

## Responding to Microaggressions

### What is microaggression?

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

### Why address microaggressions?

It takes a lot of courage and bravery to address microaggressions, especially in the workplace setting. Many people do not address microaggressions due to many reasons (uncomfortable, shock, fear, breaking relationships, be targeted, the troublemaker, retaliation, etc.).

However, addressing it can help the other person be aware of their bias and change their behavior. Addressing microaggressions also sets the tone that the behavior is not welcomed and/or appropriate, so the person and the people around are less likely to do or say something similar.

### Consider the following before addressing:

- Am I in a safe place/environment?
- Could my physical safety be in danger?
- Will the person become defensive and lead into an argument?
- Will this affect my relationship with this person?

### How do I respond?

The most effective way to respond is in a polite and respectful manner rather than a hostile or angry way. Focus on the positive qualities rather than in an accusation and/or judgmental way.

1. **Take a deep breath** – what you heard can take a huge toll on yourself and affect your tone and reactions.
  - If you need to take a day or two to process or think about what to say, please do so!
2. **Address it in the moment** – draw attention to the comments or statements that was stated. If appropriate, ask others if they were uncomfortable.
  - *“That statement is very offensive or inappropriate.”*
  - *“What you said made me feel very uncomfortable.”*
3. **Express how it impacted you by using “I” statements** – explain why you were offended and/or uncomfortable.

- *"I am offended by your statement because you generalized a part of my identity to a group when I am my own person and am not like everyone else."*
  - *When you say that, I feel (hurt, sad, angry, offended, etc.) and that makes it hard for me to be here with you."*
- 4. Ask questions** – seek to understand why the person made that statement.
- *"Are you aware of what you just said?"*
  - *"What made you say that about me?"*
  - *"Do you see what you said could make someone feel excluded or targeted?"*
  - *"Can you tell me more about why you think that way?"*
- 5. Educate with Empathy**, sometimes certain situations may require it to be a teaching opportunity and invite the opportunity for an open dialogue.
- *"Do you much about the reason or history of Black Lives Matter? If not, I would like to talk more about it on a 1:1 basis."*
  - *"Wow, can you imagine being asked or treated differently all your life because of your skin color? I have not experienced that before and am more aware now than ever."*
- 6. Finish the conversation**, be direct with what you expect to happen going forward.
- *"In the future, I would greatly appreciate you not using offensive language."*
  - *"I am glad we talked about this. Going forward, I do expect to not hear that again."*