

# Conscious Actions for Inclusion: A Common Language to Drive Uncommon Results

Judith H. Katz and Frederick A. Miller

Most people seem to understand—or at least have heard—that inclusion is important for organizational success. Yet many people are frustrated because, while their organizations may talk about the need for inclusion, very few know how to make it a reality. All too often, people feel excluded and disengaged by interactions that discourage their full participation or the contribution of their ideas or experiences.

An organization's workplace environment is the sum of the behaviors—subtle and not-so-subtle, intentional and unintentional, and often habitual—of all the members of the organization. What this means, therefore, is that to create an inclusive environment, you must start with inclusive behaviors. Policies, procedures, and initiatives can support such an environment, but an inclusive environment can only be created by the collective use of behaviors that foster inclusive interactions.

In our work with organizations across the globe, we have discovered 12 simple behaviors that produce more inclusive interactions among individuals, teams, and work groups. These inclusive interactions, in turn, have been shown to accelerate results and generate higher performance. This article describes the 12 conscious actions—4 behaviors that are key to accelerating inclusive interactions and 8 additional behaviors that support and sustain an inclusive work environment. Foundational

to the use of these behaviors is a Joining mindset that sets the stage for how we approach interactions with others.

When organizations adopt the Conscious Actions for Inclusion, the benefits are substantial. People feel more valued, supported, energized, and engaged. Information flows faster. People are more willing to speak up, make problems visible, and resolve misunderstandings and disagreements. Collaboration happens more quickly. Individuals and teams work, make decisions, and implement those decisions more effectively. Silos break down. Productivity soars. It sounds too good to be true, right?

Yet we have experienced these outcomes again and again. The Conscious Actions for Inclusion have been tested and proven in work environments around the globe, from shop floors to executive suites. They also stand the test of common sense. In many ways, they are simply expressions of the way people would choose to treat one another if given the opportunity, encouragement, and safety to do so: with respect, supportive energy, and the best intentions.

The Conscious Actions for Inclusion provide a common language from which people can easily communicate. When people use the common language of the Conscious Actions for Inclusion, such as “leaning into discomfort,” “this is a stake for me,” or “this is my street

corner,” the shared understanding of those phrases adds clarity to interactions. People are, in essence, declaring their intent to join with the other person and inviting reciprocity.

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## A Critical Decision —The Choice to Join

But what does it mean to join? Most of us have learned to approach unfamiliar people and new interactions from a standpoint of *judging* (see Figure 1). In judging mode, we engage cautiously—we size people up, do not give them the benefit of the doubt, and for those individuals with whom we might have a long standing partnership—we might hold on to past interactions and label them. Judging places distance between us and others, and it puts a limit on the people being judged—we put them in a box. And when we feel judged by others, we often become guarded and mistrustful; we may act small and tend to judge them in return, creating a lose-lose situation. Moreover, a judging mode creates waste in two ways: we waste substantial time and energy in the process of evaluating and mistrusting others, and because judging places limits on the person being judged, we lose the ability to draw fully on her or his contributions.

Rather than judge, we can choose to start each interaction by *joining* (Katz & Miller, 2013). In joining

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mode, we approach others from a stance of openness rather than caution and defensiveness. We begin with the assumption that we are going to connect, that each of us has something to offer the other, and that by partnering together we will develop better solutions and more creative ideas. The goal is not to evaluate, but to learn. In joining, we let go of the past, extend trust, give others the benefit of the doubt, and invest in the partnership for the long

can create a path for development from an experience that often causes misunderstanding, hard feelings, and apprehension.

The choice to join, while necessary, is not sufficient to create an inclusive team or organization. As mentioned earlier, an organization's workplace environment is the sum of the *behaviors* of all the members of the organization. In order to create an inclusive organization, therefore, you must support the choice to

and uncomfortable at all times. Unfortunately, trust among people and teams generally takes time to develop—and most of today's organizations cannot afford that time.

Hence the value of *leaning into discomfort*: it creates an environment in which trust can grow quickly. By making the conscious choice to move out of our comfort zones, we inspire others to respond in kind. An environment of safety evolves in which we begin to trust that others *have* our back instead of *stabbing* us in the back. We feel safe enough to speak up, offer new ideas, take worthwhile risks, raise difficult issues, co-create solutions, and in general collaborate freely.

