

ThinkHuman



Inclusive Leadership

The Fundamentals

Leadership at All Levels.

think-human.com

800 353 5813

sales@think-human.com



The Fundamentals

This guide is for all leaders (and when we say leader, we mean any person at any level with any title) looking to grow in your inclusive leadership journey.

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The Challenge

Part 1: The Challenge



The call for inclusion is critical. For the first time in decades, people are having real discussions about racism and other isms (ableism, sexism, anti-semitism, homophobia, islamophobia, ageism, classism, etc). We're realizing it's insufficient to not be overtly oppressive to marginalized groups, that we need to be **actively inclusive** to shift a world that was not built to work for or include everyone. To shift the tides it takes work at the level of systems, organizations and the individual.



As individual leaders we each have an influence on those around us. We have the opportunity to set the tone and model the behavior to create an environment where each person feels respected, seen, able to contribute and valued for that contribution.

To be the best we can be as individuals, we need to consistently challenge ourselves with new ideas and fresh perspectives.



As humans, it can be a tricky thing that we tend to see the world through the vantage point of our personal identity. And from that lens, we tend to think the world would be experienced similarly by others. So, depending on how inclusive things seem through the lens of our own identity, we may look around and see an environment that looks inclusive to us.

And if an aspect of our identity is part of a marginalized group (for example a straight white *woman*, or a *gay black* man) we may think we share the experience of others in marginalized groups, and may miss that our experience is also filtered by the aspects of our identity that have privilege (*straight white* woman, or a *gay black man*) and that the experience for those with different intersectional identities may be very different.

So a starting point is to recognize that exclusion is often in our blind spots.



Whatever our own experience of inclusion at work, or how we've weathered it, the data shows inclusion is a real issue for many.

39% of people report experiencing unconscious bias at the workplace *at least once a month* (Deloitte)¹

Whatever our own experience, more than a third of people have a consistent, regular experience of oppression at work.

What Exclusion looks like



To get a better understanding of inclusion, we need a better understanding of exclusion.
Let's start with the more common forms of exclusion in the workplace.

Microaggressions [Words]

Microaggressions are described as: "Brief and commonplace daily indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group".- Researcher Derald Sue

Microaggressions with words can happen casually, sometimes, they're meant to be a compliment or a joke, which can make them particularly confusing to the recipient.

- 'You're so articulate' or 'You sound white' (said to a Black coworker).
- 'Where are you really from?' (said to a coworker who doesn't look like you).
- Expecting someone to represent their entire population ('how do your people feel about that?')- Consistently calling someone by the wrong gender pronoun when they've made their pronoun known.
- 'That person's not professional' or 'They don't seem experienced' (said about a non-white coworker).
- 'You look like a real woman!' (said to a transgender coworker).

Microaggressions [Action]

Microaggressions can take the form of both comments and actions.

A Microaggression action that highlights a person's 'outsider status' - even when the intention behind the action is positive, and we often toss it off as said in jest.

- Mistaking a colleague of a certain racial or ethnic background for a service worker.
- Giving personality-based feedback (like 'you should smile more' or 'you're too confident' or 'too aggressive' said to a female co-worker, when men with a similar communication style escape this feedback).
- Excluding a coworker with a disability from an after-work event due to the assumption that they aren't capable of participating.
- Assuming an older coworker isn't able to use or learn to use a technology.

Exploitation

Exploitation refers to the act of using people's labors to produce profit, while not compensating them fairly.

In an age of labor rights, pay structures and corporate transparency, it's easy to imagine that exploitation doesn't happen. But here some of the most common ways it does:

- Black women are paid just 63 cents, and Latinas only 55 cents, for every dollar paid to white men for the same job.
- Fashion generated and popularized by the transgender community co-opted by big brands who share no credit or profit (or even representation on the fashion runways)
- Work and ideas from women (often women of color) for whom credit for the work and ideas go to their boss (often someone in the dominant group).
- On average, Native American women in the U.S. are paid 32% less than white women.

This form of oppression perpetuates discrepancies by identity.

Marginalization

Marginalization is the act of relegating a group of people to a lower social standing or confining them to the margins of a social group.

Common everyday examples of marginalization:

- **Limited Access**, diminished opportunities
- **Stereotyping**, a preconceived notion about a gender, race or background.
- **Gaslighting**, calling into question someone's experience Isolation, when a group or individual is not welcome to share an experience, due to their characteristics.
- **Scapegoating**, the tendency to project negative emotions onto others, usually a vulnerable group member that is not part of the in-group and holds less power.

An example of **Limited access** is representation of People of Color in CEO roles , board of directors, or in senior ranks of most organizations.

- An example of **stereotyping** is feedback women of color commonly receive that's distinct from those in dominant identities (e.g. often vague feedback about their demeanor, rather than performance, this is not found in the data for feedback given to dominant groups).
- A common example of **gaslighting** is assuming the communicated experience of racism or sexism in the workplace is exaggerated and assuming one's own narrative is accurate.



