BUILDING BELONGING: UNDERSTANDING MICROAGGRESSIONS, MICRO-AFFIRMATIONS AND INCLUSION

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SHARING IS CARING

Say you’re getting an award for your awesome professional accomplishments and you’ve been asked to select the song that will play as your name is called.

What song do you choose?
THE DATA: DIVERSE TEAMS & INCLUSIVE LEADERS, COMPANIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.3x</td>
<td>Enjoy a higher cash flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7x</td>
<td>More likely to be innovation leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Gender diverse exec teams more likely to outperform on profitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Ethnically and culturally diverse exec teams more likely to outperform on profitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>More likely to report that they are high performing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>More likely to say they make high-quality decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>More likely to report behaving collaboratively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>More likely to capture new markets</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Diversity Wins, How Inclusion Matters (McKinsey, 2020)*
MICROAGGRESSIONS: WHY THEY MATTER

Microaggressions reinforce in-group privilege and undermine a culture of inclusion.

Microaggressions and other negative microbehaviors can kill confidence and impact performance.
DEFINITION

MICROAGGRESSIONS.

EVERYDAY –ISMS THAT REFLECT INEQUALITY, SIGNAL DISRESPECT AND CONTRIBUTE TO OTHERING.

Statements, actions, or incidents regarded as instances of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.
A person could consciously express a neutral or positive opinion about a social group that they unconsciously hold a negative opinion about. And some micro-aggression may be due to biases we did not even know about.
Hey do you know any good Mexican restaurants around here?
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

TWO PEOPLE, AND SOMETIMES THREE OR MORE.
When microaggressions occur, there is a sender and a receiver, and sometimes, an observer or few. The sender is the one who “says or does,” and the receiver is the one who is impacted. The observer witnesses the microaggression or interaction.

INTENT AND IMPACT MATTER.
What we mean versus what we say is sometimes where we get into trouble, and we often judge ourselves by what we intended instead of the outcomes we create. Although micromessages might be said with innocent intentions, they may be received as negative. It’s important to reconcile the intent of the message against its impact.

THE PILE-ON EFFECT.
The frequency and cumulative impact of microaggressions impacts relationships and how employees experience work. We all “keep score” on our interactions with colleagues, and those interactions influence how we feel about each other. Not paying attention to the micromessages we send can erode trust, making it harder for people to show up as their whole selves at work.

SHARED MEMBERSHIP DOESN’T MEAN SHARED OFFENSE (OR BLANKET PERMISSION).
People’s experiences, background, culture shape the interpretation and impact of the “small, subtle things.” Just because one member of a particular social identity doesn’t find something negative or offensive doesn’t mean that others will think it’s okay.

ARE THEY OVERREACTING, OR ARE YOU INVALIDATING?
The “little things” can be hard to identify and articulate, but for those on the receiving end, the impact and feeling are real. Language like, “you’re overreacting,” or “stop being so sensitive,” invalidate the experience of others. It’s important to acknowledge negative micromessages and work towards a culture where everyone feels valued, respected and included.
64% OF WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE REPORT BEING EXPOSED TO GENDER-BASED MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE.

Source: Lean In, Women in the Workplace
HAVE YOU SEEN THESE IN ACTION?

MICROAGGRESSIONS SPAN VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY.

BEING SELECTIVE IN YOUR GREETINGS.

INTERRUPTING OTHERS.

SAYING “YOU’RE SO ARTICULATE” OR “YOU SPEAK SO WELL.”

USING A NICKNAME FOR SOMEONE THAT YOU MADE UP BECAUSE THEIR NAME IS TOO HARD FOR YOU TO LEARN.

QUESTIONING QUALIFICATIONS.

ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT SOMEONE’S DEMOGRAPHIC.

REFERRING TO WOMEN AS GIRLS OR GALS, OR MEN AS BOYS.

RESTATING SOMEONE’S WORDS.

SPEAKING MORE SLOWLY OR LOUDLY TO CERTAIN PEOPLE.

LEAVING PEOPLE OUT OF GROUP LUNCHES.
SMALL, SUBTLE WAYS WE INVALIDATE OTHERS.

PAUSE AND THINK.

- Referring to younger adults as kids.
- Greeting people in an ethnically familiar manner (that you don’t share).
- Referring to a group as “you people” or “those people.”
- Not including older employees in technology-related projects.
- Assuming that someone is a secretary.
- Saying, “Oh, I have <insert unrelated ailment>, so I know how it is!”
- Saying, “I can’t tell that joke, we’re in mixed company.”
- Using too many sports analogies.
- Scheduling meetings when you know someone won’t be available.
- Saying, “You don’t talk or look ________.”
UNINTENDED OUTCOMES

Someone feeling threatened by a boss who undermines their credibility is less likely to be able to solve complex problems and more likely to make mistakes.

Source: The NeuroLeadership Journal
EXERCISE: WHAT COULD THEY HEAR?