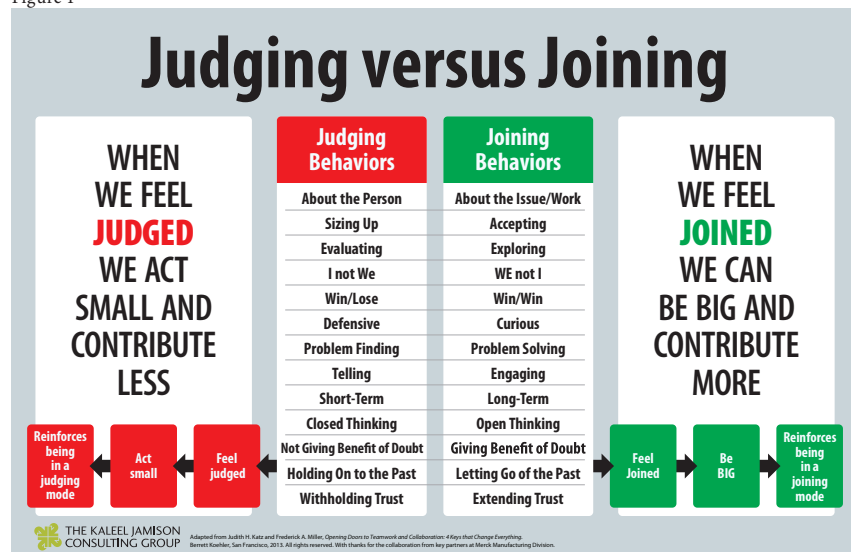
The act of using the specific language can accelerate this process. Saying, "I'm going to lean into discomfort" signals to others that we are reaching out, making ourselves vulnerable, and extending an invitation to reciprocate in the spirit of collaboration. When a team member in one organization initially used those words, the team leader replied, "You don't need to say that. It's safe to raise any issue here." To which she responded, "Oh yes, I *do* need to say it. I need to use those words because they help me be brave."

When is the right time to lean into discomfort? Usually as soon as we begin to *sense* the discomfort—to feel that something is not quite right. That is the time to say, "I am going to be courageous and lean into discomfort to address this issue now."

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Use the language, "I am going to lean into discomfort" to signal you are moving out of your comfort zone and inviting others to join you.
- Lean in by taking small steps—sitting up front when you would

Figure 1



term. Joining is a win-win mode that focuses on creating a WE—creating a partnership.

Some argue that judging is normal and that leaders are expected to judge at times. That is certainly true. But there is a difference between *judging* people and *assessing* their performance or ideas. Leaders need to assess the value of ideas and the performance of individuals. The question becomes, how do we engage with someone *during* and *after* such an assessment? Do we place blame or only reinforce what is wrong? Or do we share ideas of how to address the situation as allies? Do other people walk away from these interactions feeling supported, or has their willingness to speak up and offer their thinking been diminished? The power of joining

join with inclusive behaviors. This is where the Conscious Actions for Inclusion come in: they enhance and provide a common language for interactions, resulting in greater inclusion and collaboration. The common language of these behaviors increases speed and clarity, ensures Right First Time Interactions, and eliminates waste in interactions.

### The 4 Keys

## 1 Lean into discomfort.

Trust is fundamental for our most productive collaborations. Without trust, our collaboration is flawed at best, destructive at worst,

# Conscious Actions for Inclusion

## 4 Keys that Change *EVERYTHING*

1. **Lean into Discomfort**  
Be willing to challenge self and others. Speak up—bring your voice and street corner.
2. **Listen as an Ally**  
Listen, listen, listen and engage. Be a partner. Challenge as an Ally.
3. **State Your Intent and Intensity**  
Clarify intent: State Notions, Stakes, Boulders, and Tombstones. Say what you mean and how much you mean it.
4. **Share Street Corners**  
Accept others' thoughts and experiences as true for them. Hear others' differences as additive.