Your Compass



Part 2: Your Compass

The Four “BE’s” can act as a compass on your inclusive leadership journey. As you encounter new situations you can return to these five “BE’s” and they’ll act as a useful filter for how to navigate what are sometimes complex situations. When used as a filter, they give rise to new actions and support your ongoing growth.

Be Brave

Be Stretching

Be Committed

Be Accountable

Be a Co-Conspirator

Be Brave



To build a safe space, we need to create a brave space first. If we want to root out undesirable behaviors and create an environment that works for everyone, we're going to have some real and caring conversations along the way.

We need to give people the strength and confidence to be real. To interrupt exclusionary behaviors in others and be interrupted *ourselves*. To choose courage over comfort. To speak out rather than try to fit in. To stretch ourselves into territory outside our comfort zone, bring curiosity to grow through awkwardness and feelings, and to be willing to have other people engage in conversations with us that we find uncomfortable.

Be Brave



The values of brave spaces

Brave spaces are anchored by the following five values.

We accept that we're not perfect.

We accept that the space is not perfect.

We assume the responsibility to begin caring conversations with others.

We recognize that people might want to hold caring conversations with us.

Above all, we realize that these conversations are necessary to grow as individuals and as a team.

Be Stretching



From 'like me' to 'like you'

Many of us inadvertently surround ourselves with 'like me' people: the folks with whom we feel we share affinity and outlook on life.

This can leave those not included to feel 'other' and can also force those outside that circle to modify their behaviors to try to "fit". This also keeps us in our "comfort zone" bubble, expecting others to bend to our norms, rather than expanding and growing ourselves.

Our growth as inclusive leaders doesn't come without action. **An important step is to notice and move from 'like me' to 'like you'.**

Be Stretching



Here are some core behavioral shifts that can help us all make this leap.

INFLUENCERS

Notice what identities are influencing *you*

MENTEES

Include marginalized identities in who you mentor

MEETINGS

Actively involve absent identities in meetings you attend

APPRECIATE DIFFERENCE

Appreciate a person's identity & experience

NORMS

Adapt to different cultural and identity contexts

Be Stretching



INFLUENCERS

Notice who is influencing *you* and who is influencing the team. Notice who you lean on to hear their perspective. Reflect on who you engage with from your team in formal and informal ways, ranging from getting advice to personal connection and small talk. Then, widen that circle to include others outside your “like-me” group.

MENTEES

Expand your mentoring opportunities. Many leaders of all levels focus mentoring on certain individuals because they see them as ‘proteges’ or feel kinship. But this often denies mentoring to equally deserving teammates who you may feel less “affinity” toward. It’s important to note that mentoring relationships are bi-directional. Mentors and mentees learn from each other, so you’re also denying yourself the opportunity that comes from those outside your “like-me” circle. Inclusive leaders seek to broaden the circle of mentorship, actively opening up opportunities to less dominant identities within the team, and reciprocally, broadening your own experience as a mentor.

MEETINGS

Who is in your meetings. An inclusive leader creates an environment where everyone has equal access. In meetings you attend, take time to look around and notice who is missing, or who’s voice is not being heard. Then actively look for ways to get those absent voices involved.

Be Stretching



APPRECIATE DIFFERENCE

In an effort to try to be inclusive, we can minimize differences, sometimes saying things like “I don’t even notice that you’re ___(fill in the difference)___ (eg transgender Black, etc.” This can discount key aspects of a person’s lived experience and identity and can leave a person with the experience that you don’t really see them. So while recognizing what unifies us is powerful, it lives in balance with honoring our differences. Pause to understand and appreciate a person’s unique identity, culture and experience.

NORMS

Just like when you travel to a foreign country you pause to notice how they do things, the same can be done those you work with. Those from identities and backgrounds that differ from the dominant norm tend to have to change their way of approaching things to fit the dominant norm, and in the unidirectional flex, the value of a different way of doing or thinking about something is lost. The golden rule of treating others how we want to be treated has been replaced by the Platinum rule, treat others how they want to be treated, and based on their lived experience, not assuming our own experience is a model for that. That means bringing curiosity to differences and not expecting them to flex to you, including their ways of speaking and relating, practices, traditions, and ways of doing things that may be different than you’re accustomed to. Your own comfort zone will likely be stretched as you expand from your ‘like me’ circle to include different norms. But as your comfort zone expands over time, so will the impact of your leadership, and the results that are produced.



Be Committed

When we take on our growth in any area, bringing blindspots into view, building new awareness, and moving past blocks takes personal effort and commitment.

DO your own learning and research on the oppressions experienced by others, including history, news, and shared stories.

DON'T expect those with marginalized identities to educate you. Those in marginalized groups are already burdened in this work. When educators in marginalized groups are supporting your growth, see that they're compensated to avoid further exploitation. If learning is offered, appreciate it, but expect to do your own research and find your own answers.

Be Accountable



Invite Feedback

When we're in a growth mode, we make missteps as part of our learning. Given the systems inside of which we operate, we've all most likely said or done things that inadvertently created harm. Unintentional as it may be, that's not good enough. It's our responsibility to raise our awareness so we stop perpetuating this.

