms may cause LGB employees to be overlooked for opportunities,[11] resulting in downsized aspirations and loss of talent.[12]

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Focus on objective standards of performance, not assumptions or subjective preferences such as "style" or "fit."

IMPACT

Implicitly asking employees to cover or downplay aspects of their personality or presentation to conform to heteronormative standards (i.e., "gender performance"[13]) prevents them from bringing their authentic selves to work.

"CAN YOU TONE DOWN THE GAY?"

RESEARCH SAYS

Over 60% of employees of all backgrounds, including LGB individuals, report actively hiding an aspect of themselves at work. Covering can lead employees to feel unable to fulfill their potential and can damage their sense of self and commitment to the organization.[14]

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Get to know colleagues who are different from you, and engage in courageous conversations to broaden your perspectives.

FLIP THE SCRIPT

EDUCATE YOURSELF
Learn the terminology[15] and ask LGB colleagues about their experiences.

PAY ATTENTION
Be cognizant of your word choices, assumptions, and level of personal sharing.

DEMONSTRATE ALLYSHIP
Affirm the experiences shared by LGB individuals, and challenge assumptions and behaviors that can lead to prejudice and exclusion.

CATALYST
WORKPLACES THAT WORK FOR WOMEN

Intentional Inclusion & Belonging

By: Dorene Ciletti, Ph.D. & Sandra Mervosh, MS, SCP, SPHR

Is your organization inclusive?

Do your colleagues feel welcome?

What deliberate efforts have you made, personally and professionally, to support belonging?
Numerous studies have identified the benefits of a diverse workforce to organizations and employees. Diversity adds value… but focusing on diversity alone might lead an individual or an organization to focus on differences. Acknowledging and valuing differences is important, but representation through personal characteristics alone is not enough to build a culture that accepts and welcomes all.

How can we make others feel welcome and encourage a sense of belonging? Intentional inclusion.
Creating a culture of belonging need not be an overwhelming task…. but it is not effortless. The Women in Industry initiative at Point Park University's Rowland School of Business is exploring Intentional Inclusion and belonging through a virtual speaker series and certificate program. We explore intentional inclusion and belonging by first identifying the psychological barriers to inclusion, the basic need and benefits of belonging, and the layers of belonging including personal, organizational, and community.

Why focus on intentional Inclusion and belonging rather than diversity?
Diversity is commonly focused on differences. Inclusion involves respecting and valuing the uniqueness of others, inviting all to be part of the group, activity, or organization. Exclusion literally hurts…both individually and organizationally. A Harvard Business Review article on the value of belonging described it as a sensation of pain that can lead to lower organizational commitment and engagement. Belonging going beyond mere presence to address feelings and beliefs that an individual is connected, accepted, and included.

Multiple studies have identified the benefits of a diverse workforce to organizations and employees, including a 2020 McKinsey report asserting that recovery, resilience, and reimagination are enabled by diversity and inclusion. Belonging also plays an important role. A Harvard Business Review article focused on belonging in hybrid workplaces noted that belonging leads to increased performance, engagement, and well-being, since connections with others can enhance life experiences. Acceptance and connectedness to others within workplaces and communities can enable individuals to thrive.

We must move beyond differences to understand the employees' needs and feelings in a diverse environment that enables them to thrive personally and professionally. By focusing on intentional inclusion and belonging, we seek to create an environment in which people with different skills, perspectives, and abilities are welcomed and appreciated.

What keeps us separated? Why do we fear differences?
We become aware of differences through the process of perception. Perception begins when our senses are alerted to a stimulus which is then mentally categorized and stored in our brain for future retrieval guiding our responses and behaviors. Perception enables us to organize sensory information and experience the world around us. However, philosopher Rene Descartes (and others) suggest the process is flawed. Descartes believed

we could be deceived by our senses leading to inaccurate conclusions and behaviors. This flawed process of perception combined with a foundation of fear can lead to misjudgment. Dr. Alice Boyes, author of The Healthy Mind Toolkit and The Anxiety Toolkit suggests that fear of differences is founded on misunderstanding, uncomfortable feelings of awkwardness, and dislike of change, which can lead to resentment because our brains are making snap judgments.

What impact do faulty perceptions and fear have on unconscious bias?
We're taught that we should not judge a book by its cover... and yet we often do. Impression formation may be riddled with unconscious beliefs, perceptions, and actions that guide our behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. This unconscious bias is commonly defined as quick judgments people make of other individuals or groups. We notice cues related to factors like appearance and behavior and use these cues to infer traits and even predict how they might act. These judgments, which are frequently based on stereotypes, biases, or unsupported assumptions, are typically made at an unconscious level, and can lead to faulty beliefs, behaviors, and decisions regarding others.

