

# Build Skills to Dialogue Across Differences

## Brief Summary

In today's workplace, courageous conversations are essential in order to understand each other's experiences and perspectives and to address uncomfortable topics such as racism or bias. These conversations tend to be difficult and there are no simple fixes, but building this "muscle" is crucial to fostering a culture of inclusion and innovation. We must all do the hard work of participating in constructive dialogues to address underlying issues getting in the way of a workplace culture that is more equitable and inclusive. The issues are there, and ignoring them doesn't make them go away; it only makes things worse.

For honest conversations to work, we must foster a secure environment, where participants are willing to discuss difficult topics, listen to understand, learn from each other, take risks, and be vulnerable. Sometimes we will get it wrong, make mistakes, and experience discomfort. We must take responsibility for our impact, regardless of intent.

### Challenge

Avoiding challenging and uncomfortable topics leads to a lack of [psychological safety](#) which promotes assimilation and "[covering](#)" in the workplace.

The ability to have honest and open dialogue impacts team effectiveness, ability to innovate, and overall business performance. Additionally it impacts the wellbeing and performance of individual employees.

### Recommendation

Build the organizational "muscle" for dialogues on increasingly sensitive topics (e.g., remote work, childcare, then gender, bias, race, ...).

Create a safe environment where employees can share their experiences and find a common ground with each other, promoting more inclusive and understanding workplaces. This skill set will translate to dialogues about other critical business issues, as well.

## Proposed Actions

- Provide experiential training to build skills and establish norms and guidelines that foster trust and honest dialogue.
- Reinforce the importance of listening to understand (rather than to defend, convince, debate), particularly among majority groups.
- Ensure leaders role model constructive dialogue across difference and overcome their own roadblocks to honest, empathic communication.
- Promote initiatives and events related to discussing specific DEI topics.
- Create ERGs (employee resources groups) to raise awareness of common challenges and engage allies in solutions.



### About the Author

[Betsy Bagley](#) is Pulsely's Co-Founder and DEI Director.

## Valued Guidance

### To Read



**Catalyst:** [Resources for Talking Across Differences](#)

**Forbes:** [Conversations About Race at Work](#)

### To Watch / Listen



**Fast Company:** [How To Start Difficult Conversations About Gender Equality At Work](#)

### To Learn / Study



**HBR:** [You Just Had a Difficult Conversation at Work. Here's What to Do Next](#)

**Seramount:** [Managers' Guide to Having Essential Conversations](#)

**edX:** [Communication Skills for Dialoguing Across Difference](#)

**LinkedIn Learning:** [Skills for Inclusive Conversations by Mary-Frances Winters](#)

**LinkedIn Learning:** [Communicating about Culturally Sensitive Issues by Dr. Daisy Lovelace](#)