Read each statement in Column A. Think critically about how a person could interpret the statements as a “put down.” Then, identify the statement in Column B you believe is the best possible interpretation. We’ll discuss.
## MATCHING MEANING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLUMN A (THINGS PEOPLE SAY)</th>
<th>COLUMN B (POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. That’s so gay.</td>
<td>1. Your experiences as a minority are no different from anyone else’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The only race is the human race.</td>
<td>2. Your appearance dictates your skills or knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. [To an Asian colleague] Can you help me with these models?</td>
<td>3. You are not American.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. [A White woman to a Black woman] As a woman, I understand what you experience as a minority.</td>
<td>4. Being gay is unacceptable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. No, where are you really from?</td>
<td>5. I’m not racist, because I’m oppressed like you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. You’re so articulate.</td>
<td>6. Based on your identity, I didn’t expect you to be an eloquent speaker.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTENT MATTERS.

...IF YOU GET A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN YOURSELF.

As a reminder, microaggressions can sometimes be unintentional.

On the previous slide:
- What do you think the possible intent was of the speaker?
- What’s an alternate way to rewrite the statement or question so that it doesn’t have a hidden or negative message?
TAKING ACTION: THE ROI MODEL

Reflect
Know yourself: self-awareness is key.

Own
Take personal responsibility for managing microbehaviors.

Include
Do something to address the situation in a way that advances inclusion.

Adapted from Managing MicroTriggers
Does not apply to intentional insults, disrespect or harassment.
ROI: RECEIVER

REFLECT

- Do you know why you were negatively impacted by the microbehavior?
- Are you concerned that saying something will make the situation worse?
- Are you negatively affected by some senders and not others?
- Have you frequently been on the receiving end or is this a new experience for you?
- Do you think this micromessage can be attributed to a bigger problem within the team, department or company?

OWN

- Select the most effective time to bring up the microaggression – is that in the moment, offline or at a later time?
- Help the sender understand the impact of the microbehavior on your performance.
- Explain using specific examples.
- Ask for better clarification on the sender’s intent.
- Keep the focus on the behavior and its impact (don’t make it personal).
- Provide suggestions for how the sender might be able to communicate their intent without the microaggression.

INCLUDE

- Consider who you should speak to: the sender, an observer, your boss, HR, or the sender’s boss?
- If you decide not to speak up, don’t internalize the microaggressions or negative microbehaviors. Protect your self-esteem.
Consider how you interact with others.

Do you:
• Treat people consistently with respect?
• Make assumptions about coworkers’ capabilities or personalities based on limited or incomplete information?
• Notice the subtle reactions to your tone, body language and words?
• Provide helpful and authentic feedback or rely on subtle behaviors to demonstrate disapproval or dislike?
• Have time, resources, feedback, and insight for some people, but not for others?

• Acknowledge that you send negative micromessages or engage in negative microbehaviors.
• Articulate your intent.
• Ask about and recognize the impact of your actions.
• Admit when you are unsure about how to effectively communicate with others.
• Avoid invalidating the impact.
• Apologize.

• Become more aware of the little things you do when interacting with others.
• Communicate when you are busy or stressed to avoid unintentionally sending negative micromessages.
• Empower others to tell you when you’re sending negative micromessages.
• Build and/or strengthen relationships so that there’s a foundation for authentic conversations.
REFLECT

Think about what you do when you observe a microaggression or negative microbehavior.

Do you:
• Think it isn’t worth the hassle to acknowledge or bring it up?
• **Worry you’ll be seen as a troublemaker?**
• Think that maybe you’re offended, but the receiver isn’t?
• Believe that saying something might impact your own position?
• Sometimes ignore microaggressions because you engage in the same behaviors?

OWN

If you witness someone receiving negative micromessages:
• Be aware of your motivation to get involved.
• **Ask the receiver if they want your help, and if yes, how you can help.**
• Consider the most effective way to address the microbehavior.
• Keep an objective perspective.
• Appreciate the power of the observer in creating change.
• **Encourage the sender and receiver to speak with each other directly.**

INCLUDE

• If you witness a comment or behavior that bothers someone, you need to act.
• **Communicate to your colleagues that you will speak up if you observe negative microbehaviors.**
• Ask your colleagues how they’d like to be approached if you observe them sending or receiving negative micromessages.
ACTIVE INCLUSION
Being intentional about inclusion helps to drive belonging.

Micro-affirmations are tiny, intentional acts that strengthen trust and relationships. These daily acts of inclusion help others feel welcome, seen and considered.

A few ways to show up every day:
• Invite often unheard voices into conversations
• Ask others for their opinions
• Recognize the achievements of others [and give credit where it’s due]
• Use friendly facial expressions and gestures
• Take a genuine, professional interest in someone’s personal life
• Share “exposure capital”—going beyond your in-group to provide access to important meetings, committees or projects
• Offer support—be a sponsor when it matters, and stand up for people when they’re being discredited, disrespected or demeaned
• Provide ongoing, helpful feedback—help everyone build on their strengths and move beyond challenges
LET'S STAY CONNECTED.

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