**Feature article**

Header

**Choosing respect**

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Most of us want to feel respected, valued and welcomed at home, in our community and at work. But how much effort do we each put into making others feel those things? Beyond how they feel, the way we treat people can have a big impact on their health and well-being.

Each of us can choose to help make a positive difference. Here are some ways to do just that.

**Get to know yourself**

One of the best ways we can help people feel included is to be self-aware. When we begin to understand who we are and why we are this way or that way, it can help us identify how we may or may not be helping create an environment where others feel safe and welcome.

Our brains create categories to make sense of the world. But the values we place on different categories are learned — and can be unlearned with self-awareness and continued effort. So, it’s helpful to understand your own biases. For example, ask yourself if you:

* Prefer those most like you?
* Favor information that supports your opinions and existing beliefs?
* Hold and/or act on assumptions based only on appearances and first impressions?
* Gravitate toward things and ideas you already know you like and are interested in?

These are all indicators of potential biases. Self-examine how these might show up in your day-to-day interactions with others and how you can help yourself correct course.

**Understand the impact**

For an individual, being discriminated against and excluded can lead to depression, anxiety, chronic stress, post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), high-blood pressure, substance use, among other mental and physical health conditions

While a single person (usually) cannot change the world, we can each help make a positive difference in another person’s day-to-day life, including by helping them feel seen and welcomed. It can be as simple as greeting a passerby, sitting next to a coworker you don’t know at a team meeting, or making sure to introduce yourself to a new neighbor. There are countless ways.

**Think about what you’re really saying**

Whether or not we mean to, sometimes the words we use demean another person by suggesting they don’t belong or invalidating their experiences. These “microaggressions” can be verbal, nonverbal or environmental slights, snubs or insults. So, it’s best to think before you speak, and think about what it is you’re about to say from the other person’s point of view.

Even with the best intentions, we sometimes make mistakes or accidentally hurt another person’s feelings. If you do, apologize. Everyone makes mistakes — the important part is learning from them and committing to doing better.

**See the person**

Everyone is unique. Just because people share a background, race, gender, sexuality, etc., does not make them the same. Indeed, even if someone shares your background, grew up in the same town, went to the same school, is the same gender, works in the same field, has the same values, looks like you, talks like you and acts like you, etc., they are still different from you.

**Be an ally — and an advocate**

Hold yourself and others accountable for creating a welcoming environment. If you overhear or see something that could threaten another person’s sense of safety or acceptance, address it in a polite but firm manner. Likewise, if you overhear someone display a microaggression, help them learn from it by gently correcting them and explaining what transpired.

**Mind the treatment gaps**

We’re often told to treat others as we would like to be treated. Sure, this makes a lot of sense — most people want to be treated with kindness and care and to feel included. Yet, there are considerable differences in how we as individuals want to be treated and what makes us comfortable. An easy example is the different ways people greet each other — including in the same family — a word (hello!), bow, nod, handshake, hug, kiss, something else?

Before you say, do or assume something, remind yourself to keep an open mind about the various possibilities, perspectives and preferences of individuals, and to respect personal boundaries. In other words, think first to treat people as they prefer to be treated. And if you don’t know, ask.

**It’s OK to disagree**

Finding mutual understanding and respect doesn’t mean you have to agree with everything another person says or does — or vice versa. Supporting diversity in and of itself means appreciating and making room for people the fact that people have different ways of seeing and living in the world. Do your best to listen respectfully and invite open conversation. Depending on the situation and circumstance, that may include taking constructive feedback into consideration. We can only improve and grow if we are willing to.

**Seek new perspectives**

Something might seem completely foreign to you until you try it. Take advantage of opportunities to broaden your own perspectives and gain experiences. Start conversations, read books, watch movies, visit museums, try new foods and travel to get out of your comfort zone, make new connections and see the world through other people’s eyes.

Chances are, the more you learn about all the cultures, flavors and regions of the world, the more you’ll learn to see the similarities and appreciate the differences — including your own.

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