

Turning Challenging (DEI) Conversations Into Inclusive Dialogs



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Goals for Today

- Understand what makes DEI conversations difficult or challenging
- Learn steps on how to prepare to have challenging DEI conversations
- Take away strategies on how to turn challenging DEI conversations into inclusive and meaningful dialog

Brave Spaces Conversation Agreements

- Make space, take space
- Embrace complexity and divergence
- Speak from your understanding
- Honor intent and attend to impact
- Try to be concise
- Listen to understand
- Uphold confidentiality of personal stories

What Makes DEI Conversations Challenging?

-  Different values and beliefs
-  Language, accents, body language
-  Lack of experience / knowledge
-  Biases, assumptions and stereotypes
-  Emotions: fear, anger, frustration
-  Different communication styles

Comments That Make DEI Conversations Challenging

1. *"Can I speak to someone who speaks REAL English?"*
2. *"DEI is a concerted effort to retaliate against White men."*
3. *"You ladies just take care of the landscaping and clean up; leave the framing to the men."*
4. *"I have been doing things this way for a long time; I don't see any reason to change now."*

What do you think are the reasons behind each one?

General Guidelines **Before** You Respond

1. Consider **context before** speaking up, including surroundings, safety, support, person, relationship.
2. Be careful not to insult, educate, punish, shame, blame or guilt.
3. Resist urge to be defensive.
4. Choose your words wisely. Consider the impact of your words.
5. Accept that we all have triggers, biases and prejudices.
6. Know that the other person's perspective is their reality.
7. Avoid attitudes that suggest all your perspectives are 100% correct.
8. Consider if your comment makes the situation worse and/or give more power to the speaker.
9. Consider the status and power differential between you and the person.

Source: *Responding to Every Day Bigotry: Speak Up!*, Teaching Tolerance, Southern Poverty Law Center, www.tolerance.org

General Guidelines When Responding – Step 1

If the person is aggravated, aggressive, yelling, disrespectful, cursing, or you're feeling unsafe, this becomes a workplace disciplinary or hostile work environment issue.

- *I need to stop you right there as we don't speak like that at Habitat.*
- *I am going to ask you to rephrase what you just said because that doesn't sound respectful.*
- *If you insist on continuing with this tone of voice, I'm going to ask that we regroup later when you've had a chance to rethink what message you want me to hear. What would you like to do?*

General Guidelines When Responding – Step 2

When they are ready to continue the conversation in a more respectful tone, you can say:

- *Thank you for speaking up. I see that you have some strong reactions and concerns about DEI. Let's talk about why you believe this and where these beliefs come from.*
- *What has been your experience with DEI? How has that experience informed what you believe is true?*
- *Help me better understand why you feel this way.*

Difficult Conversation Starters

1. *I would really like to understand what got us here...*
2. *I am/was just wondering (or curious) what caused the breakdown ...*
3. *I am curious if you might be feeling the same way I am about what happened the other day..*
4. *Could you please tell me more about ...*
5. *I really want to sort this out and wondering if you do too? Can we begin with you sharing what you think happened?*

What would YOU say?

Source: Jeremy Solomons & Associates

Tool for Handling Challenging DEI Conversations

Calling Someone Out (Transactional)	Calling Someone In (Relational)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When we need to let someone know that their words/actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When there's an opportunity to explore deeper, make meaning together, and find a mutual sense of understanding across difference.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When we need to interrupt in order to prevent further harm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When we are seeking to understand or learn more.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will likely feel hard and uncomfortable, but necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When we want to help imagine different perspectives, possibilities, or outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows us to hit the "pause" button and break the momentum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focused on reflection, not reaction.

Calling Someone Out

Wow. Nope. Ouch. I need to stop you right there.	That word/comment is really triggering and offensive. Be mindful and pick a different word.	I need to push back against that. I disagree and don't see it that way.
I'm having a strong reaction to that and I need to let you know why.	I don't find that funny. Tell me why that's funny to you.	I wonder if you've considered the impact of your words.
Hmmm.. maybe you want to think this one through a bit more and talk about it later.	It sounded like you just said _____. Is that really what you meant?	I feel obligated as your peer/colleague/co-worker /friend/supervisor to tell you that your comment wasn't okay.
It sounds like you're making some assumptions that we need to unpack a little.	You may or may not realize this, but you're talking about me: my story/my identity/my experience.	I need to leave the room if the conversation is going to continue down this road.

