

How Little Things Can Cause Such Big Problems: Microaggressions at Work

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With Your Partner Discuss the Following:

- 1) What's Up? What is going on in the world of EEO/HR?
- 2) Discuss your level of understanding of Microaggressions and Microinequities.
- 3) What do you want to gain from this session?

Ground Rules

Respect

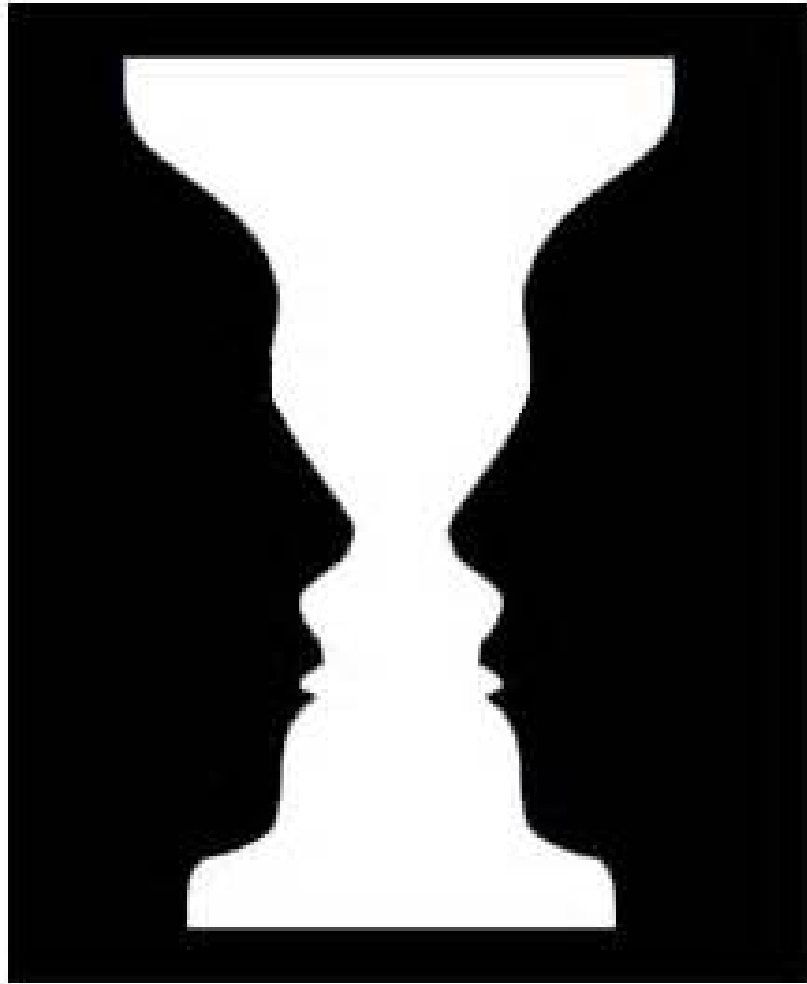
- Listen respectfully; seek to understand
- Listen harder when you disagree

Challenge Yourself

Engage in open and honest dialogue

Assume good intent

Be Open to New & Different Perspectives



Microaggressions

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

Microinequities

Microinequities are apparently small events which are often ephemeral and hard-to-prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognized by the perpetrator, which occur wherever people are perceived to be “different”.

Microaggressions

Usually outside of conscious awareness

Represent a clash of experiences

Create a hostile and invalidating climate

We all microaggress

Microaggressions Examples

A Black employee is complimented as being very articulate and bright.

- May be interpreted as: Most Black people are inarticulate and not intelligent

An Asian American/Hispanic American is complimented for speaking such “Good English”.

- May be interpreted as: Asian Americans/Hispanic Americans are perpetual aliens in their own country.

Microaggressions Examples

A female physician wearing a stethoscope is mistaken by medical students for a nurse.

- May be interpreted as: Women should occupy nurturing and not decision-making roles. Women are less capable than men.

Employees refer to a fellow straight employee, who is socially ostracized, as “gay” (“That’s so gay!”)

- May be interpreted as: People considered weird, strange, deviant or different are “gay”.