Practiced together, these 12 Conscious Actions create a **Joining Mindset**, which builds partnership, collaboration, and teamwork.

### Inclusion Is...

A sense of belonging;

Feeling respected, valued, and seen for who we are as individuals;

There is a level of supportive energy and commitment from leaders, colleagues, and others so that we—individually and collectively—can do our best work.

## Sustaining Behaviors

5. Greet people authentically—say “hello.”
6. Create a sense of safety for yourself and your team members.
7. Work for the common good and shared success.
8. Ensure right people, right work, right time: Ask who else needs to be involved to understand the whole situation.
9. Link to others' ideas, thoughts, and feelings—give energy back.
10. Speak up when people are being made “small” or excluded.
11. Address misunderstandings and resolve disagreements—work “pinches.”
12. Build *TRUST*: Do what you say you will do and honor confidentiality.

**CHANGE THE INTERACTION CHANGE THE EXPERIENCE CHANGE THE RESULT**



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normally sit in the back, speaking up when you ordinarily would be silent.

- Discuss what you need in order to feel safe to speak up.
- Invite others to discuss what they need to feel safe to speak up.
- Acknowledge and support other team members when they lean into discomfort.

## 2 Listen as an ally.

Many organizations operate with a narrow definition of *we*—with no sense that “we are all in this together.” Collaboration, by definition, requires a *we* that encompasses all relevant perspectives to enhance solutions and decisions. Expanding our sense of *we* involves building cooperative, collaborative, and mutual working relationships by linking our ideas together to create something better than any of us could have done individually. In a word, expanding

our *we* involves becoming an *ally* to those around us—and the first step toward becoming an ally is to *listen* as an ally.

In *listening as an ally*, we listen deeply and with full attention, viewing others as partners on the same side of the table. We look for value in the speakers' perspectives and build on what they say. We engage with others in the conviction that we *are* all in this together. We open the door for collaboration to take place and for breakthroughs to arise. Critical to listening as an ally is slowing down to really hear the other person before responding so the other person knows they have been heard. It is also important to remember that the issue people initially raise in a conversation is sometimes just a “warm up” for their real issue—it’s the “oh, there is one more thing” that is often the real issue that someone wants to discuss. They want to make sure it is safe to raise it.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Let others know you need them to *listen as an ally* as a way to signal that you need their full attention.
- Give your full attention to others when they are speaking. Don't multitask.
- Make eye contact and ensure your body language is giving the message “I am joining with you as a partner.”
- Restate what you have heard to check that you are receiving the intended message. Use clarifying questions such as “let me check that I understand” and “what I heard you saying was...”
- Accept that what others are saying is true for them and that their perspectives (their *street corners*) may be different from yours but are no less valid.



### 3 State your intent and intensity.

When we clearly state what we mean and how committed we are to the idea, it enables others to act quickly, decisively, and correctly. The clarity of stating intent and intensity eliminates second guessing, miscommunication, and the waste in interactions that results from them. As a result, this key both accelerates and enhances the quality of collaboration.

One model for stating intent and intensity—*Notions, Stakes, Boulders, and Tombstones* (Figure 2)—gives people a common language by which to explain intensity:

- *Notions* are statements that require no action from others: they are offered simply as an invitation for further discussion. By positioning a statement as a Notion, we open the door to exploring the idea and seeing where it will take the group, if others find it of value.

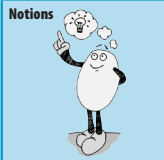
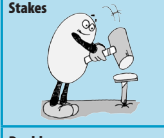


- *Stakes*, like tent stakes, establish a firm place for a discussion to start, but that place can be moved. When you put your Stake in the ground and demonstrate that you are willing, eager, and able to move it, you are saying that others may have insights and information that might reveal a better position for that Stake. The Stake concept is grounded in the belief that none of us is as smart as all of us.
- *Boulders* offer little latitude. They imply a strong investment in seeing the idea addressed in the way the speaker has framed it. A Boulder is not an invitation to discussion, though requests for clarification and suggestions for implementation might be welcome. A substantial amount of energy and information will be required to change the Boulder.
- *Tombstones* leave no room for negotiation. When someone labels a statement as a Tombstone, it indicates total commitment to the idea or issue—so much so that we may be willing to leave our

jobs over it. Often, Tombstones are about core values or beliefs. Tombstone statements should be made only in the most critical situations, when personal or organizational integrity is at issue.

#### SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Make *Notions, Stakes, Boulders, and Tombstones* common language for how the team will engage.
- Clarify that your passion on a topic does not mean you are closed to hearing other perspectives. Let people know that your Stakes and Notions, even when stated passionately, are still just Stakes and Notions.
- Actively seek feedback from team members on how often you use the range of *intent and intensity*. (Too many Notions and Stakes can be distracting. Too many Boulders and Tombstones can be dispiriting.)
- Lean into discomfort, listen as an ally, and hear others' street corners to fully engage the team for greater understanding.

Figure 2  
Guide to Notions, Stakes, Boulders, & Tombstones

Initiator has:	Intent	Intensity of Commitment	Desired Response
 <p><b>Notions</b></p>	Discussion Possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low investment</li> <li>• Testing if idea makes sense to others and/or hoping others will build upon the idea</li> <li>• Individual is willing to let go of the idea</li> <li>• Totally open to influence</li> </ul>	Discuss if interested/willing to explore; Action optional
 <p><b>Stakes</b></p>	Discussion Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some investment</li> <li>• State a position</li> <li>• Wants to hear others' Street Corners</li> <li>• Willing to be influenced</li> </ul>	Discuss, to be considered or explored in depth; Acted upon if parties agree after discussion
 <p><b>Boulders</b></p>	Discussion for Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong investment</li> <li>• Firmly entrenched in position</li> <li>• Wants it to happen</li> <li>• Difficult to influence</li> </ul> <p><small>This level of acting on an idea or making a decision should not be used frequently.</small></p>	Action expected; Substantive objections somewhat OK
 <p><b>Tombstones</b></p>	Discussion, if any, under Duress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total investment</li> <li>• Worth quitting over</li> <li>• No ability to influence</li> </ul> <p><small>This level should not be used more than twice a year, if that frequently.</small></p>	Act now, or else

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### 4 Share your street corner.

In order to get a comprehensive understanding of a situation, it is essential to hear different perspectives, or *street corners* (as in, "the view from my street corner"), of all relevant people, thus creating the 360° view that allows for better decisions. Individually, we must be brave enough to speak up and share our *street corners*, particularly when they are different from what others are sharing. Just as important, we must create the safety necessary for others to share their *street corners*, so we can fully leverage the different perspectives people bring

to the table and truly get diversity of thought and the possibility of breakthroughs as we bring our different ideas together.

When I share my *street corner*, I must remember it is *my* corner, not *the* corner. My colleagues may have different *street corners* that are true for them. When we accept that fact, we must then be curious about why others may see a situation differently. If everyone in the room has the same perspective on a situation, it might indicate that we are missing some important points of view. That leads us to ask whether all the relevant people, with all the necessary perspectives and experiences, are in the room to properly address the issue. Instead of regarding difference as a deficit, we begin to see that differences are necessary for success.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- Be open and curious to learn why and how others have reached the conclusions and ideas they present, particularly when they are different from yours.
- Find ways to build on what another person shared, and see if—together—you can find a new solution that neither of you could have imagined on your own.
- Identify people, functions, and groups who will be impacted by decisions, and make sure to include the right people from those groups.
- Join and learn from another person's *street corner* rather than judging what they say as wrong.
- Ask the question, "Are all the right people in the room?" This encourages everyone to think about who else might have valuable input that could help solve problems and make decisions.
- If key people are not available to participate, consider postponing until they are available.

**The 8 Sustaining Behaviors**

While practicing the 4 Keys makes significant changes in the way people and teams collaborate, they need to be supported by other behaviors if the change is going to be sustainable. For example, to lean into discomfort on a regular basis, people need to create a safe space for themselves and others to bring their voices and to address conflicts or disagreements that may arise. Street corners have limited value if someone has not first ensured that the right people are included and are focusing on the right work at the right time. It is difficult to listen as an ally if you have not said hello authentically first! Clearly, the 4 Keys need to work in tandem with "sustaining behaviors" in a symbiotic relationship, with the keys and the behaviors reinforcing one another to effect lasting change.