Source: Tufts University: Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In

Calling Someone In

I'm curious what your intention was when you said that?	How might the impact of your words/actions differ from your intent?	What sort of impact do you think your decisions/ comment/action might have?
How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone might misinterpret your words/actions?	How might your own comfort level, assumptions, expectations, prior experiences be influencing your beliefs, decisions, process?	How is ____ different from ____? What is the connection between ____ and ____?
What criteria are you using to measure/assess etc?	How did you decide, determine, conclude...	What would have to change in order for ____?
What do you assume to be true about ____?	Why is this the best way to proceed? What other approaches have you considered?	What is making you the most fearful, nervous, uncomfortable or worried?
Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?	Why do you think others have/haven't moved in that direction?	How do you know it's working?
Why did the result or response cause a problem for you?	What would other stakeholders say/think/feel?	In your opinion, what is the best case scenario?
Adapted from the School Reform Initiative Pocket Guide to Probing Questions		

Practice Example: How Would You Respond Using Calling In or Calling Out?

How would you prepare to respond?

1. <i>Pause, take a deep breath</i>	2. <i>Feel whatever you need to feel (frustration, anger)</i>
3. <i>Wait until you're calm to engage</i>	4. <i>Decide whether you even want or need to respond</i>

Comment: *"DEI is a concerted effort to retaliate against White men/people."*

Call them out:

- *"It sounds like you're making some assumptions that we need to unpack a little."*
- *"I need to push back against that statement. I disagree and don't see it that way. I'd be interested in seeing data that supports that statement."*

Call them in:

- *"I'm curious about your statement. What's behind it? (Why do you believe this?)"*
- *"DEI is about making safer and more respectful workplaces, strengthening everyone's well being and ending discrimination. However, this work can be challenging. I'd love to hear your thoughts on how we can make it more effective for everyone here."*

Adapted from: Lily Zheng DEI Strategist & Author of *DEI Deconstructed: Your No-Nonsense Guide to Doing the Work and Doing it Right*.

Difficult Conversation Starters - Source: Jeremy Solomons & Associates

1. *I would really like to understand what got us here...*
2. *I am/was just wondering (curious) what caused the breakdown ...*
3. *I am curious if you might be feeling the same way I am about what happened the other day..*
4. *Could you please tell me more about ...*
5. *I really want to sort this out and wondering if you do too? Can we begin with you sharing what you think happened?*

What would YOU say?

When Considering What to Say...

Please use your own style and words so it sounds and feels natural and authentic.

- **Communicate how you feel in a way that helps others understand your intentions:**
 - *"Wait, can we pause this conversation and talk about what was just said and what I heard?"*
 - *"I'm having a reaction to what I just heard; I'm wondering if you would be willing to engage in a conversation about it?"*
 - *"What are some of your thoughts about what is going on here?"*

Engagement Strategies for Inclusive Dialog

Ask questions to uncover facts, not judgments

- *"Can you help me understand what it was that (I/he/she/they) said that offended you?"*
- *I'm curious if there might be another explanation for what you/we just heard/saw? / or another way of looking at this situation? (frame switching)*

Know that other person's perspective is their reality

- *"I'm having a difficult time understanding your perspective... would you mind helping me understand what you meant, and the intention behind your statement?"*

Pay Attention to Nonverbal Cues

"I noticed (your face turning red, nervous shifting, crossing arms, etc.) when I was sharing my feedback.

I'm curious what you were responding to?

Can we talk about it?"

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCENARIO BREAKOUTS

1. The room will be divided into 4 "quadrants"
2. Each quadrant will be assigned one of the scenarios.
3. Organize yourselves into small groups and discuss strategies on how you would prepare and then respond to the questions in each scenario.
4. Make sure to use the ideas presented so far, as well as the Calling Out/In tool in your answers.
5. Take turns to act out the scenario from your role's perspective and use your own words, if you wish.
6. Be prepared to share during the debrief in the plenary.

