Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging

GLINT

Conversation Guide for Managers: Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging

This guide is designed to help you have team conversations centered on diversity, inclusion, and belonging—creating not only a safe space, but also a brave space for team members to share their experiences.

In addition to the conversation prompts below, there are a number of free resources dedicated to helping improve diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the workplace. Regardless of who is on your team, these conversations are important to fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging for all employees.

Before the Conversation

Education and self-reflection are critical precursors to helping yourself, your team, and your organization. Make sure you do the work to be informed about current issues before going into this conversation.

Keep up with communication from leadership to stay aligned with messaging, and share relevant resources provided by your organization. If you have not had these conversations with your team in the past, you may initially feel uncomfortable. But having intentional conversations is critical to opening dialogue about diversity, inclusion, and belonging (DIBs). As you build your capabilities in having these conversations with your team, look to find and normalize constructive discomfort. This is where the real growth happens.

Given the personal nature of diversity, inclusion, and belonging, managers should be prepared to address concerns about threats to safety, fears, privilege, microaggressions, and inequities faced within the organization or team. In preparation, take time for self-reflection.

Consider what it means to be an ally. All of us can strive to be allies. No matter what groups we may belong to or were born into, we each have our own privilege or benefits within society. Allyship is about understanding and recognizing our unique experiences in how we move through the world and how we can help each other and dismantle inequalities.

Consider how your preparation may incorporate self-care before going into this conversation. All managers should ask themselves:

1	How am I doing?
2	Have any current events triggered an emotional reaction, perhaps aligned with my own experience as part of an underrepresented group (for example, gender, LGBTQ+, or nationality)?
3	Am I in the right physical and mental space to be present in this conversation right now? (If not, it might be best to reschedule.)

Consider your internal resources and support, perhaps leveraging your Human Resource Business Partners or Diversity Team to discuss any concerns and how you might approach the conversation.

Tips for Team Conversations

Set the Ground Rules

Provide a framework for considerate and open dialogue, ensuring all team members feel safe and respected. Having a set of agreed-upon rules up front creates a social contract that you can point to during times of heightened tension. You don't need a lot of rules, and they don't have to be worded perfectly. Use what feels right for your group, and invite modifications throughout the discussion. Consider these as a starting point:

Confidentiality - Set the expectation that participants will not speak specifically about experiences shared or connect any of their learning outcomes to a specific person's story. Encourage them to share the broad lessons that they have learned through the discussion, not the confidential details of their peers' experiences.

Shared Accountability - Communicate up front that you expect a shared sense of responsibility in creating a brave space for productive conversation, where team members can lean into constructive discomfort. Call out that you, as the facilitator, may not always be able to detect how everyone is feeling. Invite and encourage others to calibrate if they have been negatively impacted by something that is said in the conversation. This may be done by using a code word, a hand signal, or simply stating, "I'm having a reaction to X." If this happens, pause to address the impact by asking what they need in the moment and consider taking time for a few deep breaths or a quick break.

Intent and Impact - Assume good intent of others and understand that your intent may not match the impact your words may have on someone else. An emotionally intelligent leader attends to the impact first, ensuring the impacted individual or group is cared for.

Cultural Humility - Explain to participants that it is okay that they may not know how to be completely respectful of others' experiences. We are in a place of learning. However, cultural humility asserts that all participants in a dialogue be humble about their knowledge and assumptions of others' experiences. If someone has an issue with an idea or way something is said because of their experience and/or identity, we must have the humility to defer to their knowledge of the situation, and legitimize their experience and how it may differ from our own.

Speak for yourself - Use I-statements. I-statements include, "I feel, I believe, I think, I read, I learned in school," and so on. I-statements help you avoid portraying what you think, feel, and do as the only or best thoughts, feelings, and actions. This bit of humility opens our minds to others while also making others feel more comfortable sharing. Make sure to provide space for others to speak. If you are more talkative, ensure you provide air time for others to contribute.

