

## Inclusive and Respectful Communication in the Workplace

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America continues to grow more diverse every year<sup>1</sup>. Ethnic diversity is often a major focus when discussing the topic of diversity—especially when we look at it through the lens of the events recent years; the disproportional impact of the pandemic on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People color) communities and the high-profile killings of numerous black individuals. Yet diversity goes beyond our ethnic background and extends into our political beliefs, religious affiliation, age, gender identity and sexual orientation.



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Often in conversations about inclusion and respectful workplace practices, much of the focus is placed on organizational policies. But whether your organization has explicit policies in place, how you communicate and collaborate with others can help your workgroup embrace inclusion and foster diversity. And these skills can extend into our lives outside of work as well.

### How do you identify?

Our identity is how we define who we are and where we feel we belong. Especially during our adolescent years, we are continually refining how we fit within the context of our social group and family. When we find others who are similar to us, we often gravitate towards them and find a sense of comfort in the similarities of how we think and experience the world. As we age, we develop a clearer definition of our identity and often surround ourselves with other individuals who make us feel a sense of belonging.

Inclusion involves expanding our definition of what is necessary to develop a sense of belonging. Inclusion helps us find excitement in diverse perspectives by providing us with the opportunity to further our understanding of those who on the surface seem different from ourselves. By improving how we communicate with those who we see as different from ourselves, our perceived differences become much smaller and we develop a deeper sense of our own identity. Below are some tips to help you be more inclusive in your communication style.

### Tips for more inclusive communication

1. **Ask, don't assume** – If you're not sure how someone identifies, whether it's their gender, religious affiliation, or nationality; it is always better to ask, than assume. They will appreciate your willingness to ask and it removes part of the "awkwardness" you might feel when uncertain.
2. **Recognize your unconscious bias** – We all have biases based on our life experience that impact how we communicate and relate with others. Make room to think about how your life experience may impact how you interact and communicate with others who may seem different from you.
3. **It's okay to be human** – Mistakes happen. The fear of making mistakes should not deter you from trying to engage more often with individuals who are different from yourself.



4. **Listen before you speak** – Make room for individuals with different communication styles and perspectives to provide their feedback, insights and ideas. You'll find this helps you broaden your ability to effectively and respectfully communicate across a broader audience.

## Respect

Although we may not always agree with the ideals, opinions or decisions of our coworkers, friends or family members, this does not mean that we should not still offer them respect. The U.S. Soldier's Code pledges, "Treat others with dignity and respect while expecting others to do the same."<sup>2</sup> Respect is a two-way street. If you are a leader and feel that you deserve respect due to your position, you must show first respect to those who you are expecting to respect you.

Your respect of others allows the entire team to flourish and encourages diverse voices to share, which might otherwise be held back. When we take the "high road" by showing someone respect, we create opportunities for mutual growth and understanding. Respect is a necessary aspect of developing a sense of belonging, and this in turn helps us more deeply understand the connections we share with other people in our life.

## We Can Help

VITAL WorkLife offers numerous online, virtual and in-person resources to support inclusive practices and respect in your workplace and daily life.

- Organizational leaders, managers and supervisors can consult with a Senior Consultant to develop an action plan to assist in fostering acceptance and respect in your workgroup or workplace.
- Employees and their family members have access to online resources on their [Member Website](#) to improve communication, address conflict and enact positive improvement in their well-being. They also have access to in-the-moment behavioral health support or face-to-face or virtual counseling.

For more information and to access your VITAL WorkLife EAP resources, contact us at **800.383.1908**, through the VITAL WorkLife app or [contact us online](#).

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.axios.com/where-americas-diversity-is-increasing-the-fastest-ae06eea7-e031-46a2-bb64-c74de85eca77.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.goarmy.com/soldier-life/being-a-soldier/living-the-army-values.html>  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2016/06/07/11-ways-male-leaders-can-adjustcommunication-in-order-to-be-more-inclusive-to-women/#74358c864638>