

STEPS FOR FOSTERING A BRAVE SPACE:

MICROAGGRESSION INTERACTIONS

FOSTERING A BRAVE SPACE

The intention of this resource is to support creating or enhancing a brave and healthy workplace.

Brave workplaces include (but are not limited to):

- Extending grace to yourself and others.
- Taking care of yourself.
- Having a willingness to learn.
- Being willing to receive difficult feedback
- Recognizing the potential imbalance between intent and impact.
- Honor each person's sense of belonging

john a. powell talks about belonging in article [BRIDGING OR BREAKING: THE STORIES WE TELL WILL CREATE THE FUTURE WE INHABIT](#) . Read this article before engaging in the activities to help you understand the importance of fostering brave space and bridging our collective similarities and differences.

WHAT IS A MICROAGGRESSION?

The term originated in the 1970s as a term to describe the insults and dismissals enacted upon African-American students by non-African American students at Harvard. Presently, the term is used in a broader sense to explain something you have experienced multiple times that reiterates a bias or stereotype people have about you based on part of your identity; frequent comments, questions, or actions that have to do with a person's membership in a group that is often subject to stereotypes; typically, not with malice intent or intended to induce harm. - Social Designs

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION OF MICROAGGRESSIONS:

- o [EXAMPLES OF VERBAL & NON-VERBAL MICROAGGRESSIONS](#)
- o [EXAMPLES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS](#)
- o [TOOL: RECOGNIZING MICROAGGRESSIONS AND THE MESSAGES THEY SEND](#)
- o [EXAMPLES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS](#)

***The listed resources are a tool for further understanding. However, we suggest engaging in dialogue about the assumptions made in the resources.**

PERSON TO PERSON INTERACTION

Person feeling like there has been a microaggression enacted on them

- **STEP 1:** Reflect and ask yourself what you are feeling specifically: insult, dismissal, annoyance, curiosity from the other person, anger, sadness, etc.
- **STEP 2:** Choose to engage or not engage with the person.
- **STEP 3:** If you choose to engage, articulate your feelings and be specific about what you are feeling and why.
- **STEP 4:** For example: When you said _____, I felt _____. This is not ok because _____ and I would like _____.
- **STEP 5:** Understand that their INTENT may not align with the IMPACT you are feeling.
- **STEP 6:** Move forward with a stronger relationship by engaging in dialogue further.

*Challenge yourself to use specific language instead of OR in addition to the word microaggression.

Person being accused of the microaggression

- **STEP 1:** Affirm the person's reaction.
- **STEP 2:** Seek understanding from the person you are talking to.
- **STEP 3:** Be aware that the person may not choose to continue the conversation with you.
- **STEP 4:** Understand that your INTENT may not align with the IMPACT the person is feeling.
- Research the issue: explore books, videos, articles, podcasts.
- **STEP 5:** Talk to a friend or family member to help you better understand from another perspective.
- **STEP 6:** Move forward with a stronger relationship by engaging in dialogue further.

Reducing your chances of causing a "microaggression"...

- Reading histories of different groups of people and places.
- Reading fiction written by people from different backgrounds and identities other than your own.
- Learning more about stereotypes and bias you have internalized, and what comments and language are based on stereotypes.
- Explore your blind spots by asking friends and family to point out things you may be unaware of based on their opinion.

MICROAGGRESSION SCENARIO PRACTICE

Directions: Read the scenario and answer the questions below.

Hair

Two women work together on a team. They began working on the same team three months before. One of the women is Latina and grew up in Panama, the other woman is Black and grew up in North Carolina. The woman who is Black changed her hair style 3 times in the months they worked together. At a work retreat the co-worker who is Latina says “Oh my goodness, you changed your hair again and took out your braids. It is gorgeous can I touch your hair?”

What is your understanding of the details of the situation?

What is lived experience that informs your bias about the situation?

What is your opinion about the situation?

What is occurring with each character?

Is this an instance of a microaggression?

If so, is it an insult, a dismissal, a curiosity, and/or an annoyance?

What should they do to move forward?

Where are you from?

An older white couple from the pacific northwest of the US travels to Atlanta. On the way home from the airport, they are in a cab with a driver who is a younger black man and appears to be from another country originally because of his accent. One of the passengers asks him where he is from. The driver answers that he is from Washington DC. The passenger answers, “Oh cool, what do you think of Washington DC? After they talk for a while about Washington DC, the driver also mentions that he grew up in Nairobi and they all continue to talk about the differences between different cities for the rest of the ride.

