

Diversity Minutes: Integrating DEI into the Flow of Work



By Jamie Ousterout

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One of the most common concerns I hear from individuals at our client organizations is this: “I want to learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and share with my teammates, but I just don’t have time, and I don’t know where to begin.”

I also hear “I don’t have time to spend 30 minutes on DEI every day, let alone a full-day in DEI training” and “It seems like DEI is such a daunting task. What can I do easily and quickly that will actually make an impact?”

At The Diversity Movement, we strongly believe that DEI is not something that should be on the side of your desk; it works better – and is more sustainable – when incorporated into the fabric of your organization and your daily work. However, I also recognize that DEI as an organization-wide initiative can sound intimidating or discouraging to the manager or individual employee who just doesn’t know where to start, or what to say.

The answer is to integrate DEI learning into the flow of daily work, so it isn’t just one more thing piled on but a small part of the day’s routine – and hopefully, one that you can look forward to. In this article, I will provide practical suggestions and examples you can leverage to incorporate DEI into your workflow.

Start by practicing curiosity

One of the easiest ways to start incorporating DEI in the flow of work is simply to be curious. Ask questions about your fellow employees and teammates, and do so from a place of genuine interest.

All too often, we (myself included) launch right into business without taking a moment to simply ask: “How are you doing?” We never know what someone else might be going through on any given day. Are they worried about a sick relative? Are they concerned about their child’s grades or behavior at school? As is frequently the case nowadays, are they worried about COVID affecting them or a loved one? Did they just spill the coffee all over themselves on the way to the meeting? Taking a moment to check in and listen, from a place of genuine curiosity and interest, is an easy place to start.





Here's an example. When I was in college, I took a very early Spanish class and began to form relationships with two of my classmates. After class, we would sometimes go get a cup of coffee or breakfast together and chat. I grew up in the Catholic faith in Colorado. One classmate grew up in the Jewish faith in North Carolina. And the other classmate grew up in the Muslim faith in the Northeast.

As we became more comfortable, we started asking questions about one another's identities and backgrounds coming from a place of genuine curiosity and respect. While I had dear family friends who were Jewish, I personally had never been exposed to those individuals from the Muslim faith. My friend patiently answered my questions about Ramadan, why he was fasting, the various clothes he wore, and more. In a similar way, I shared my upbringing and my religion with him and with my Jewish friend. We all learned a great deal from one another, but it didn't feel like learning. It only felt like making friends over coffee.

Enter the "Diversity Minute"

How can we translate this idea of casual learning to make it applicable in the modern workplace? Integrate DEI into the flow of work. Give managers and employees easy ways to integrate DEI learning – and actions – into their existing meetings, interactions, and individual work. Donald Thompson, CEO at The Diversity Movement, calls this a “Diversity Minute.”

Culture change doesn't necessarily have to be an organization-wide overhaul of processes. It can start with a daily Diversity Minute, built into the routine of every day. Instead of setting aside separate time to talk specifically about DEI topics, just start infusing DEI learning into your everyday habits and rituals. Below are five “grab and go” examples that I encourage you to use at your next department or team meeting.

The first time you do it, it may feel awkward or uncomfortable, but I promise that your team will enjoy the break from the regular business routine and the will soon seize the opportunity to take five minutes and think critically or expand their perspectives.

But, before you dive right in, I do think it's important to set some ground rules. You might consider saying something along the lines of:

“Today, we're going to spend the first few minutes of our meeting expanding our perspectives. I want to share a short [video/quote/slide] with you and then have a couple minutes of open discussion. First, I want to recognize that we all have different perspectives, and I want to welcome everyone to share their own unique view. Participation is not mandatory, but I want to start pulling in different thought starters to help us be more curious and inspire innovation. Also, remember, I don't have all of the answers but just want to create a space for conversation and sharing.”

Five "Diversity Minute" examples

1) "10 Inclusive Language Blunders and How to Correct Them" (3 minute video)

Talking points: It's great if you can start by sharing why this video resonates with you. Here's an example script, but feel free to adapt: "I didn't know about the origin of many of these phrases, like 'rule of thumb' and 'uppity'. I grew up saying these things. This video made me think a bit more about the language I use, although like the speaker in the video, I am sure I will continue to use these words as I learn more."