**1 Greet people authentically—say "hello."**

To give their best effort, people must feel acknowledged and part of their work community from the moment they arrive at work. Too often, however, people are in such a hurry to start their day that they miss connecting with their leaders, peers, and colleagues. How can we partner, collaborate, and co-create with others if we don't know who they are? If we don't even see others, how can we include them? A simple, authentic "hello" to acknowledge others, whether in a team meeting or just walking down the hallway, is a key step toward ensuring that people feel seen and included.

But an authentic "hello" is only a first step. Beyond that, people must make sure they know everyone in each meeting they attend. A simple check-in at the beginning of the meeting can add depth to

individuals' knowledge of one another. The more diverse the group, the more important a "hello" becomes. People who are new or different from the traditional group often feel less acknowledged or less visible and might therefore be less likely to share their perspectives or opinions. The very act of connecting in these ways is an invitation to join the discussion. It carries the message that "I value you and the contribution you can make here."

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- When walking down the hallway or stepping into an elevator, make it a point to say hello to people—particularly those you might not know.
- Take the time to connect with each team member during the course of the day.
- At meetings, greet each individual by name. Introduce yourself to people you don't know. Show genuine interest in others.
- Connect with the other person in an authentic way. Make respectful eye contact. Shake hands. Say, "Hi, how are you?" and listen attentively to the response.
- When appropriate, begin meetings with a brief check-in, particularly when convening virtual meetings. Depending on time constraints and group needs, it can be a personal update, such as "How are you doing as a person on earth?"

**2 Create a sense of safety for yourself and your team members.**

*Creating safety* does not mean creating a risk-averse environment. It means fostering an environment that respects and acknowledges the differing needs and approaches of

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all people so they can do their best work. The goal is a workplace in which people feel safe from physical harm, as well as psychologically and emotionally safe enough to trust that others will “have their back” and not “stab them in the back.” Each individual must feel safe enough to speak up and share her or his perspectives, to lean into discomfort, to share their thoughts, and ideas—even if they differ from others.

Safety means something different to each person. One person might need to chat informally at the start of a meeting in order to feel safe; another might need to be clear about the agenda in advance; a third may need some quiet time before the meeting to prepare. Because of these differences, conversation needs to occur to establish how individuals and team members will interact in ways that are safe for each person and for the team as a whole. Just because you feel safe as an individual, do not assume that everyone else feels safe as well.

If a team wants to achieve high performance, raise difficult issues, identify and solve problems, and make decisions rapidly, everyone must feel safe enough to speak up, share their thinking, voice their opinions, take risks, partner with others, and join as full participants. At the same time, these conditions will happen more quickly if both leaders and team members lean into discomfort, building the environment of trust so essential to a sense of safety.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Ask team members what they need to feel safe enough to bring their voices and share their ideas. Don't assume or guess. Ask the question periodically, since circumstances change.
- Be mindful about the language you use. Avoid language that diminishes people, their ideas, or their efforts.

- Be careful with the use of humor. Make sure that no one is the object of jokes or ridicule. Do not make “inside jokes” that exclude others who don't have context or history.
- Give honest, constructive, pinpointed feedback without attaching blame or personal judgments. Evaluate and critique actions, not people.
- Think about what you need to feel safe, and let others know so they can support your ability to do your best work.
- Learn about what people need in order to do their best work and feel valued, seen, and respected for who they are as individuals.

## 3 Work for the common good and shared success.

One of the most effective things an organization can do is ensure that people have, and are supported in doing, meaningful work for a shared purpose. Within such environments, everyone is encouraged to add value in achieving the common goal.