Here are some tips that will make the experience better, and support our growth as inclusive leaders. When offered feedback:

APPRECIATE

Thank them for saying something

AKNOWLEDGE

Verbally acknowledge your impact

LEARN

Treat it as a learning moment

Be Accountable



APPRECIATE

If someone suggests we have spoken or acted in an oppressive way, even unintentionally, thank them for saying something.

Take a pause and appreciate that even if the feedback was challenging to hear, it took someone's care and likely bravery to have the conversation, and even if it wasn't delivered with the most grace, it's still an opportunity for us to grow,

Resist the urge to react defensively (and yep, it can be hard!) Avoid saying things like 'I didn't mean it' or 'I was just making a joke.' or focus on their delivery or how they left you feeling. If you listen to another person's concerns with an open heart and mind, you can make significant progress in aligning your words and actions with your ideology.

AKNOWLEDGE

Verbally acknowledge your impact. It probably wasn't your intention to create any harm, but regardless of our intent, it's important to recognize and own up to the impact we created.

Verbal acknowledgment also serves as a spoken commitment we make to ourselves and to the other person. It's a way of conveying that 'I have heard and internalized what you said, and my future self will act more thoughtfully and intentionally because of what you have shared with me.'

Apologize, but don't expect forgiveness. You may not get it, and that's totally fine. The best way to make amends is to educate ourselves and be more intentional in the future.

Be Accountable



LEARN

Treat it as a learning moment, use this as an opportunity to grow.

Embrace your emotions that come out of the process, but don't center them. Moving through the emotions that come with our 'unlearning' is a part of the process. Understand that we will feel uncomfortable, and challenged at times. Taking the time to experience and process our own experience supports our growth.

Above all, we do not expect the people in marginalized communities to provide emotional support. Make sure their experience is paramount and centered, not our own.

Do the work to find the learning from the experience and use this as an opportunity to grow. Don't get hung up on how well they had the conversation. Even if it wasn't delivered with the most grace, it's still an opportunity for us to grow.

If your relationship allows the two of you to dig deeper, you can consider asking questions to better understand their experience and your impact. But respect that it's not their responsibility to educate you, they don't owe you answers, and your own growth is a responsibility you own.

Be a Co-Conspirator



Call In rather than Call Out

When exclusion happens, be an advocate for growth. There are certain fundamental principles that can enable us to be an ally in various situations.

ACKNOWLEDGE

Address what was said

CHECK IN

Connect with the person who has received the harm

CALL IN

Privately address the person who said or did the harm

Be a Co-Conspirator



ACKNOWLEDGE

Publicly acknowledge what was said.

Pause the conversation by publicly asking ‘Could you say more about what you mean when you say xyz?’, or: ***“Thank you for sharing. I am interested in continuing our conversation. May I schedule some time with you to further discuss?”*** This gives you the ability to have an ally-centered conversation without offense.

CHECK IN

Connect with the person who has received the harm.

You could talk to the person who might have been impacted and say, ‘*How did that feel for you?*’ and ‘*Hey, would it be ok for me to say something?*’ or ‘*What might you want me to do next time?*’

Be respectful of their wishes, let them lead, center their feelings and experience over your own.

Watch yourself for “*saviorism*”, where we jump to be the savior in ways that are unrequested, often unwanted, and often centering ourselves vs. the person who experienced the harm.



CALL IN

Privately address the person who said or did the harm

Remember to separate the person from the action. Put the focus on the comment or the sentence, never the person. Don't lose sight of this.

Share the intention for the conversation, the facts, the impact and a request.

Share your intention: For example, *'Hey, I know you care about the team feeling like they belong, so I wanted to share this with you.'* Sharing your intention keeps the compass of the conversation pointed in that direction

Facts: Describe what you observed, heard, said or were notified of.

Impact: Share why this matters, and how the person's action or comment might impact others. Acknowledge that intention and impact are separate, and yet the impact is real regardless of intention. Even if the person didn't mean their behavior to come across a certain way, that's how it's impacted others.

Request: End with a question to make it a two-way conversation. For example, you might say *'Can we chat about the comment you made earlier? When you said XYZ, the recipient didn't seem as engaged afterwards. I've been there myself - I've said things that didn't get the reaction I'd anticipated. Would you be up for chatting it through further?'*



Support and utilize our privilege and power for others people we seek to work with. Use opportunities to engage people with whom we share identity and privilege in conversations about oppression experienced by those we seek to work with.

Being an ally is not a role that we can claim for ourselves: It's a term that can be bestowed upon us by those experiencing oppression, based on their experience of us. Do not expect awards or special recognition for confronting issues that people have to live with every day and redirect attention to the groups we are supporting, and the issues they face.



Summary

To be the best we can be as individuals, workplaces and as society is a commitment that takes effort and intention.

The five Be's are a compass to help guide us.

Be Brave

Be Stretching

Be Committed

Be Accountable

Be a Co-Conspirator

Growing as an inclusive leader is not an overnight proposition, it's an ongoing journey. And as we challenge ourselves to grow, we strengthen our own leadership and the positive impact we make around us.

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