How might we break the barriers to inclusion and belonging resulting from a flawed perception process and unconscious bias?
Recognizing, acknowledging, communicating, and acting are important in breaking the barriers to inclusion and belonging. In her bestselling book, Subtle Acts of Exclusion, Tiffany Jana provides a process enabling us to change our own and others' behaviors and statements to become inclusive by pausing the action, assuming good intent, explaining why the action was paused, acknowledge the discussion with gratitude, and replace defensiveness with curiosity or empathy.

Recognizing and acknowledging our inclinations and understanding the process that leads to impression formation can help us intentionally seek to avoid faulty judgements and evaluate more equitably. Again, combining faulty perceptions and fear of difference can lead to unfair and improper judgement of others, leading to in-group bias. According to research from Harvard Business Review, we may seek out those like us, with whom we expect to feel comfortable, with whom we have common ground, and while we may also seek out uniqueness, the drive for commonality and comfort can be powerful,

How do we move beyond intentional inclusion at a personal level?
Like Holistic Resilience, for Intentional Inclusion and Belonging to enable individuals to thrive, we need to address individual, organizational and community efforts.

Building an inclusive culture in the workplace includes organizational policies and practices, leadership, and decision-making. Forbes Human Resources Council member Laura Hamill suggests seven ways to create an inclusive workplace: access to resources including technology, ERGs, providing a format for employees to have a voice, being accepted and valued for who you are, providing learning and development opportunities, a collaborative environment, intentionally focusing on inclusive practices, and creating a sense of belonging.

Keep in mind that inclusion is not an event. We can – and should – plan to intentionally integrate it throughout

the organization, but it is also something that happens in everyday workplace activities, whether in a conference room or a hallway, a meeting or a casual discussion. Hamill reminds us that modeling and encouraging ongoing inclusion through intentional acts can help create a more inclusive culture because the day-to-day actions impact organizational culture.

How can organizations be intentional about inclusion and belonging?
People, organizations, and communities cannot assume best practices will naturally result from decisions and actions. We need to engage and develop tools to build and sustain environments that support inclusion and belonging actively and consciously. These efforts should intentionally include those historically underrepresented as well as provide creative and innovative freedom to foster belonging.

Organizations can begin welcoming and establishing belonging through job design along with realistic job previews during application and interview processes. Organizations can be intentional in recruitment, selection, and on-boarding, using inclusive language, employing blind processes, focusing on culture add rather than culture fit, providing multiple modalities for interaction, and assessing how processes impact all applicants and employees.

Inclusion and belonging efforts can continue throughout the organization with intentionality in communication and engagement. Use of bias-free language, ongoing training and support, and access to employee resource groups can support inclusion, establish belonging, and foster allyship. These efforts can have an exponential impact because addressing intentional inclusion and belonging at an organizational level can also impact the broader community.

For additional information on Point Park University's Women in Industry Intentional Inclusion & Belonging series, contact Sandy Mervosh at smervosh@pointpark.edu.

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Religious Accommodations should be part of your diversity toolkit

By: Diane Houser, PHRA Board Member, Co-Chair Membership, Diversity, and College Relations

When you think of your diversity strategy, Religious Accommodations may not be the first thing you think of. But seeking to understand those with different religious needs, whether they impact the daily flow of work or not, is an important part of having a diverse employee base.

Right now, we are all actively seeking diverse employees and taking a closer look at the employees that are already part of our companies. Religious diversity is not necessarily something you will see right off the bat. It resides in the deepest core of our teammates and it is something they bring to the office, or virtual office, every day as part of their person. To overlook this cornerstone of our employees, their deepest thoughts and emotions, could be a very real missed opportunity.

Human Resources is the exact part of the organization to help with seizing that opportunity by guiding the company with Religious Accommodation practices.

It's not possible to list every consideration as there are so many different religions, but here are a few tips that HR professionals might find helpful when an employee discloses their religion to you.

- Don't assume you know everything about a religion just by its title. There is no harm in googling it. Look up resources on practices, holy days, and history. Reach out to local churches/temples/mosques or experts to help you. Be open to learning something you did not know.

- When presented with a Religious Accommodation request, be sure you understand the particulars of the practice and why it is important.

  - For instance, the Jewish faith requires that the person be home before sundown on Shabbat (Fridays). While summertime is easy with its long days, winter days are much shorter and require adjustments to schedules. Use the internet to track sundown times and plan how to adjust work in the deep winter.

