


The Impact of Microaggressions on Well-Being

Welcome! We will start shortly. While you wait:

1. Plan to have your video turned on and be prepared to actively engage during the program.
2. Update your display name to your first & last name (tap on 3 dots in upper right corner of your video box).
3. Use of computer audio is preferred. If you need to dial-in by phone go to https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362663-Joining-a-meeting-by-phone#h_682f2e00-6a7c-4a5a-b20f-70b9b9012563 .
Following these steps will enable your video and audio to be in the same breakout room.

SJC Committee on Lawyer Well-Being

June 9, 2021



The Impact of Microaggressions on Well-Being: Expanding Understanding and Employing Practice Skills to Interrupt Bias

Today's Objectives

- Understand the impact of microaggressions on well-being
- Develop skills for interrupting bias
- Learn how to recover when we make mistakes



Discussion Guidelines

- Listen to each other.
- Be open to a range of perspectives.
- OK to disagree.
- Keep a self-focus
“I statements.”
- Maintain confidentiality.



Additional Zoom Guidelines

- Change your display name to first & last name.
- Use the raise hand feature to ask a question.
- Use your video camera during the session.
- Mute when not talking.
- Resist temptation to multi-task.
- Try to limit distractions.



A Few Concepts

Unconscious Bias

The process by which the brain uses mental associations that are so well-established as to operate without awareness, intention, or even control.



Micro-inequities / Microaggressions

- Micro-inequities are a manifestation of unconscious bias.
- Small slights, that may be unintentional.
- Become more significant as they accumulate.
- May appear to be jokes or compliments but leave recipient with a negative feeling.
- Pay attention to impact & intent.



Examples

- “Impressive you can be a good lawyer and a good mother at the same time.”
- “You are very articulate.”
- “Your English is so good!”
- “Your hair looks professional when you wear it straight like that.”
- “Making assumptions about someone’s sexual orientation.
- Speaking to the aide instead of the person in the wheelchair.
- Assuming some people are competent and others not.

Dimensions of Diversity



Race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, mental/emotional aptitude, religious beliefs, political beliefs, country of origin, personality types, thinking styles, work role and other dimensions whether visible or invisible.

Inclusion

An environment in which everyone can be themselves, thrive and do their best work.



Case Study

Understanding the Impact of Microaggressions on Well-Being

Case Study

Danielle and Maya are the only Black attorneys in the department. Danielle has been with the organization for two years, while Maya is relatively new. Alex, a supervisor, has been working on a case with Danielle for the last month. They have met a few times and communicate regularly by email and phone. Alex is having lunch in the cafeteria and spots Maya a few tables away. Alex goes over to Maya and says, “Hi Danielle. I will be sending you some documents later today to review; let me know if you have any questions.”

Case Study

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1. Is this a big deal?
2. What is the range of possibilities for Alex’s behavior?
3. What is the possible impact on Danielle and Maya?

Micro-inequities

“What makes micro-inequities particularly problematic is that they consist in micro-messages that are hard to recognize for victims, bystanders and perpetrators alike. When victims of micro-inequities do recognize the micro-messages, it is exceedingly hard to explain to others why these small behaviors can be a huge problem.”

- Prof. Mary Rowe (MIT)

Language Matters

- Language changes over time.
- Address people in the way they self-identify.
- We stop using words/phrases when we learn of their origin.
- Inappropriate language can cause harm.
- Much to learn and unlearn.

Impact of Unconscious Bias

- We all come by it honestly.
- It is pervasive.
- It affects our interpersonal interactions.
- It impacts our organizations:
 - ✓ Hiring
 - ✓ Assignments
 - ✓ Evaluations
 - ✓ Advancement

What matters is what we do to counter our biases.

From Bystander to Upstander

Ways to Interrupt Bias at Work

Why People Might Not Speak Up When They Feel Offended

- Fear of reprisals.
- Fear of rejection by colleagues.
- Fear of being labeled “over-sensitive.”
- Fear of not being considered a team player.
- Fear of being accused of not having a sense of humor.
- Fear of being disbelieved.

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What could you do or say if you were aware of the situation?

Interrupt Bias When You See It

- Ask a clarifying question.
- Offer a different opinion.
- Model good behavior.
- Don't laugh at inappropriate jokes.
- Tell the person the comment was offensive.
- Follow up with the offender or offended person.
- Consider who else should know.

Focus On Your Part

How to Recover After a
Microaggression

Focus on Your Part

At work, and in life, you will have many conversations on challenging topics and with people with whom you disagree.



Focus on Your Part

- 1. Speaker:** Pay attention to the impact of your words and behavior.
- 2. Recipient:** Contemplate the possible range of intent of the speaker; consider giving the benefit of the doubt.
- 3. Bystander / Upstander:** Step up. Practice allyship by interrupting bias. If you have privilege, use it.

Tips for the Speaker

Pay attention to the impact of your words and behavior. If you focus only on your intent, you will miss out on the learning.

- Believe the recipient when they describe the impact.
- Listen more and talk less.
- Try not to be defensive when you get feedback.
- Apologize. Don't include a "but" in your apology.

Tips for the Recipient or Bystander

Consider the possible range of intent of the speaker. Use your privilege to interrupt bias.

1. If intent is unclear, start with the benefit of the doubt (if able).
2. Offer a different opinion.
3. Ask a question:
 - “Why do you say that?”
 - “Tell me more?”
 - “Is that true?”
4. Don't laugh at inappropriate jokes.

Tips for Giving Feedback

1. Some things you can say:
 - a. “I felt sad/angry/disappointed/offended when I heard your statement.”
 - b. “Wow, I’m surprised you said that; and, that really disturbs me.”
 - c. “You might not be aware of how your behavior is seen by others.”
2. If you can’t think of what to say in the moment, you can follow up later.

Practice and Keep Talking



What's one thing you are taking away from today's session?



Key Takeaways

1. Increase your awareness.
2. Don't use microaggressions to gain an advantage.
3. Practice civility and respect above all.
4. Interrupt bias when you see it.
5. Pay attention to your part.
6. Believe someone when they say they have been marginalized on the basis of an identity.

Thank You.

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