Micro-inequities Examples

Boss greets everyone in an elevator but one person.

A group of employees go out for drinks after work and leave one person on the team consistently out.

A female makes a suggestion, and it is ignored but a male colleague makes the suggestion, and it is accepted.

Repeatedly mispronouncing your name or misspelling your name

Constantly being interrupted while you are talking

Being introduced as someone else of the same race

Invitations that while inclusive are uncomfortable for some



In 2014, NBC's Today show host Matt Lauer asked Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors if she could be a good mother and effective CEO of a major company



“Sexism is not a glass ceiling. It’s a labyrinth of micro-inequities that add up over a lifetime”

AMY CUDDY

Professor at Harvard Business School

What Happened to Jane?

Jane and Bob are hired for a difficult and highly stressful job. The job is crucial to the operation of the company. As a result, people in this job are expected to produce and produce quickly or they are fired and replaced.

There are eight people in the department. Jane is the only woman. Six months after they are hired Bob passes his probation and is given a nice raise. Jane is fired for low productivity and poor performance (making errors). HR can't figure out why women have historically not performed well in this position, since no one in the department is overtly sexist and women are held to the same performance standards as men.

How could microaggressions/microinequities have been a factor in Jane's demise?

Microaggression Themes

Ascription of intelligence

Alien on own land

Denial

Criminality

Intrinsic Skills

Denial of Individual prejudice

Myth of meritocracy

Microaggressions Come From Many
Different Places

Microaggressions

Purposeful or repeated

- May need to involve management or allies

Not thinking

- Education about other people's experiences may help them understand the impact microaggressions have on people and may help keep them mindful

Unconscious bias

- There's a reason it is called "unconscious"

Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.

Which is more likely:

A) Linda is a bank teller

B) Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement

5% Rule

“95% of what we tell you is true we have never seen. We think it is true based on the 5% we have seen” Harold Meyers (assumptions)

What is the first 5% we notice about the people we meet?

Can have an affect on our perceptions of others

Speaking While Female (Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant), New York Times, 2015

“A University of Texas researcher, Ethan Burris, conducted an experiment in which he asked teams to make strategic decisions for a bookstore. He randomly informed one member that the bookstore’s inventory system was flawed and gave that person data about a better approach. In subsequent analyses, he found that when women challenged the old system and suggested a new one, team leaders viewed them as less loyal and were less likely to act on their suggestions. Even when all team members were informed that one member possessed unique information that would benefit the group, suggestions from women with inside knowledge were discounted.”

Intent vs. Impact

Small Things Can Create Big Problems

Victim blaming

- Why are you so defensive?
- You are so loud and rude!
- You are hyper-sensitive!

Cumulative result

- Can be the feeling, if not reality, that bias exists.

It's not about agreement – or the intent

- We will not always agree

It's about perception

- Do I have an obligation to you?

How Do We Address It As Managers?

Issues of a diverse workforce

The manager's problem:

- Sometimes you must decide who's right

We should push back against “I’m right” because it is too easy, becomes a reflex

Relationships are as important as “being right”

Issues of a diverse workforce

“Right” can be in the eye of the beholder

Some people just aren't very self-aware

Radical Candor (caring and direct)

- Can work only if underlying relationship is trusting and solid
- This is why psychological safety is important

Caring provides context to all our conversations

- So does uncaring

Communication

It takes two, a sender and a receiver

They have to agree on terms in order to understand each other, so our brains are continually on the look out for context

Context helps us understand each other's meanings

Context alters the definitions of terms

It's not about intent. It's about communication. We're all responsible for what we communicate.

Tips for Managers

Remember, microaggressions are isolating, and a team isn't a team unless everyone participates

Pay attention to possible microaggressions/microinequities

Remember that EVERYONE will microaggress

Active listening is KEY

Open and honest communication builds trust

Ally for those who are marginalized

Start the conversation

The New Labor Market

Addressing workplace behavior is not just about limiting legal liability, it is the the first step in recruitment

We need to recruit our own people.

- Employees are feeling isolated and disconnected from their employers. **Are we giving them reasons to stay?**

How Do We Address It As Individuals?

Our response...as a person

Did she just say what I think she said?