In most organizations, people assume they are *working for the common good and shared success* of the organization. More often, though, there is a lack of true alignment of priorities and actions. While everyone may be able to point to the organization's vision and objectives, there is often a misalignment when it comes to establishing priorities to meet those objectives. For instance, one department might see the third organizational objective as its highest priority, whereas another department may see another objective as its highest priority. The differing ways departments state performance and behavioral expectations also

adds to the confusion of common good and shared success. While each individual believes they are working in the best interest of the organization, unless they specifically spend time discussing priorities and objectives within teams and across departments, a major lack of alignment actually occurs. Too often, people have never had the conversation with their teammates to identify the common good and related priorities. Now more than ever, conversations like these are an absolute necessity: in today's complex organizations—with countless interconnections between people juggling myriad projects—your priorities may look completely different from mine, so we need the discussion to align our priorities with what is best for the organization as a whole.

Establishing, verifying, and constantly updating a shared understanding of the organization's common goals can help overcome divides and silos that plague so many organizations. By collaborating across silos to determine what the common good and common priorities are, people in the organization can establish higher-performing patterns of interacting and a sense of shared purpose that will enhance individual, team, and organizational results.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Make sure everyone on the team understands how each person's unique role, skills, and perspectives are essential to achieving the team's work and the organization's mission.
- Begin meetings of new teams with a clear statement and understanding of why each person was invited to the meeting and how each member of the team brings value to

accomplishing the purpose and desired outcomes.

- Periodically reevaluate projects and processes to ensure they are consistent with the team's objectives and the organization's goals. Prioritize projects and eliminate those that contribute little to accomplishing the objectives and goals.
- Initiate conversations across teams, functions, and other silos to identify and clarify the common good and priorities.

## 4 Ensure right people, right work, right time: Ask who else needs to be involved to understand the whole situation.

A key to creating 360° vision (and sharing your street corners) is understanding the need to have the right people doing the right work at the right time. Even the most insightful and productive meeting can be limited if those who have important perspectives related to a project, problem, or decision are not present. Sometimes, one key person's absence can leave an ever-so-important street corner/perspective out of the conversation—leading to rework, delays, waste, and even failure.

*Asking who else needs to be involved* in a meeting or project also helps to break down conformity and sameness. In many organizations today, people are groomed to give leaders the answer they think the leader wants. All too often, the same people are pulled together no matter what the problem or issue. The key is getting the right voices involved at the right time to ensure the work is done right the first time.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Shortly before each meeting, check to make sure you have right people, right work, right time:

- **Right people.** *For individuals who are inviting others to a meeting:* Will the right people be in the room? Who is missing? Who will not be at the meeting and needs a buddy? Whom might we invite next time? Who will not need to be there and can work on other things during that time? Who else has a street corner on this besides us? Who will be impacted by a decision we make? Should they be at this meeting? Alternatively, how do we include them after the meeting? *For individuals invited to a meeting:* Am I the right person to be in this meeting? If not, is there someone else from my team or organization who can add value through her or his thinking and street corner?

Keep people in the loop. If key individuals are unable to attend a meeting, create “buddies” for them to make sure that pertinent information gets to them in a timely manner. Buddies are responsible for communicating what transpired at a meeting to the absent person, so everyone is up to speed on the conversation and able to contribute when they do participate.

- **Right work.** What is the focus and scope of the work? Does it make sense for the organization? Does it connect to our mission, vision, and priorities? Is the work or issue being addressed at the right organizational level or should another organizational level be addressing the issue? Are we doing work someone else could be doing better or more effectively?
- **Right time.** Is this the right time to focus on this work? Is it

too soon? Do we have enough data to have this conversation now? Have we set aside enough time to have a thoughtful conversation?

## 5 Link to others' ideas, thoughts, and feelings—give energy back.

*Linking to others' ideas, thoughts, and feelings* is about connecting and letting people know they have been heard. It is a way to give “energy back” and to let people know the impact of their ideas, thoughts, and feelings on others. This is one of the simplest yet most powerful of the 8 Sustaining Behaviors—and a natural outgrowth of listening as an ally.

When people connect to one another in this way, they begin to foster a greater sense of trust, safety, and understanding that encourages greater participation. Linking also enhances collaboration. One way to demonstrate that you understand and accurately interpret what other people are saying is to link to what they say.

When people receive energy back from others, it gives them the courage to do more and share more. This is particularly true of leaders, who pour a great deal of their personal energy into the organization but, all too often, receive little back from people who may have learned to be silent when dealing with “the boss.”