Questions to pose to the group: What did this video make you realize? Were there any examples that stood out to you?

Additional resource: Download The Diversity Movement's [guide to inclusive language](#) for more examples.

2) Quote from the book, Wandering in Strange Lands by Morgan Jenkins

"People's assumptions are often wrong, but dangerous too. When people assume, they inadvertently erase others' identities."

Talking points: After showing the quote onscreen and/or reading it aloud, share why this quote resonates with you. Again, here's an example script, but feel free to adapt: "I think people have probably made assumptions about me in the past, and I know I have made assumptions about others. I never thought about assumptions as 'dangerous', but this quote really made me stop and think and realize that I have probably inadvertently hurt others because of my assumptions about them."

Questions to pose to the group: What did this quote make you think about? Can you think of a time when someone assumed something about you, or you made an assumption about someone else, even if it wasn't dangerous or harmful?

3) "Who Has Privilege, and Who Doesn't?" (2-minute video)

Talking points: It's great if you can start by sharing why this video resonates with you. Here's an example script, but feel free to adapt: "For me, I really like this video because I always believed that being privileged meant being affluent, or I would think of the term 'white privilege'. This video helped me understand that we all have some privilege and some obstacles we have had to overcome. It also made me reflect on how we can use our privilege and experience to open doors for others."

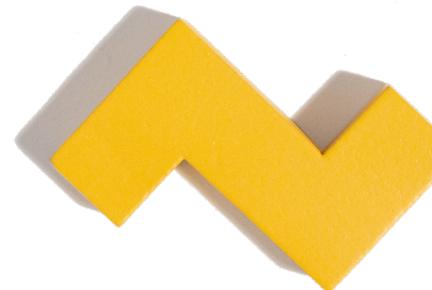
Questions to pose to the group: What did this video make you realize? What resonated with you? What did you think about privilege before watching this video?

4) Quote from the book, [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#) by Isabel Wilkerson

“We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, “I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.” And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.”

Talking points: After sharing the quote onscreen and/or reading it aloud, share why this quote resonates with you. Here’s an example script, but feel free to adapt: “I really like the comparison to inheriting an old house because I cannot personally be responsible for what happened in the past. However, I also know I am responsible for what can happen in the future. This quote really made me pause and consider what I can do to create a better future.”

Questions to pose to the group: What did this quote make you think about?



5) [“What’s the Difference Between Equality and Equity?”](#) (2 minute video)

Talking points: After sharing the video, explain why this video resonates with you. Here’s an example script, but feel free to adapt: “From my perspective, I was raised to believe that everyone should be treated fairly and that meant treating everyone the same, so I always felt like we should be striving for equality. But, this video made me realize that receiving the same treatment doesn’t work for everyone — some people need certain interventions that others may not, and vice versa. I thought the desktop versus laptop computers example was a good one.”

Questions to pose to the group: What did this video make you think about? Are there instances you can think of where you or someone you know received equitable treatment that made a big difference in their work experience?



Maintain momentum

I challenge you to try using one of these examples to kick off (or close) your next department or team meeting. And then feel free to use another example...or better yet, challenge yourself or your teammates to do the same at future meetings.

Find a short video, share a quote from a book or article, share a social media post, or share a story from the news or pop culture. If you're not sure what content to share, The Diversity Movement has many free resources on our [website](#) that we encourage you to explore and share. Another fun idea for a team meeting is to have your team members share a story or a person that they admire during a particular observance.

For instance, throughout Black History Month last year, my team at The Diversity Movement each shared a person whom they believed was making Black history now. (I chose the ballet dancer, Misty Copeland). Similarly, for Women's History Month, one of our clients had everyone share the woman they most looked up to in their lives, either personally, professionally, or historically. This is an easy, fun, and casual way for people to learn more about not just a "diversity" topic but also about one another.

Hopefully, these examples and scripts will help you feel more confident in incorporating DEI into the flow of your daily work. While these moments may seem small or feel uncomfortable at first, what they offer is an easy and joyful way to start creating a more inclusive workplace culture by helping you and your team learn more about one another and other perspectives.

When you do try one of these Diversity Minute examples, I'd love to hear how it went and what you learned! Please reach out to me on [LinkedIn](#) or by [email](#). As always, we are here to help.

