

## Steps to Engage in Difficult Dialogues

### 1. **Get grounded in positive intentions ~ The DESTINATION:**

- Create a teachable moment
- Stir cognitive dissonance
- Demonstrate respect and dignity
- Leave them feeling whole...
- Plant seeds...Influence hearts and minds...
- Help person(s) explore the impact of their behavior, understand the reasons their behavior has a negative impact on others/building an inclusive community
- Re-establish the boundaries for civil discourse
- Do no harm!
- Make a human connection; build the relationship for future dialogue
- Support those impacted by the comments/actions

### **P.A.I.R.S. ~ Skills to Engage**

- P: PAN the environment, yourself**  
~ as data to diagnose; name your pan as an intervention
- A: ASK questions to explore**
- I: INTERRUPT the process**
- R: RELATE to others, their comments**
- S: Share, use self-disclosure as your response**

### 2. **Based on what you PAN, engage others in the conversation**

- I noticed that.... I overheard your conversation and thought I heard you say....
- I notice that folks were laughing...I'm curious what that's about?
- I noticed how quiet everyone just got...I'm wondering what is going on for folks?
- It seems some people were impacted by that statement.
- I'm noticing you're speaking with a lot of energy and emotion...
- We've had some comments from this side of the room, what are your thoughts and reactions? (looking at the other side of the room)
- I'm wondering if people are feeling triggered right now.
- The energy in the discussion seemed to shift after...

**3. A: ASK about the specifics behind the person's comment or behavior**

- Gives you time to center, better understand the comment, choose a response
- May help the person hear themselves and reflect on what they said, the impact...

**4. A: ASK clarifying questions**

- I want to make sure I understand your point...you think that...
- Are you saying that...?
- Help me understand what you mean by that?
- I don't understand your point...
- What do you mean when you say...?
- Come again? Or Can you repeat that?

**5. A: ASK questions to gather more information**

- Could you say more about that...Tell me more...
- Can you give us an example of what you're saying...?
- Help me understand what you disagree with...find frustrating...
- Help me understand how you got to that conclusion?
- What has been your experience that led you to that conclusion?
- What readings or research are you referencing?

**6. A: ASK questions to get them to reflect on their comment**

- When was the first time you heard that?
- How do you think others could be impacted by your comment? Behavior?
- Why might others disagree with your comment?
- What if I gave you a convincing argument and data that was counter to your perspective? What might that mean for you?
- How do you think others will view you when you make similar comments?

**7. A: ASK questions to explore their intention**

- What were you hoping to communicate with that comment?
- Help me understand your intent when you said...
- What did you mean to say with that comment?
- What is underneath your comment/question?

**8. I: INTERRUPT the process and give space to process**

- Let's slow down the conversation and talk about what just happened...
- I'm going to interrupt and try a different approach to this conversation...
- We are not engaging according to our group norms.
- Let's take a breath...

**9. R: RELATE to the person who made the comment (Reflectively)**

- How are you just like this person? Were just like them? (search in other categories of difference)
- When have you said or done something similarly?
- When might you say or do something like this in the future?

**10. R: RELATE to the person or their comment/behavior**

- I relate to what you're saying, I...
- I have felt the same way...
- I remember a time when I...
- I did the exact same thing...
- How do others relate to that comment?
- Who can relate?
- What you're saying seems to relate to what so-and-so just said...

**11. S: SHARE: "Put a Face on the Issue"**

- Share a personal example or one you have heard from a credible source
- Invite others to share personal examples and stories ~ verbally; in writing
- Offer to share resources, articles so they can review different perspectives
- Offer to meet with them and talk about your life experiences inside and outside organization
- Ask them to talk with 2-3 other people in the near future to hear their experiences and stories

**12. S: SHARE: Share about yourself ~ self-disclose with a story or example; your feelings in the moment; the impact of a comment or behavior, etc.**

- My heart aches as you tell that story...
- As a \_\_\_\_, I... (tell a story, give an example)
- I'd like to share the impact of your comment...
- I'm feeling uncomfortable with what you're saying...
- I'm noticing I'm feeling \_\_\_\_, anyone else?
- I notice I feel triggered right now....
- That's a trigger word/phrase for me...
- I need to stop a moment and talk about what just happened. I...

**13. Give the “benefit of the doubt” if you directly confront their comment ~ a face-saving tactic**

- I trust/know you didn't intend this... I
- You're probably not aware of the impact of your comment...

**Further Resources**

Obear, K. H. (2013). Navigating triggering events: Critical competencies for social justice educators. In L. M. Landreman (Ed.), *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Stylus.

Obear, K. (2016). *Turn the Tide: Rise Above Toxic, Difficult Situations in the Workplace*, Difference Press.