SCENARIO #1

You are Jill, an enthusiastic volunteer for HFH. You love building houses for HFH and have been doing so for many years. You've been working on a home for the past several months with other volunteers. From the beginning, however, you've noticed that you and other women are usually assigned tasks like clean up or landscaping instead of framing or working on siding. Even though you know perfectly well how to use heavy tools, you are told by several some male volunteers that "ladies shouldn't do that." You are frustrated, angry and insulted. You want to say something to stand up for yourself, but don't know how. However, you don't want anyone to quit or get angry. What could you do?

Discussion:

- If you are Jill, how would you have a dialog with the men to call them in?
- If you're the man who's just been called in, how would you respond using difficult conversation starter ideas?
- If you're the ED or Manager and your volunteer shared this with you, what would you do and say to the volunteer?

SCENARIO #2

You are a new employee who is one of the “younger” ones at your affiliate. In the past several months you have been feeling disrespected and “belittled” for not having enough experience, while being addressed and referred to frequently as “kid.” You’re getting a little tired of this and want to address this the next time it happens.

Discussion:

- If you are the younger employee, how would you address this respectfully and inclusively the next time it happens? What would you do to prepare? Which of the conversation starts would you use?
- If you are the unintentioned offender, what would you say to the younger employee in response? How would you respond using the suggested phrases and difficult conversation starters?
- If you are an upstander, ED or manager who witnesses this, what would you say and/or do?

SCENARIO #3

You are Fernanda, a Latina who was hired by HFH six months ago as a volunteer coordinator. You are very passionate about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and noticed that you are the only person of color in your affiliate. Your affiliate also does not have a DEI statement, a committee, or any goals to advance DEI even though you know HFH is committed to breaking down barriers, to bring people of all backgrounds together, to generate equity, respect and lasting change. You also have several homeowners with diverse backgrounds. Many are immigrants and people of color, others have visible disabilities, some are single moms and survivors of assault and domestic violence.

You try bringing up the topic to your supervisor and your Executive Director (ED), but they inform you that the Board of Directors doesn’t think there’s a problem. So the subject is dropped. How can you have a conversation to move DEI forward so that it is a part of the business plan?

Discussion:

- What would you say if you were Fernanda to your manager to highlight the importance (or business case) of DEI?
- If you are the ED, how would you respond positively in support of DEI?
- If you’re a board member, how would you respond in support of DEI?

SCENARIO #4

You are the Executive Director (ED) of your affiliate. Sam, an experienced ReStore manager, has been at HFH for over 20 years; he loves his work, and reports directly to you. However, in recent months, you’ve overheard disrespectful comments in the hallway, by volunteers and ReStore employees about Sam being referred to as *“that older guy who struggles with keeping up.”* You also hear through the grapevine that he’s mentioned that you speak to him condescendingly as if he was inexperienced. He hasn’t spoken with you yet. You understand he’s suffering in silence, is occasionally depressed, and it’s affecting his performance. How would you handle this situation?

Discussion:

- As Sam’s ED, how would you address this with him? What would that sound like?
- What would you say to his colleagues to call them in when you overhear their disrespectful comments about him?
- How would you address this with the volunteers who work with him?

6 Strategies for Inclusive Conversations

1. Ask questions to disarm and clarify intentions.
2. Rally advocates and upstanders
3. Create a culture for courageous, open, & inclusive conversations
4. Frame & practice what you want to say...often
5. Check your biases, assumptions & stereotypes
6. Use Calling In / Calling Out Tool

Commitments to Action

1. What is at least one thing I've learned, appreciated or been reminded of today about challenging DEI conversations?

2. What is at least one thing that I will do from now on to create a culture of inclusive and courageous dialog at my affiliate and community?

