

Inclusive Responses in Times of Fear



cook ross 

A Resource Guide for Organizations and Communities

The information in this guide empowers organizations and individuals to respond effectively to current events and engage in meaningful dialogue.

About Cook Ross

Cook Ross Inc. is a consulting firm whose mission is to provide powerful solutions to organizations around the world in the areas of diversity, inclusion, cultural competency, leadership development, and organizational change management. We are committed to creating organizations in which all people communicate effectively, recognize their value, develop themselves as leaders, and contribute powerfully to their organizations.

Introduction

We have been deeply saddened by the numerous recent tragic events in the U.S. and around the world that have increased our sense of fear and “us vs. them”. We carry these emotions with us everywhere we go, including our workplaces.

Organizations often don’t realize how this might significantly impact employee experience and collaboration, day-to-day culture, and organizational reputation, and tend to shy away from discussing these difficult subjects. Silence on these issues, or underestimation of their impact, can leave employees with the impression that organizational leaders are out of touch with what is going on in our world. This might especially affect the organization’s credibility regarding Diversity & Inclusion.

So what can we do in our organizations to engage with these challenges in productive ways that promote, rather than diminish, inclusion? In keeping with our vision to transform organizations around the world to become more conscious, inclusive and humane communities, we have developed this resource guide. The information in this guide empowers organizations and individuals to respond effectively to current events and engage in meaningful dialogue.



Organizational Measures

There are actually a number of important measures that organizations and the people in them can take:

1. **Issue an external public statement** expressing sadness or some sentiment about what has occurred. We recognize that many companies are reluctant to do so. However, it is difficult to remain credible on other Diversity & Inclusion messaging with such a glaring omission. Some Examples:
 - Pandora Radio tweeted the following:
“Our hearts go out to all those who unfairly lost their lives. We stand with marginalized communities. We stand for racial justice. We stand for equity. And we stand together to make this world a better place. #BlackLivesMatter #LoveAboveAll”
 - Chik-fil-A expressed support for the LGBTQ community by providing **free food to victims and family members of victims of the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando**. Just a couple of years ago, Chik-fil-A faced a boycott because of their anti-gay policies.
2. **Provide a safe forum** for employees to voice their feelings.
 - Managers should encourage employees to participate in employee resource group sessions without repercussions.
 - These sessions should be facilitated by someone trained in establishing ground rules and bringing difficult discussions to closure.
3. **Emphasize company values related to Diversity & Inclusion** and ensure that senior leaders model these values in their interactions with employees.
4. **Provide information about support resources** available to them like Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and/or discussions with Human Resources if necessary.

Conducting a Dialogue Around Challenging Issues

Dialogues are designed to bring people together who may represent different points of view, communicate their various perspectives, interpretations and viewpoints for the purpose of mutual understanding. There are a number of key steps to take in creating a constructive dialogue. In preparing for the dialogue, you should be asking the following questions:



1. What is going on in this organization that a dialogue will address?

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2. What are your goals for how this dialogue is intended to positively impact the organization moving forward?

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3. Who are your stakeholders and what is the organizational reality/context for dealing with the issues at hand? Knowing this, what is the most effective and appropriate strategy to move this conversation forward?

4. Who should participate? **It is better to conduct several smaller groups than one that is so large that people do not have a chance to participate fully. Optimum size is generally 20-25 people.**

5. Who should facilitate? **Trained facilitators should be leading dialogue sessions. Their role is not to take a position, but to be a “good faith” neutral facilitator to allow all participants to feel safe and be heard. The freedom of people to speak can be directly related to the safety they feel in the space that is created by the facilitator.**

6. How much time or how many sessions should you plan for? **You want to be sure to have enough time to fully engage. It can be frustrating for participants when they get into the subject and do not have time to fully explore it.**

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7. What do people know about how their leaders relate to the issue?

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8. Have topics like these been discussed within the organization in the past? If so, how might past learning inform this dialogue?

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9. What role can existing groups like diversity councils, employee resource groups, affinity groups, corporate social responsibility colleagues, or community partners play in moving the dialogue forward?

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Pre-Dialogue Questions

You may want to send a series of pre-dialogue questions to prepare people for the dialogue. Examples include:



1. How do you feel about this issue?
2. Are you mostly around people who feel the same or who feel differently than you? Is there a difference in your personal and professional life?
3. How do you feel about people who think differently than you about this?
4. Do you welcome opportunities to talk about this issue or would you rather avoid these opportunities? Why?
5. How can you engage in these conversations authentically and whole-heartedly? What might get in the way?
6. What are you afraid of? What is more inspiring to you than fear?
7. What are you committed to? How do you see your role/contribution in any conversations or actions?
8. What is your desired outcome for these conversations?

Facilitation Guidelines

To set the stage for the dialogue, a trained facilitator should do the following:



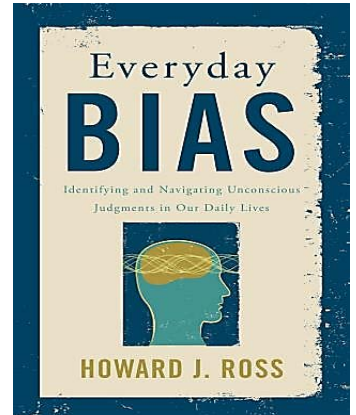
1. **Frame the conversation** in the context of how the issue is impacting your organization or to whatever general group the members belong. This helps create a container for the dialogue to occur within.
 - Remind employees of company values related to diversity and inclusion and of the expectation that we continue to treat each other with respect. This is especially important as we share our personal opinions at work and remain respectful of each other and our experiences.
2. **Create clear intentions and agreements** for the conversation. Examples include:
 - Seek mutual understanding, not necessarily agreement
 - Don't persuade, defend or interrupt
 - Be curious
3. **Establish ground rules** for the dialogue. Examples include:
 - Time will be shared equitably to be sure that all points of view get equal listening. It is often helpful to time segments to ensure this happens.
 - Listen without interrupting, except to clarify.
 - Seek to understand before being understood.
 - Maintain a mood of mutual respect and civility.
 - Create an agreement of anonymity. People should be free to discuss any topic or conversation but not to quote or share what any participant says.

Resource List

Everyday Bias: Understanding and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives

By Howard Ross, Published by Rowman and Littlefield, 2014

Provides an understanding of how bias impacts our decisions and offers suggestions as to what we can do to individually manage our biases, and create processes within our organizations that help us be more mindfully inclusive.



Listen In: Crucial Conversations on Race in the Workplace

By Allison Manswell, Published by JRM Publishing, 2015

Afterword by Howard Ross

Offers an innovative way to understand the issues surrounding race in the workplace. It is a fictional novel that gives fishbowl insight into the experience of five African-American characters as they navigate today's workplace. We also meet a curious white CEO who overhears one of their conversations and blazes a trail to accelerate progress on the diversity goals his company has been struggling with for years. It can be used as an informal tool or a formal intervention where necessary.

