

TIPS FOR NAMING, INTERVENING AND ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC POWER

THINGS WE CAN DO WHEN WE CAUSE HARM

Move From Defensiveness & Guilt, Toward Action

I notice and let go of feelings that interfere with my ability to listen to what you are saying.

Seek More Information

I ask questions to make sure I understand your reaction. I read. I attend workshops. I talk with other “agent” group members.

Receive Feedback As a Gift

I welcome the information and believe it to be to my benefit to receive it.

Take A New Perspective

I try to understand your perspective by thinking about one of my own target group memberships.

Problem Solve

I take responsibility for identifying ways that I might change my actions, not assuming that you should or will help me.

Integrate New Behavior

I choose different behaviors in the future because I believe it is important for me to do so, not just because I am afraid of being confronted again.

Adapted from: Agent Responses to Harm: Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts,

THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A WORKPLACE

Use A Code Word

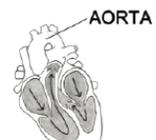
Institute an understanding that when someone is harmed by oppressive behavior they can say one word (like “ouch” for instance). The responsibility is on the person/s who caused harm to follow up when the person who was targeted is ready.

Develop A Support Team

Who are the people in your organization that you can trust to help with hard conversations? Invite those folks to form a Support Team that can be called in when needed.

Make Space For Ongoing Development

Ongoing professional development on addressing systemic power can be occur in many ways: it can be built into a manager’s job description to organize



trainings/study circles; or certain staff can be designated as a “change team” who is responsible for overseeing the larger arc of your process of supporting a culture that challenges oppression.

Institute Regular Check In Spaces

Check-in time can be built into ongoing meetings. You can also create Container spaces that happen regularly – taking 45 minutes to talk about the hard things that have come up where people get to work on them together. You can also use caucuses.

Institute Exit Interviews With Space To Reflect On Power And Privilege

Exit interviews can include questions like: Are there things about the organization (policies, day-to-day practices, specific incidents) that prevent you from bringing your whole self, cause you to feel tensions, to feel unsafe? What are they? Are there conversations you are not having at the organization (specifically around race, class, culture, ability, gender, power dynamics)? Are there things you would have liked to bring up, but found it hard to do so? What are they?

THINGS WE CAN DO AS FACILITATORS AND MEDIATORS

There are no “cookie-cutter” responses in these situations – timing is everything. Here are some suggestions.

Holding Multi-Partiality

Acknowledge power is always in play in any social dynamic. How is it showing up? Be partial to everyone and try and see yourself in that person’s position. Be partial to yourself. Knowing there are moments when you are triggered, have trauma responses, or get heated. Knowing there are moments to acknowledge that you have social power, or a lack of direct experience, i.e. facilitating a conversation between two people of color, if you are white.

Name It When It’s Happening

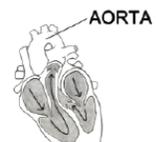
“I’m noticing that there’s a lot of interrupting happening, and that it’s happening along gender lines. I want us all to work to become more aware of that and change that.”
“I’m noticing there was a lot of silence after that statement”.

Give Yourself Permission To Switch Strategies

Communicating effectively can mean different things depending on the moment and the group composition. Will the group be better served by a quiet conversation after the meeting? As a change agent, a helpful question to ask yourself is, “What is my goal?” Is it to state your truth? Inspire change? Both? Folks often hear “racist,” “sexist,” “ableist,” etc. as name-calling. You can say: “What you just said is hurtful” or ask questions like those listed below.

Ask Questions To Support Self Inquiry

Elicitive questions support self inquiry, where as leading questions can create



defensiveness, or prevent critical thought. Consider using elicitive questions, like: What makes you say that? Where did you hear that? What do you mean by that? Can you tell me more about that?

Support The Leadership Of Those Targeted.

Allow people to respond on their own behalf. Support their responses by synthesizing, if those who are behaving in harmful ways are expressing confusion or resistance. A helpful formula for synthesizing someone's statements is: "What I heard from this person is this...[restate with a lens towards clarification and understanding]...is that right?" Always offer an opportunity for those whose words you are restating and synthesizing to correct you if you got it wrong.

Create Space For Those We Are Not Hearing From

For instance: "I'm going to take a moment to see if anyone who hasn't spoken in a while has something to say." Or: "We've been hearing from a lot of (cis-gender) men. Let's take a moment to see if any of the other folks in the room have something to say. "

