

Even with the best intentions, we can say or do things that are offensive and hurtful. Getting past these missteps means recognizing that our words matter. This means taking action by using words that create inclusive environments where people feel both that they are valued and that they belong.¹

IMPACT

Ignoring differences can stifle trust, authentic communication, and your ability to connect with someone who is different from you in some way.

RESEARCH SAYS

"We don't see color—only people." It is not racist to see a person's race or ethnicity—it is in fact a natural tendency. Avoiding conversations about race to maintain neutrality will not create an ideal work environment for all employees.²

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Ask your colleagues who have a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background than yours if they feel your workplace honors their identity and experiences.

IMPACT

Implies that you had lower expectations, possibly because of the person's race or ethnicity.

RESEARCH SAYS

"You are so cor articulate."

This reinforces the stereotype that people of color and ethnic minorities are less competent than their white counterparts, and that those who are successful are an "exception to the rule."³

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Provide concrete examples of why and how you felt the individual excelled. For example, "Your presentation was very motivating, and it aligned with our business goals very well."

IMPACT

Insinuates that racial or ethnic minorities are "outsiders" who can't speak English and don't really belong where they live or work.

RESEARCH SAYS

"She speaks English well."

People of all races and ethnicities can speak English well.⁴

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Unless the person has previously struggled with the English language and has made vast improvements, it is better to congratulate your peer on the content of their work.

IMPACT

Shutting down authentic conversations disempowers and shames people by diminishing their experiences, feelings, and sense of worth.

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Minimizing another person's experiences can raise tensions, lead to defensiveness,

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Step into another person's shoes and learn more about their experiences. For example, "I recognize that this is important to you; I'd like to understand more..."

IMPACT

Questioning the qualifications of other colleagues can make them feel that they must always "prove" themselves worthy to be in their role.

RESEARCH SAYS

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"So, how did you get this new position?" Some people assume that people of color have benefitted from special treatment through affirmative action or quota systems and are therefore not qualified.⁶

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Congratulate your colleague on the new position. Ask questions such as, "What energizes you about your new role? How can I support your transition? How can we team up to advance our company's mission?"

HOW TO FLIP THE SCRIPT⁷

PAY ATTENTION

Are your words authentic, thoughtful, and carefully chosen, yet not so stilted as to stifle open discussion?

LEARN FROM OTHERS

Ask your colleagues if they have ever experienced or witnessed biased behavior. What did it look like? What was said?

BE ACCOUNTABLE

Ask a colleague: "Can I count on your help to give me honest, constructive feedback if I use words that are hurtful or offensive to you, in the moment or later?"

Sources.

- 1. Catalyst, Engaging in Conversations About Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace (Catalyst, 2016).
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- 3. Derald Wing Sue, "Microaggressions: More Than Just Race," Psychology Today, November 2010.
- 4. Derald Wing Sue, Jennifer Buccei, Annie I. Lin, Kevin L. Nadal, and Gina C. Torino, "Racial Microaggressions and the Asian American Experience," Culture Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, vol. 13 no. 1 (2007): p. 72-81; Shirin Hakimzadeh and D'Vera Cohn, English Usage Among Hispanics in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2007); Benjamin Herscovitch, "English is the Language of the Asian Century," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, September 12, 2012.
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- 7. Catalyst, Engaging in Conversations About Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace (Catalyst, 2016).