Resources for Inclusive Conversations

- *35 Dumb Things Well-Intended People Say*: Maura Cullen (Morgan James, 2008)
- *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*: Amanda Ripley (Simon and Schuster, 2021)
- *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts*: Dan Shapiro (Penguin, 2016)
- *Compassionate Conversations: How to Speak and Listen from the Heart*: Diane Hamilton, Gabriel Wilson and Kimberly Loh (Shambhala, 2021)
- *Don't Call People Out, Call Them In*: Loretta J. Ross (TED, 2022)
- Calling In v. Calling Out: <https://diversity.tufts.edu/resources/interrupting-bias-calling-out-vs-calling-in/>
- *DEI Deconstructed: Your No-Nonsense Guide to Doing the Work and Doing it Right*: Lily Zheng

In one word or short phrase, reflect on one learning or takeaway from today's session.

Notes:

SUGGESTED RESPONSES TO THE FOUR SCENARIOS

SCENARIO #1

You are Jill, an enthusiastic volunteer for HFH. You love building houses for HFH and have been doing so for many years. You've been working on a home for the past several months with other volunteers. From the beginning, however, you've noticed that you and other women are usually assigned tasks like clean up or landscaping instead of framing or working on siding. Even though you know perfectly well how to use heavy tools, you are told by some male volunteers that "ladies shouldn't do that." You are frustrated, angry, and insulted. You want to say something to stand up for yourself, but don't know exactly what to say since you don't want anyone to quit or get angry. What could you do?

Discussion:

- **If you are Jill, how would you have a dialog with the men to call them in?**

PREPARATION & RESPONSES:

1. Prepare for the dialog by practicing what you want to say, what your goals are, and to imagine "what if" responses. Practice how you would respond to each of these possible responses/reactions.
 2. Schedule an appointment with all your fellow volunteers and let them know you have something important to share with them.
 3. After you thank them for showing up, say:
 - *"I've been a volunteer here for many years; I know some of you are fairly new and others have been here longer than I have. It's come to my attention, and that of other women volunteers, that we seem to be relegated to menial tasks like kitchen clean up, landscaping, and little odd jobs instead of more hands-on building work, such as framing or working on siding.*
 - *We know you mean well when you say things like, "ladies shouldn't do that." Or "that's a man's job." However, how it lands on some of us, and especially on me, is that we women aren't capable of doing what you do, which isn't true. I, for one, have had 10 years' experience installing siding, and I'm perfectly comfortable using power tools. Others may have basic skills and volunteer in part so they have opportunities to apply them on behalf of this wonderful organization.*
 - *I'm wondering when we can discuss this further and come up with a plan to assign tasks more equitably so that all of us have opportunities to fully utilize and develop our skills?"*
- **If you're the man who's just been called in, how would you respond, using difficult conversation starter ideas?**
 - *"Thank you for speaking up about the impact comments like these have had on you. We didn't realize this was the case!*
 - *May I suggest we schedule a meeting to identify what tasks you're willing to take on so we don't insult you inadvertently? And of course, we will re-do the schedules accordingly."*

- **If you're the ED or Manager and your volunteer shared this with you, what would you do and say to the volunteer?**
 - *"I'm so sorry this happened to you and the other women. What was it like for you to experience this?"*
 - *"What can I do to rectify this situation, or would you like to handle this yourself?"*
 - *"I will make sure my staff monitors these behaviors on sites to make sure this doesn't repeat itself."*
 - *"I appreciate your candor and willingness to come forward to share that something uncomfortable happened. It helps us to know so that we can address problematic behaviors and consider whether process or policy changes could help prevent similar situations in the future."*

SCENARIO #2

You are a new employee who is one of the "younger" ones at your affiliate. In the past several months, you have been feeling disrespected and "belittled" for not having enough experience, while being addressed and referred to frequently as a "kid." You're getting a little tired of this and want to address this the next time it happens.

Discussion:

- If you are the younger employee, how would you address this respectfully and inclusively the next time it happens? What would you do to prepare? Which of the conversation starts would you use?