If you find the conversation heading in an unproductive direction that might intentionally or unintentionally exclude others, firmly redirect. Ask that your team help you in this effort—ensuring you are not unintentionally excluding others. Keep alert for changes in body language or facial expressions. If you sense a negative reaction has been triggered, check back in with the group. As you have these conversations, consider these phrases to help you manage the dialogue:

- ☐ Can you clarify your intention or provide additional context from your personal experience?

- ☐ I notice that people seem to be having an emotional reaction. Would anyone like to express their own experience with this subject?

- ☐ Unfortunately, that is against our ground rules. Let's move back into using collaborative behaviors. I want to make sure we're always acting in line with what we set as ground rules because my role is to make sure this remains a safe learning space.

- ☐ Thank you for your vulnerability and sharing your perspective based on your experience.

- ☐ This is hard work. We're stepping back to understand other perspectives. Thank you for sharing!

- ☐ I don't know the answer to that. Let me consult with my DIBs adviser, and we can open with that next month.

Prompts for Team Conversations

1   **Open by acknowledging what is going on.** Tell the team you want to create an open space for conversation that might be uncomfortable—but that space is necessary. Be sure to explain why this topic is important to address and what your personal commitments are. Why is this important to you and your team? You may want to share a personal experience, what you've learned as you did research prior to this conversation, or the vision of the environment you hope to work in. Doing so helps to create a deeper connection to the meaning of the conversation and the "why" behind it, as opposed to a check-the-box exercise.

2   **Clearly set the ground rules for the conversation.** Discuss your intention for the meeting, and introduce the ground rules. Ask for the team's input on these rules and agreement to uphold them.

3   **Ask how the team can commit to meaningful action together.** Consider as a team how you can continue to support this work at the team and individual level. This may be as simple as talking to a friend or family member about race and inequity. Perhaps you commit to a weekly book/resource discussion. If your organization is hosting workshops or other ways to become more involved, consider how your team might participate together.

4   **Recommend that the team regroup in a few days.** Keep the dialogue open. This should not be a one-time event. Additionally, it may take time before individuals are ready to share. To help others open up, take time at the beginning of the meeting to share your own "aha" moments. This could be something new you've learned or perhaps a prior misstep that you see differently now. Show vulnerability through your own learning process, and remind your team that the goal is not immediate perfection, but meaningful progress. Additionally, create time for 1:1 drop-ins, as this may be a more comfortable way for them to share. Consider setting aside time on your calendar for anyone who wants to talk.

Prompts for 1:1 Conversations

We advise that you have both team and individual conversations with your team members. Individual conversations provide the opportunity to go deeper on personal experiences and for you as a manager to better understand the individualized support they need.

1   **Open by acknowledging what is going on** and that you want to create an open space for continued conversation on this topic, which may be uncomfortable in a group setting.

2   **State you are there for your team member,** and ask a simple question, "How are you doing?" While this can be a great way to open up the dialogue, it can also be a loaded question. If you find that this question feels too broad, ask them to rate how they are doing on a 5-point scale. Offer flexibility and space to process, and ensure you're keeping an open, honest, and constructive dialogue on impacts to commitments and expectations in the role.

3   **Ask these questions:** "What support or resources do you need?" and "How else can I support you?" Seek to better understand the individual's needs and how you as their manager can help them to feel more supported. Don't feel you have to have the answers; actively listening and checking in regularly to provide support is meaningful.

4   **Recommend regrouping in a few days.** Keep the dialogue open. It is likely that employee needs may change and evolve. Make it clear that you are committed to continuing the conversation and will make time for additional 1:1 connects.

After the Conversation

Use the **ACT Conversation framework** to guide action steps following your conversation:

Acknowledge:
Here are a few things I heard. Is that accurate? Is there anything else you would add or change?

Collaborate:
Based upon this discussion, what one thing should we focus on over the next few weeks?
What should we NOT focus on over the next few weeks?

Take One Step Forward:
What's one thing we can each do to support our top focus area?

Throughout the coming weeks, share what's been done or has changed as a result of your team's conversation(s) during this time—even if it's small. This could be as simple as instituting a daily coffee standup to help the team feel more connected. When action has been taken and tied back to the team's feedback, they will feel their voice has been heard, and be more willing to share open and honest dialogue in the future.