

COWORKING IDEA
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ANTI-RACISM GLOSSARY

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ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. It takes the form of challenging and actively changing policies, stereotypes, ideas, beliefs and social behaviours that perpetuate racist actions and produce harmful outcomes. Anti-racism is rooted in action; it is about taking steps to eliminate racism at the individual, institutional, and structural levels, rather than passively claiming to be non-racist.

The goal of anti-racists is to work towards ultimately cultivating a much more egalitarian, emancipatory society. This can only be achieved from a collective, historical understanding of how years of federal, provincial, and local policies have placed Black, Indigenous and Racialized communities in the crises they face today, and rightfully identifying those policies for what they are: racist.

People often mistakenly believe that simply being “not racist” is enough to eliminate racial discrimination. The problem with this perspective is that white people are often unaware of their own unconscious biases. People often don’t fully understand the institutional and structural issues that uphold white supremacy and contribute to racist behaviours, attitudes, and policies.

Saying “but I’m not racist” also allows people to avoid participating in anti-racism. It’s a way of saying “that’s not my problem” while failing to acknowledge that even people who are not racist still reap the benefits of a system that is biased against other people.

As Ibram X. Kendi, director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Centre at American University, notes in his book *How to Be an Antiracist*: “One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an anti-racist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist’ ; the claim of ‘not racist’ neutrality is a mask for racism.” “The opposite of racist is not ‘not racist’, it’s anti-racist”.

Action: Find an opportunity within your coworking space to confront what could potentially be harmful and/or prohibit an environment that is egalitarian for all races.

Examples:

i.) *I read over my coworking space’s Respectful Workplace Policy, and found ways that the language could be tailored to reflect more inclusive processes and practices when a situation a racial discrimination occurs.*

ii.) *I remembered a situation where a fellow coworking member of South Asian descent timidly told me that he felt another member was being passive aggressive with him and that it was racially motivated. My response before asking why he felt that was: “that’s awful I’m sorry...but I don’t think it was because of your race”. Today I reached out to that same member and apologized for taking a neutral and dismissive stance before hearing him out. I’m committing to doing better in a future situation.*

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Bias is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that's considered to be unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences.

There are types of biases

a.) **Conscious bias** (also known as explicit bias) and

b.) **Unconscious bias** (also known as implicit bias)

It is important to note that biases, conscious or unconscious, are not limited to ethnicity and race. Though racial bias and discrimination are well documented, biases may exist toward any social group. One's age, gender, gender identity physical abilities, religion, sexual orientation, weight, and many other characteristics are subject to bias.

Unconscious biases are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

Unconscious bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and often incompatible with one's conscious values. Certain scenarios can activate unconscious attitudes and beliefs. For example, biases may be more prevalent when multi-tasking or working under time pressure.

Action: Create an opportunity to have a discussion with someone in your coworking community (especially those from socially dissimilar groups), to share that you are exploring your biases, and identify what some of them are. This can help others feel more secure about exploring their own biases. It's important to have these conversations in a safe space; individuals must be open to alternative perspectives and viewpoints.

Examples

i.) *I ran into an acquaintance in the kitchen on my way routine 11:00am coffee. Instead of our usual banter around football, I decided to share that I am currently challenging my biases after speaking with an Indigenous CEO on a call that I accidentally mistakened for the assistant.*

ii.) *Today I suggested to my Community Manager that Unconscious Bias training/workshops be made readily available to our membership. She said that she would look into it and get back to me. I made a note to follow up with her in a week.*

WHITE SUPREMACY

The belief that white people are superior to those of other races and thus should dominate them. Its purpose is the maintenance and defence of a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

As a political ideology, it imposes and maintains social, political, historical, or institutional domination by white people. This ideology has been put into effect through socioeconomic and legal structures such as the Trans Atlantic slave trade, Indigenous genocide on Turtle Island, Jim Crow laws in the United States, the White Australia policies from the 1890s to the mid-1970s, and Apartheid in South Africa.

White supremacy is a belief system that perpetuates notions of upholding white dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially in instances where they may co-exist, and maintaining a “white culture” that is superior to other cultures. It also implies on a scientific level that white people are genetically superior to other races. This has historical roots in Eugenics, Darwinism which claimed evolutionary superiority amongst only white Europeans against other races, and even instances of Freudian psychoanalysis theories.