PREPARATION & ANSWERS:

- Prepare by checking with yourself about why being addressed as a "kid" bothers you. What emotion(s) does that evoke? Could it be that this has happened multiple times repeatedly and you're tired of it? Does it make you feel your experiences or contributions aren't valued? Is it demeaning and insulting to you? Identifying the "why" helps you to understand yourself and the feelings such comments bring up better, which can help you know how to respond.
- Prepare by practicing. Say *out loud* how you would respond:
 - How will you center yourself so you can respond in a calm manner so that others are able to hear" what you want to say?
 - Think about what words have deeper meaning for you, words that best describe the impact of what's said to you. E.g. *"When I heard the word "kid" used to refer to me, I feel unappreciated and disrespected, like my perspectives and ideas don't matter."*
- Then practice asking for what you need from your colleagues:
 - *"What I need from you is to feel valued, included, and like I belong and matter here. I'm proud to be a member of this team as we do such meaningful work for folks who would not otherwise have the means (or ability) to be homeowners. I want to be acknowledged for my contributions and not stereotyped for my age."*
- **If you are the unintentional offender, what would you say to the younger employee in response? How would you respond using the suggested phrases and difficult conversation starters?**
 - *"I'm so sorry I offended you. I had no idea and am glad you spoke up. Can you help me understand what it was that I said that offended you so I won't repeat it in future?"*

- *“I really appreciate your speaking up. I had no idea my words were disrespectful. I will be much more thoughtful and careful in future.”*
- **If you an upstander, ED, or manager who witnesses this, what would you say and/or do?**
 - First, speak with your younger employee to ask how they’re feeling. Listen to how they feel about the comment, and, if it came across to the younger employee as a slight, ask whether there’s anything you can do to rectify the situation. Let them know you’re willing to do whatever it takes to make sure this doesn’t happen again, including speaking to the offender.
 - Speak to the unintentional offender privately. Be sure to use empathy with the intention to seek to understand their perspective:
 - *“I understand that (name of younger employee) felt disrespected during a conversation between the two of you. I know sometimes we have good intentions but the impact may be different from what we intended. Would you be willing to share your perspective?”*
 - You might suggest that they apologize if they haven’t done so already.
 - If the younger employee didn’t “hear” the comment or “read” the situation the way you did, consider whether this is still something that should still be addressed in a larger conversation, now or in another context in the future.

SCENARIO #3

You are Fernanda, a Latina who was hired by HFH six months ago as a volunteer coordinator. You are very passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and noticed that you are the only person of color in your affiliate. Your affiliate also does not have a DEI statement, a committee, or any goals to advance DEI even though you know HFH is committed to breaking down barriers and to bringing people of all backgrounds together to generate equity, respect, and lasting change. You also have several homeowners with diverse backgrounds. Many are immigrants and people of color, others have visible disabilities, some are single moms and survivors of assault and domestic violence.

You try bringing up the topic to your supervisor and your Executive Director (ED), but they inform you that the Board of Directors doesn’t think there’s a problem. So the subject is dropped. How can you have a conversation to move DEI forward so that it is a part of the business plan?

Discussion:

- **What would you say if you were Fernanda to your manager to highlight the importance (or business case) of DEI?**

PREPARATION:

- Do some background research about whether the affiliate has had any discussions about DEI in the past. If so, what were the details? Why has the initiative not moved forward?
- If not, there are several things Fernanda can do to determine whether her affiliate is ready for a DEI initiative. Perform your own **DEI organizational culture scan (OCS)** which is essentially asking two key questions:
 - 1) What’s working well here?
 - 2) What could be different? (i.e., more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and/or accessible?)

Other actions:

- Start to notice during staff or volunteer meetings whether anyone is talked over/ interrupted more frequently, whether decisions are made equitably, if anyone appears unhappy, excluded, or seems to feel like they don't belong. If so, how often are these occurring?
 - Speak with your colleagues to see how often their input is or is not solicited before decisions are made and whether they feel their input is fully considered.
 - How often do you notice conflict, misunderstanding, and/or slights, insults or microaggressions between older and younger employees and/or volunteers?
 - What percentage of your homeowners speak English as a second language? Do they struggle with having to fill in forms in English? Is there someone at your affiliate who speaks their language?
 - Is your affiliate having difficulty with employee retention and/or turnover?
 - Do all employees have equal opportunities for professional development?
 - How effective is your affiliate's onboarding process for new employees and new board of director members? Are they expected to fend for themselves?
 - Track and document what you observe so you can share specifics to support the concerns you want to share.
 - [Your own ideas.]
- Once Fernanda has some data, schedule a meeting with her manager via email or do it during a scheduled one-on-one. Share the results of her research and show how inclusive and equitable practices can benefit not just homeowners but also employees and volunteers.