  - Those who practice the Muslim faith have requirements for daily devotional prayer. If you are asked to accommodate these prayer requirements, consider how to work breaks or adjust schedules to accommodate this need. Think about a quiet space that could be used for prayer that provides privacy for the person.

- Approach Religious Accommodations like other interactive dialogues. Gather your information and review it before talking with the person. Work with your management to understand the impact to the business to make the requested accommodations and when those accommodations cannot be made.

- As with all things HR related, explore the SHRM website. They have sample Religious Accommodation forms and guidance to help you along the way. There are articles on how to approve and deny accommodation requests. SHRM is always a go-to resource!

Religious Accommodations can be an unexpected but vital part of your diversity toolkit. They are an opportunity to learn new things and grow your diversity practices.

Diane Houser
PHRA Board Member
Co-Chair Membership, Diversity, and College Relations
Director of Employee Relations, ConnectiveRx

Diversity, equity and inclusion reports help boost sense of belonging

By: Kevin Walling, PPG Chief Human Resources Officer

In recent years, employees have experienced a global pandemic that highlighted the disparities across underrepresented communities. They lived through the Great Resignation and the Great Reshuffle. They struggled with George Floyd's murder and the murders of other underrepresented people.

The social unrest spurred by these events and more over the last few years has rightfully stirred feelings of uncertainty in employees across the world. Many have lost their sense of belonging and are seeking companies that demonstrate and communicate their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I).

When developed thoughtfully, a DE&I report can help increase employee engagement, foster a culture of belonging, increase hiring of historically underrepresented groups, boost retention and help stakeholders understand that your organization is operating with accountability.

People First

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, countless employees have shifted their professional preferences and are more inclined to work for companies with a people-first mentality. Potential employees are searching for organizations that have a sustainability strategy, combat systemic racism and maintain DE&I as a top business priority.

Your recruiting team has likely already noticed that potential candidates are repeatedly asking, "What did your company do in response to George Floyd's murder?" or "How is your company supporting your LGBTQIA+ employees all year?"

In a recent Washington Post article, Jennifer Miller notes, "Over the past decade, highly educated young professionals have increasingly prioritized personal values in deciding where to work, whether it's a commitment to sustainability, philanthropy or social impact." Miller adds, "Millennials and Generation Z job seekers are setting a higher bar; they want employers to be equally committed to changing themselves."

DE&I Milestone

Based on our own research, we realized that it was time to disclose even more employee data to highlight our 2025 aspirational DE&I goals and share our progress against them.

On March 1, 2022, PPG published our first DE&I report. This was a milestone in PPG's decades-long journey to cultivate a sense of belonging for all PPG employees and to harness the power of diversity in igniting innovation and performance.

While PPG has made strides toward enhancing social equity, we understand that we still have plenty of work ahead of us. Our values and our desire to do better today than yesterday – every day – remain our driving forces for creating genuine and lasting change across our society, not just in our workforce.

Transparent Reporting

A well-crafted DE&I report underscores your organization's commitment to transparency, details your goals, highlights progress you have achieved and outlines areas of opportunity.

Diversity, equity and inclusion reports help boost sense of belonging (cont.)

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Is your organization considering developing a DE&I report? Based on our own experience, we believe there are several things to keep in mind when creating one. These include:

- Humbly own both the strengths and opportunities highlighted in your data. Share your successes to inspire others, while acknowledging the areas where work still needs to be done. Make a commitment to the actions your organization will take to address any gaps.

- Involve a broad set of internal stakeholders to review your report prior to publishing. Make the report review process as inclusive as possible. Invite a sample of employees from various organizational levels and geographic locations, including members of your employee resource groups (ERGs), legal, communications, human resources, sustainability, and investor relations, to thoughtfully review your report content prior to publishing. The more unique perspectives involved in the review process, the better.

- Invite employees to tell their stories. Who better to tell your story than your employees? Is there a colleague that has a remarkable story about coming out? Do you know of an employee who committed to life-long learning and joined all your ERGs? Select employees across all levels, business units, regions, languages, skin tones, sexual orientations, and more. Every perspective is valuable and relevant.

- Remember, your report will evolve over time. Your company's story is an evolving one, and you do not need to say everything in your first report. Instead, consider earmarking in-progress DE&I projects for the next report.

- Do not pretend to know everything. Even the most seasoned DE&I experts are continuously learning about diverse communities and the DE&I space. In your own words and examples, establish that your organization is dedicated to listening and learning.