As a full-fledged ideology, white supremacy is far more encompassing than simple racism or bigotry. Most white supremacists today further believe that the white race is in danger of extinction due to a rising “flood” of non-whites.

Action: Identify a way that your coworking space upholds values rooted in white supremacy, and what a change to that could look like.

Example:

i.) All of the books we’ve been reading in our Book Club have been by white authors and told from predominantly white perspectives. A simple change would be recommending a book by a Black author when it’s my turn to choose a book next month. I will do my own research to choose a Black author of my choice.

ii.) I realize that almost all of the guest speakers we’ve had at our Lunch N Learns have been white. I took it upon myself to bring this up with our program director. Together we set up a time to research leaders of marginalized races this week, and came up with a list of potential leaders to bring in and offer differing perspectives to our community.

DECOLONIZE

Recognizing the negative effects of colonialism in all forms, and in response making long-term commitments and processes to dismantle these effects. It can look like bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power.

Decolonization engages with imperialism and colonialism at every level. It means challenging how higher education, research and publishing are complicit in and vital to the colonial oppression of Black, Indigenous and Racialized peoples around the globe.

Decolonization restores the Indigenous world view, culture and traditional ways.

Action: Find or create an object that you can physically integrate into your coworking environment that will contribute to decolonizing the space.

Examples:

i.) This week, I managed to convince a few coworking members to pitch in to acquire an art piece by a local Indigenous artist. After we purchased the piece, we donated it to our coworking space and requested to the Executive Director that we keep it permanently hung in our space. So many community members have been engaging with the piece so far, and it is already starting lots of conversation around this nation who were the first to occupy these lands.

ii.) I asked a few community members if they would back me up in requesting that we print out a land acknowledgement at the entrance of our coworking space. Some of them felt uncomfortable, but I'm in the process of having these uncomfortable discussions so that we can all understand why this small gesture makes a huge impact in decolonizing our space.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Listening is not simply hearing another person speak. We are talking about the practice of listening with the full intent to understand another, while engaging with the conversation in meaningful ways. It involves putting your ego aside, withholding judgment, and directing your full attention to the things the speaker is saying. It can also apply when you're listening to the radio or reading an article that presents a different perspective. Listening is a practice of engaging with the world in an attentive, empathic way.

While we don't always want to acknowledge it, we all have unconscious biases and unrecognized assumptions about people who look different from us. And these assumptions can keep us from hearing what that individual is saying, from seeing who that individual really is. This may have been what was happening with Mei. We can tackle this by setting an intention to really, actively listen to each other.

As sometimes uncomfortable or heated conversations about police brutality and racism begin to enter mainstream discourse, it's important that we all take some time to learn what it means to truly listen. While you might feel a strong need to speak out on these issues, give your own perspective, or offer solutions that you think may work, start by listening deeply to what is being said.

If you come from a place of privilege, listening is the first thing you can do to practice anti-racism. Privilege manifests as a set of blinders on the world; those with privilege are often unaware of the harms they do to those without. BIPOC (an acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, and/or people of color) have been vocal about these topics for years but were largely not heard until the murder of George Floyd forced mainstream media and society to pay attention. We need to pay attention to the voices of those who have been doing the work all along. And we can best do so with listening, which provides a bridge to understanding the lived experiences of marginalized groups; an essential step in devising and implementing solutions for the future.

Action: Find an opportunity to apply active listening within your coworking community by prioritizing someone or a group with a different background than you.

-Direct your full attention to the speaker. Quiet the background noise in your mind and focus on the speaker and the meaning behind the words they are saying. Using your full attention also involves letting go of the urge to craft a response as you listen. Rather, listen with your whole self, and trust that it is only through listening that you could possibly be able to respond wisely--if a response is even necessary.

-Ask clarifying questions when appropriate. As you turn your attention to the meaning that is being conveyed by the speaker, you will undoubtedly encounter a need for clarification. Make sure to ask questions that grow understanding rather than questions that challenge a speaker's perspective. Now is not the time to debate the validity of someone's experience. Now is the time to learn.

-Choose when you speak. It is impossible to speak and listen at the same time, so it's important to recognize that one comes at the expense of another. People in positions of privilege or power should be especially mindful of speaking over those without. If you are someone who tends to speak often, try taking a speaking break. You may be surprised by what you hear when you allow space for others' ideas to emerge.

