TREC TOGETHER RISING AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY

TREC DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION RESOURCE

Preparing for Courageous Conversations & Personal Influence Activity

Activity Type

- Reading
- Large and small group discussion
- Individual Reflection
- Remote or in-person

Activity Time

- 60 minutes

Issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and identity are personal, sensitive, and can be emotionally challenging to address, no matter how our individual experiences impact our world views, how we relate to others, and how we approach our work. Examining and reflecting on those experiences and our ***personal influence*** can help us uncover individual and systemic biases, remove barriers to communication and collaboration with colleagues, and ultimately create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable work culture.

Some people may be hesitant to do this work because of previous experiences where they may have felt vulnerable, been attacked or experienced criticism. Before beginning these courageous conversations, it's important to make sure everyone makes a commitment to creating a constructive and authentic discussion together. To honor and respect people's lived experiences and points of view, another important skill is listening. In discussing DEI topics, it's important that each person can feel heard, and to listen deeply to other's lived experiences and discussion points. This exercise is one way to start having these courageous conversations in a way that is meaningful, intentional, and productive. It can be done in person or virtually.

Preparing for Courageous Conversations

Before beginning the exercise, post/share group agreements and review before proceeding. Some suggested group agreements are below, which can and should be added to/modified if participants have other ideas for ensuring the conversation is productive for everyone (It's a good idea to have these written up/posted so everyone can see them). Explanations, if needed, *are in italics.*

Sample Group Agreements

- Default to trust - *when in doubt, trust other participants*
- Instead of a safe space, we want to facilitate a "brave space" in the conversation - *stretch ourselves to be frank and respectfully honest*
- Be all in – *important to be present, fully a part of the conversation, even when listening*
- Share the Air - *be mindful of who is speaking more or less*
- One mic - *no interruptions*
- What is said stays, what is learned is shared - *respect confidentiality of peoples' stories*
- Respect the cultural knowledge and identities you bring to the discussion
- Commit to taking a look at your own biases
- Be observant - *notice and name group dynamics if needed*
- Be accountable to each other if action steps are identified
- Take care of yourself - *take breaks if needed or let leader/facilitator know if you're having difficulty participating*

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Personal Influence Activity

1. In a large group, ask participants to read Margaret Wheatley's, "Willing to Be Disturbed". This can be done individually before the session or during the session. - 10 minutes

2. Ask participants the debrief questions below. Take 2-3 responses for each question. – 5 minutes

a. What were your initial impressions?
b. What questions did it raise for you?
c. What is something you learned or want to take away from this reading?

3. In silence, individually reflect on the Personal Identity questions below. Participants can write their responses if they choose. Responses will not be shared with the larger group unless the participant elects to. - 15 minutes

a. What component of your identity has most shaped your life?
b. What do you believe, and why? What influences (events, people, etc.) have most impacted your life?
c. How would you describe your "class" status when you were growing up as a child? What was that experience like for you?
d. When have you been challenged based on someone else's identity and what was your response?
e. What was your first experience with someone from another race or ethnicity like?
f. What were you taught about people who accessed different government or other supports (ex: financial assistance, food stamps, programs targeting underserved populations)?
g. What were your personal experiences with these kinds of supports and/or how were they perceived by others?
h. What are the most common assumptions/stereotypes about issues of race where you live? What about where you work?
i. How do you think your personal experiences have influenced the way you approach your work? Based on these experiences, what blind spots may you have when approaching your work and working with others?

4. Split into groups (4-8), and respond to the debrief questions. - 15 minutes

a. What themes emerged? Were there any surprises?
b. What was uncomfortable or challenging?
c. What did you learn from this exercise?
d. How have you seen your personal identity influence the way you approach your work? What are the implications for your work individually?
e. What are the implications for us as an organization?

5. Return to the large group to debrief. Have each group elect a representative to share 1-2 responses to the last question, "*What are the implications for us as an organization?*" - 10 minutes

6. Final Reflection: Ask participants to write down (1) takeaway from this exercise that they are bringing into their work. This could be a practice, a reminder, a mindset, etc. These are not to be shared. - 2 minutes

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Reflection Questions

- What is something you learned about yourself?
- What is something you learned about someone else?
- What questions did this exercise raise for you?
- How could you apply something you saw/read to your work?
- What else would you like to learn/explore about this topic?

Additional Resources

- TREC DEI Terms and Definitions
- TREC Personal Blueprint Worksheet - a much more abbreviated version of this activity
- Turning to One Another by Margaret Wheatley - source of reading
- From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice by Brian Areo and Kristi Clemmons

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