Giving energy back does not always involve positive reinforcement. Providing the kind of honest and caring feedback that helps someone identify an area for improvement can also give energy back when delivered in the spirit of “I appreciate what you did enough to give you honest feedback about what you did well and what you could



have done differently.” This is the kind of support all of us need from our peers and our leaders so that we—individually and collectively—can do our best work.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- Use phrases like, “Based on what you said, here’s what I am thinking...”, “I like what you just said, and here is what I would add...”, or “I want to link to (or build on) what you just said.”
- When someone makes a presentation to a group, let the presenter know that her or his efforts were appreciated and heard. Ask a question about the presentation and give energy back for the answer; mention something in the presentation that you valued or found helpful. This kind of feedback gives presenters a measure of their impact and encourages them to present again in the future.
- Point out how various statements made in a group connect to each other.
- A simple “Thank you for what you shared” can also provide energy back.

## **6 Speak up when people are being made “small” or excluded.**

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When people are made small and their ideas and potential contributions are excluded, the individuals, the team, and organization suffer. People hide their skills and ideas in an attempt to regain a sense of safety, and the organization cannot leverage their talents. People often feel small through unintentional interactions and unconscious behaviors. Unfortunately, many exclusive behaviors and attitudes, even those that are unintentional,

are deeply ingrained in some of our interactions and organizations, and a concerted effort must be made to change established patterns to fully engage and include all members of an organization.

The assumption that people will speak up if they have something to say is often incorrect. If we want to encourage new ideas and ensure the richest and best thinking, it is incumbent on all members of the team to be allies, to make room for all voices to be heard, and to be responsible for the team’s efforts and results.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- Speak up when someone is being made to feel small, discounted, or ignored (directly or indirectly through humor or other “jabs”).
- Use inclusive language; avoid using acronyms, “insider” language, or metaphors that some people may not understand.
- Recognize that some individuals may find it hard to “get into” a conversation. Invite people who have not spoken into the conversation to hear what they are thinking so you get the benefit of everyone’s ideas.
- To ensure that everyone has airtime, go around the room and ask each person to share a thought or reaction that has been stimulated by the discussion.

## **7 Address misunderstandings and resolve disagreements—work “pinches.”**

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When people from different backgrounds and perspectives come together on a team, the potential for conflicts and disagreements (or, as

we call them, “pinches”) increases. Many people feel uncomfortable in acknowledging or addressing conflicts, but over time, unresolved misunderstandings and conflicts damage a team’s ability to effectively work together, solve problems, and make decisions.

The challenge is to address, not avoid, misunderstandings; to explore and address disagreements and differences, not ignore or suppress them. When disagreements or misunderstandings go unaddressed—as people continue to avoid the issue, talk to others about their concerns, and work around team members with whom they feel misunderstood or have a “pinch”—it creates waste. Engaging others when there is a misunderstanding can lead to breakthroughs in thinking and ideas. Working through disagreements can enable teams to overcome barriers and move the organization to higher performance.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- Deal with misunderstandings and disagreements as soon as they become apparent.
- Be brave, lean into discomfort, and be willing to acknowledge when you think a misunderstanding has occurred.
- Talk directly to the individual about the misunderstanding or disagreement rather than triangulating and discussing the issue with others—unless you need a third party to help mediate or clarify how to deal with the situation.
- Use the “Pinch Model” to resolve misunderstandings and disagreements. This model encourages people to clarify expectations, identify the issue (the “pinch”), provide a safe space for hearing each other as allies, own each part of the pinch,



problem-solve, re-contract, follow up, and celebrate.

- View addressing misunderstandings and disagreements as an opportunity to create a stronger partnership and clearer expectations.