Examples:

i.) I was having a conversation in the lounge room of our coworking space with an Latinx member who was complaining that he didn't get a job because the interviewer was bias due to his race. I reassured him that there were many times I didn't get the job, and I'm a white guy! He's not more special than me! It has nothing to do with race. But the more he spoke, the more I decided this was the time to apply active listening, so I tried to not centre myself and really empathize being in his shoes. I left that conversation thinking that it is possible his accent was too much of a barrier for the employer, and that his race may have played a part with him not getting the job. It has happened to people before I've learned from him, so there is a chance this situation also applies. Either way, I'm glad I took the time to listen to him and consider a different perspective.

PRIVILEGE

Privilege can be hard to notice, if we were born with it. But everyone has identities that are privileged and not privileged. What is privilege?

Privilege is any unearned benefit, advantage, favor, or right that a person receives by nature of their identity.

White Privilege is preferential institutional treatment that grants power and resources to European- and European-American/Canadian people, while simultaneously withholding from Indigenous, African, Asian, and Arab people. White Privilege is having the power to define, or be the definition of the status quo. White Privilege does not assume that you've never struggled, or experienced hardships. White Privilege does not assume that everything you've accomplished didn't take strain, or effort. White Privilege does not assume that all white people benefit equally. Because White Privilege is bestowed, doesn't mean there's nothing we can do.

Action: Find a specific way that you personally hold/carry privilege within the world, and how you potentially carry that within your coworking community.

Example:

i.) As a white person, I see many examples of positive, celebrated, white role models in fashion, tv, movies, media, leadership and government. This could potentially allow me to unconsciously feel empowered in a way that would make someone who isn't as represented feel marginalized.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality refers to the overlap of various social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and other individual characteristics. How they “intersect” with one another contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual. It serves as a framework for understanding how aspects of a person’s social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

Intersectionality is living at the intersections of overlapping systems of privilege and oppression, identifying advantages and disadvantages that are felt by people due to a combination of factors. Acknowledging intersectional forms of oppression is an attempt at demolishing racial hierarchies altogether.

Action: Either independently or in a group, find a creative way to leverage an intersectional analysis to promote respect and awareness for all identities in your space.

Examples:

i.) A few friends in my coworking space and I decided to start hosting monthly discussion groups for members to have a safe space to navigate the intersectional social barriers that they face.

ii.) I am a white woman who has always fought for gender parity. After speaking to a new queer Black female member, I couldn’t understand why it took her 10 years longer than me to launch her startup. I learned that not all of us women face the same fight- she has the added social barriers of being queer, and Black. What I recognized for the first time is that a fight for feminism isn’t sincere unless I am considering intersectionality.

VALIDATION

Validation is making a sincere effort to listen, understand and validate differing points of view. For occasions where the ability to understand is not possible, there should be a commitment to at least listen and validate one another for sharing an experience.

Validation is also accepting that others will come from a different identity and thus experiences than us. This means accepting that others will have values and opinions that are different from our own - not wrong, different. Be open to the fact that there is always room for learning and growing.

Identifying our own feelings before sharing our concerns with another person is crucial. Make every attempt not to blame, threaten or name call, even if angry or hurt. If it's a problem you haven't been able to resolve, seek assistance with another person.

Action: Think of a time either within or outside of your coworking community, that you jumped to a conclusion or argument very passionately. Recount what you would do differently in that situation if you applied validation.

Example:

i) I am not entirely familiar with the historical extent of the Israel and Palestinian crisis, but I have more Jewish friends so have just assumed they are correct in their arguments. Regardless of where I stand, I regret not validating the feelings of my Muslim coworker when he tried to have a conversation with me around this. There can be no progress moving forward if I'm not at least validating somebody's feelings or experiences, regardless of where I stand on the issue.

SOLIDARITY

Racial solidarity is akin to community; it is a stance of unity, support or agreement of feeling or action against oppressors rooted in racial injustice. This can be cross-cultural, and/or amongst individuals with a common interest. An act of solidarity stems from an alignment in your own personal values.

Action: Work with members of your coworking community to define a list of values for the coworking space. Based on these values, determine a marginalized group or recent headline that fits into these values, that you can determine you are in solidarity with.

Example:

i.) My coworking space had a brainstorming session this week, and we determined one of our community's values is safety, and ensuring all of our members feel safe when in our space. With that said, there has been a surge of anti-Asian hate and racism in our state since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our community stands in solidarity with those who identify as Asian experiencing this hate. We want you to feel safe in our community.