At PPG, we knew publishing a DE&I report was the right thing to do by our employees and for organizations outside of our manufacturing industry. We believe that when a company commits to transparency via a DE&I report, that company will likely motivate and inspire other organizations to do the same. The ultimate result – a more transparent and inclusive future for us all.

How to Create Gender Inclusive Workplaces

By Patrick Gilchrist, Robert Half

Across the globe, Pride Month is recognized during June as a time to uplift lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) voices and experiences. Though the month and its many parades, marches and other celebrations have ended, what persists is the need for individuals and organizations to reflect and take collective action in creating inclusive workplaces.

Employees and job seekers are looking for companies where everyone's unique background and experience are recognized so that they feel supported and valued. While June presents a timely opportunity to consider how workplaces can dedicate resources to LGBTQIA+ groups and organizations, it is imperative for companies to focus on LGBTQIA+ inclusion and equality all year long. This extends beyond adding the rainbow flag to company logos, updating Zoom and Teams backgrounds, and donating funds to organizations with LGBTQIA+-driven efforts. All these initiatives are important, but how can efforts go beyond visual niceties and effectuate systemic change?

There are several ways for businesses to support a variety of genders and underrepresented groups in the workplace including opportunities for development and allyship. The following four tips can help when thinking about LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the long term:

1. Create inclusive hiring processes

While simply hiring more women, LGBTQ individuals and underrepresented groups will not solve gender imbalance in the workplace, ensuring a good mix of genders (i.e., male, female, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, and others) and backgrounds amongst candidates creates a better and more inclusive hiring process.

2. Address gendered language and practices

Thinking specifically about LGBTQIA+ individuals, removing traditionally gendered language from job descriptions has been shown to increase the number of applications from all genders. Applying this consistently in workplace communications and educating staff of gender-inclusive language that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity helps to create a better environment for everyone.

Increased diversity in the workplace means that more employees are likely to have non-binary gender identities. Encouraging pronoun sharing helps to create a more comfortable environment, without the risk of misgendering. Even sharing preferred pronouns on email signatures is a helpful step in the right direction.

3. Offer gender-neutral benefits

Specifically about women in the workplace: some claim the reason for there being fewer female employees in senior positions is linked to the time they take off to raise their families but, with the introduction of shared parental leave and other initiatives, this type of thinking is taking a back seat. Not only can partners now share leave, in some cases companies are offering all new parents the same parental leave benefits and making it clear that they are strongly encouraged to take up the offer.

Initiatives like this send a clear message on inclusivity by eschewing traditional gender roles, removing entrenched biases, and creating better balance between all people in the workplace.

4. Encourage allyship

Employers can create a more inclusive environment that addresses issues that are pertinent to underrepresented groups. Many companies are starting to arrange activities surrounding awareness days and months, but this type of initiative can be more effective if continued throughout the year. When well-publicized and possibly traumatic events happen, businesses and employees can act as allies by checking in on those who may be affected and creating safe places for education on the issues. Here are a few actions professionals can take to be a better ally in the workplace:

- **Engage** – If there is programming to encourage allyship, then take the time to participate. Seek out more education and training. Cultivating more inclusive spaces for all individuals to champion change and educate their peers is a shared responsibility.

- **Challenge your own assumptions** – Have conversations, be open to the initiatives available. Remember it's okay to make a mistake if you learn from it and aim to do better in the future.

- **Speak up** – Prioritize the use of inclusive language and the need to understand the weight and connotations behind words and phrases. Encourage your peers to do the same and participate in employee network or resource group chapters to learn more.

Global talent solutions and business consulting firm Robert Half and its LGBTQIA+ employee network group, BELONG, celebrated Pride by following a weekly theme for the month, LIVE: Learn, Inform, Vocalize, Engage. Some of the activities included:

- Raising awareness of and deepening the company's strategic partnership with Out & Equal, a nonprofit organization focused on LGBTQIA+ workplace equality

- Sponsoring Lesbians Who Tech & Allies, the largest LGBTQIA+ technology community in the world, and attending the organization's 2022 Pride Summit

- Co-hosting a panel event focused on LGBTQIA+ youth with Protiviti, a Robert Half subsidiary and global consulting firm, and It Gets Better, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to uplift, empower and connect LGBTQIA+ youth around the globe

Patrick Gilchrist is the regional director of Robert Half in Pittsburgh. Founded in 1948, Robert Half is the world's first and largest specialized talent solutions and global consulting firm. For more information about our Pittsburgh services and location, call us at 412.912.2984 or click here.