What is your understanding of the details of the situation?

What is lived experience that informs your bias about the situation?

What is your opinion about the situation?

What is occurring with each character?

Is this an instance of a microaggression?

If so, is it an insult, a dismissal, a curiosity, and/or an annoyance?

What should they do to move forward?

You speak so eloquently.

A young African American male delivers a speech on the importance of community members sacrificing now for the next generation to live in a more humane, safe and just world. The speech is full of research, citations and personal experiences. After the speech and question and answer session, the young man is approached by an older white woman. Without mentioning any of the content in his speech she says, “You are so eloquent, you must have been to toastmasters, you speak so well!” After she walks away an older white man makes similar comments about how well he pronounced words and did not offer anything else he learned. The young man is left to process that experience.

What is your understanding of the details of the situation?

What is lived experience that informs your bias about the situation?

What is your opinion about the situation?

What is occurring with each character?

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What should they do to move forward?

Not addressing a woman as a decision maker in a situation

A man and woman go to a car dealership to look for a car. They are in a committed partnership and will both be paying for the car. However, they have decided the car will be in the woman's name and she will do most of the negotiation because she has more experience with buying cars. (And enjoys the sales process.) When the couple enters the car dealership a male salesperson approaches the couple and spends the next 30 minutes talking and asking questions. He only makes eye contact with the man and asks questions of the man. Even when the woman addresses him directly, he turns to the man to answer.

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What is your opinion about the situation?

What is occurring with each character?

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What should they do to move forward?

“Dr.” Correction

Training is scheduled for all managers and directors of the organization. The training is a zoom meeting where all participants are required to have their camera on, and full names spelled out. During the training a white male manager who has been with the company for 28 years makes a comment that one of their old processes that he helped implement should stay the same: “If it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.” His director, who is a black woman, cuts him off while he is speaking to provide arguments as to why the change is necessary. After being cut off, he says “Ms. Jones, I wasn't done speaking. She replies, “It’s Dr. Jones.” Afterwards, the story went viral on Twitter and the manager was fired from the company for insubordination.

What is your understanding of the details of the situation?

What is lived experience that informs your bias about the situation?

What is your opinion about the situation?

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What should they do to move forward?

Dean at University

A new, incoming student, is seeking help with his new educational program and is directed to go speak with the Dean of the department. When the student arrives at the Dean's office, he is asked if he was sent to her by someone from the Admissions Office. The student replies by saying..." Yes Ma'am Dean Williams". The Dean immediately responds to the student..." It is Dr. Williams; I have earned this title". She feels like the male student enacted a microaggression.

What is your understanding of the details of the situation?

What is lived experience that informs your bias about the situation?

What is your opinion about the situation?

What is occurring with each character?

Is this an instance of a microaggression?

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What should they do to move forward?

Youthful Adult

A trainer noticed that when she shared her knowledge about the human resources field, there was a lot of push-back and defensiveness about her knowledge pertaining to benefits and retirement. Until she shared an example of an experience with the lack of benefits as a mom of two and a wife. Afterward, a participant says openly, “oh I get your perspective better now. You’re the same age as me. Thanks so much for your insight.”

What is your understanding of the details of the situation?

What is lived experience that informs your bias about the situation?

What is your opinion about the situation?

What is occurring with each character?

Is this an instance of a microaggression?

If so, is it an insult, a dismissal, a curiosity, and/or an annoyance?

What should they do to move forward?

NOW WHAT?

When is it appropriate to have pro-active conversations about what you've explored in this packet with your co-workers? Check all that apply and book the meeting on the calendar.

- One-on-One Meetings
- Team Meetings
- Client Team Meetings
- Manager One-on-One Meetings
- Company Town Hall

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR CONTINUED DIALOGUE:

- Is this a feeling?
- Is this an action?
- How does this connect with intent vs. impact? Whose responsibility is it to address microaggression?
- How does using the word microaggression connect to call outs and call-ins?
- Do we need to have a policy, protocol, or practice in addressing microaggressions at Fenton and with our clients?
- How can we create learning moments from microaggression conversations connected to larger systemic issues/problems that we support our clients in messaging? Institutional/systemic racism, poverty, etc.
- What is a material change we can make from having conversations about microaggressions?