What did he mean by that?

Should I say something?

Will saying something make it worse?

Will she think I'm overreacting?

Will speaking up hurt more than help?

Our response...as a person

Empathy works both ways

- Most of the time the microaggression is done without malice,
- **Not excusing behavior**; instead, understanding what may work best with that particular person in that particular circumstance
- Our experiences are not common – we all have blind spots
- No one size fits all approach

Our response...as a person

Think of a time when you were subjected to a microaggression:

- Who was the person? (co-worker, supervisor, friend, unacquainted)
- What were the specific circumstances? (purposeful, unthinking, unconscious, quick, deliberate, repeated, triggering)
- What was the overall environment like? (toxic, open, empowered)

How did you respond?

- Did it resolve the situation, and did it salvage the relationship?

Strategies (Assess)

Who is the microaggressor (power status)?

Do you have friends in the room? Who?

Where is this coming from, in your estimation?

- Purposeful
- Not thinking
- Unconscious bias

The Conversation...

State purpose (if you can agree on purpose, you're most of the way there)

Be specific about behavior

Be specific about impact (our experiences are not common)

- **Its not about right or wrong; it's about the relationship**
- If you feel the conversation veering off in the wrong direction, paraphrase, re-state what you hear, and bring back to purpose

Leave with positive intention

What if you have no idea what I'm talking about?

If this is not in your set of experiences, remember this:

- Uncommon experiences are common
- Do your homework. Talk to people. Hear their experiences.
- You don't have to agree
 - But avoid victim blaming
- Impact is important
- Remember the obligations we have to one another

Let's talk about context

Before you throw your hands up and say, “I can't say anything to anyone,” remember this,

- We all microaggress and
- “caring” also provides context

The purpose of this exercise was not to scare you into silence, it was to give you some understanding that people's experiences influence how they hear and see things

Google and Project Aristotle

The best functioning groups created a sense of “psychological safety”

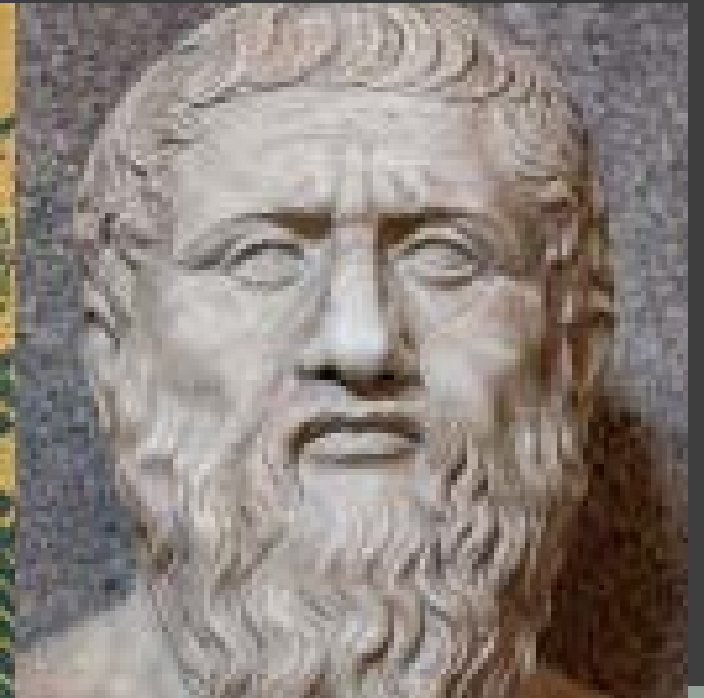
- The idea that a person will not be punished for making a mistake (team activity)

Group members exercise high degrees of social sensitivity

Or to put it another way, groups work best when the number one priority of each member is the objective of the group, not winning

Disagreements are productive, but once they become personal, they become destructive (goal shifts to individual – winning)

BE KIND, FOR EVERYONE YOU MEET IS FIGHTING A HARD BATTLE.
-- PLATO OR SOMEONE ELSE



If you remember nothing else from this training, remember this...

- 1) We all have different experiences, and those experiences influence how we see the world**
- 2) We all microaggress**
- 3) We have obligations to each other**



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