ANSWERS (what to say):

• **If you are the ED, how would you respond positively in support of DEI?**

- *Context: the ED is now speaking to the leadership team:*
 - *"I'm so glad Fernanda mentioned her interest and enthusiasm about DEI and brought it to my attention. We have had some interest in the past, but no one had the capacity or the interest in carrying it forward. So, it was dropped. Based on the data that Fernanda has now brought forth, it is evident there is a clear opportunity for us to focus on making this a priority here. I'd like for us to start by forming a DEI Committee to discuss what our purpose is, and how we wish to move forward. I will see if we have some grant dollars for this and then hire a consultant to lead us in this important effort, unless one of you has the experience. What do you all think?"*

• **If you're a board member, how would you respond in support of DEI?**

- *Context: DEI is an agenda item you (the board member) added for discussion at the next Board meeting. You are now speaking up at that meeting.*
- *"It's clear to me that DEI has been and is, a central imperative for Habitat for Humanity. Our mission is to ensure that we create a world where everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from, has a decent place to live. And, in order to create this world, our work must always break down barriers across difference so we can bring people of all faiths and backgrounds together to generate equity, inclusion, respect, and lasting change. Habitat's leaders have committed to creating an environment where humility, open communication for vulnerable, courageous dialogue and listening are our standard. We come together in a common cause to being actively anti-racist. I'm 100 percent onboard, and I hope you are too. If not, let's discuss it. Once we are ready, let's get a plan together on how to move forward."*

SCENARIO #4

You are the Executive Director (ED) of your affiliate. Sam, an experienced ReStore manager, has been at HFH for over 20 years; he loves his work, and reports directly to you. However, in recent months, you've overheard disrespectful comments in the hallway, by volunteers and ReStore employees about Sam being referred to as *"that older guy who struggles with keeping up."* You also hear through the grapevine that he's mentioned that you speak to him condescendingly as if he was inexperienced. He hasn't spoken with you yet. You believe he's suffering in silence and may occasionally be depressed. You observe that his performance has changed. How would you handle this situation?

Discussion:

- **As Sam's ED, how would you address this with him? What would that sound like?**
 - Context: As ED I would schedule a 1:1 with him in a private location ASAP so he's not left wondering if he's done anything "wrong." He's now in my office.
 - *"Thank you, Sam for accepting my ad hoc invitation to get together. I'm sure you're probably wondering what the topic is. Before I get into that, how are you doing? (and other pleasantries). I wanted to see how you're really doing, especially since I've been overhearing some disrespectful age-related comments about the older employees here, which I find disturbing. I've also been made aware that the way I am communicating with you is condescending. That's why I wanted to apologize to you in person for my thoughtless and condescending behavior. I have no excuse for that. [pause] I want you to call me out the next time this happens, which I hope doesn't. Do you think you can do that?"*
 - *I'd like very much also to put a stop to the ageist comments I understand other employees and volunteers have said to you. Is there anything you'd like me to specifically address or say to them on your behalf?*
- **What would you say to his colleagues to call them in when you overhear their disrespectful comments about him?**
 - *"I just overheard what was just said about Sam. I'm wondering how Sam might respond to that and what the impact is? I'm also curious what your intention was?"*
- **How would you address this with the volunteers who work with him?**
 - *"I just overheard what was just said about Sam, our ReStore manager. I'm wondering how Sam might respond to that and what the impact is? I'm also curious how well you really know him? He's been here for 20+ years and has an excellent work ethic. He's certainly taught me a lot since I got here a few years ago. I'm wondering what you might be able to learn from him as well. I'd like to invite you to get a cup of coffee with Sam, get to know him as another human being who's dedicated to our work and see what you can find in common...I think you'll really enjoy his ReStore stories!"*