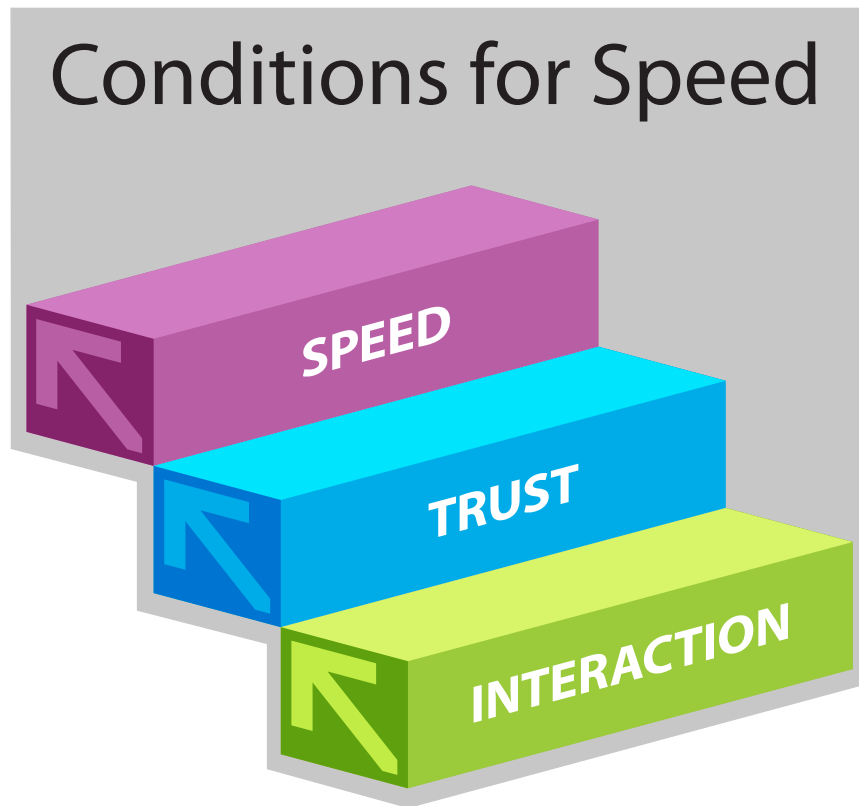


## 8 Build *TRUST*. Do what you say you will do and honor confidentiality.

Trust is a requirement for achieving the speed that organizations need to accelerate results. It comes from a history of positive interactions between people: the more positive interactions they have, the more they come to trust one another. Similarly, the more they are trusted, the more they will trust in return. When people feel that sense of trust, they are willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt—and in turn, speed up the level of interaction, problem solving, and decision making. This dynamic, however, only takes place when people can count on one another to *do what they say they will do*, when everyone knows that each individual will live by her or his commitments and honor confidential statements. As others share their street corners/ perceptions, experiences, and feelings, it is important to treat that sharing as a precious gift.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Follow through on commitments. Keep team members updated if deadlines need to be delayed or moved.
- Hold yourself accountable for your actions.
- Create a safe zone for you and your team members by establishing and following ground rules.
- Invest the time needed to get to know others you are in



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partnership with in order to build the trust that leads to speed.

- Maintain confidentiality—do not share personal information about others.

### Reaping the Benefits

An inclusive workplace won't happen just because people would like it to be so. It starts with the choice to join and the willingness to practice and engage differently. The 4 keys and 8 sustaining behaviors that comprise the Conscious Actions for Inclusion are simple, practical behaviors that improve everyday interactions. When they become the normal way of doing business in an organization, they give people the opportunity to do their best work, and to support others to be and do their best as well.

These behaviors are not “something extra” that will add to the burden of an already overworked individual or work team. All of us are already interacting with others to accomplish our tasks throughout our workday. The question is, HOW are we interacting? The behaviors simply enable us to be more effective and our interactions to be more productive and rewarding.

By bringing these behaviors into every interaction, every meeting, every moment of the day, organizations are more successful in supporting people to do their best work, individually and collectively, all the time. In organizations that achieve this level of effective interaction, people make problems visible more easily; solve problems; make and implement decisions in an aligned, focused way that accelerates

## Conscious Actions for Inclusion: A Common Language to Drive Uncommon Results

results; and place themselves in the optimal position to grow and succeed today and in the future. If you change the interaction, you change the experience and change the results. The Conscious Actions for Inclusion provide that common language to drive uncommon results.

Special appreciation to Marjane Jensen for partnering in the creation of the original inclusive behaviors.

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