



# Diversity Gazette

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### Golden opportunities arise from difficult conversations

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The truth is that sometimes we are scared to engage in conversations about diversity. We are scared that we don't have it figured out, might offend someone or say something wrong. With the increasing diversity and shifts in our society, it can be challenging to keep up.

Let's face it - we are bound to mess up at some point. The reality is we don't know everything, and we shouldn't expect that we do. We aren't perfect; only humans. So, what do we do when we do "mess up"?

Here are some of our best tips:

**Listen:** This is the golden rule of difficult conversations. First, you have to listen and put your emotions aside. If someone comes to you and is willing to have this difficult conversation, that means they trust you in some capacity. Listen to understand, not to respond. This requires a lot of work. You can even take notes of what you are hearing, even write out what you are feeling. Be sure to continue to make eye contact

though so that the person knows you are present. Only once they feel like they have been heard and honored will they truly be able to accept an apology or conversation about the issue.

**Pause:** So, you've listened. Don't respond right away! Your initial response will likely have some hurt or anger or defensiveness, which is not productive. Think and sit with what was said. Let the person know that you hear them, and you are thinking critically about what they said. If your emotions are running high, ask for time to think about what they brought to your attention and follow-up.

**Think Critically:** You have heard the person, you didn't respond with defensiveness or anger, so now you must reflect on the conversation and the situation. Think about the broader context of what was said. Are there things that you may have missed? Are there things you don't understand? Reach out to support from other people who

you know will be honest with you about the situation. In the world of the internet, resources online can also be a great way to expose you to different perspectives.

**Rebuild Trust/Grow:** If you haven't followed up, you should. Apologize. Let them know that your intention was not to offend them and that you have reflected on what they shared. Thank them for being honest with you. Then ask, what can you do to repair the trust. Follow through and continue growing.

If someone reaches out to you to let you know that you have hurt them in some way, consider yourself lucky. I know that upon first hearing that you offended them, it can feel like an attack. The truth of the matter is that their honesty and vulnerability allow you to grow. Think about it this way, if no one ever told you, you would never know. *Now that you know, you have an opportunity to achieve a different outcome.*