



Creating a Culture of Accountability: Strategies for DEI Success

QUESTIONS

1. Accountability can be a challenging word for some people. They hear it and think of shaming and blaming – and maybe even being disciplined or reprimanded for something. Why do you think “accountability” is useful for DEI work?
2. What would be examples of how someone could hold someone else accountable – in a way that is not shaming and blaming?
3. How can we build accountability into our organizations without turning everyone into an arm of HR or some kind of tattletale, which we know everyone hates?
4. You talk about pushback, but what does that mean, in terms of DEI? What are some examples of pushback – at both the personal and organizational level?
5. Is there more pushback for DEI now? How do you know? And why is that?
6. What can we do to challenge pushback around our DEI efforts?



HANDOUT

BUILDING ACCOUNTABILITY

From “Brene on Shame and Accountability,” *Unlocking Us Podcast*, Brene Brown, July 1, 2020

Accountability is not comfortable...being held accountable [for racism] and feeling shame is not the same thing as being shamed.

“Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection.” Guilt is “I did something bad.” Shame is “I am bad.”

During every one of the many times that I have been held accountable for not recognizing my own privilege, or centering my story or my experience, every time, I’ve experienced shame. Not guilt. I didn’t feel like, “Oh. I did something bad,” or “These actions are not aligning with my values.” My response, first response, has always been full-on shame.

And it’s our responsibility for experiencing and regulating our own emotions. It’s my job to regulate my emotion, move through shame in a productive way, without defensiveness, without doubling down, without rationalizing...

...we solve the problem of accountability with action...It’s “What am I going to do differently? How am I going to show up differently? What choices, different choices, am I going to make moving forward? How am I going to think about the language that I’m using? And how am I going to think about how I’m showing up?” Change, action, is probably the best cure for the shame we experience around accountability.

Consider Brene Brown’s ideas about accountability, then consider these questions:

1. What has been your experience when you have been held accountable for behavior that was insensitive, biased, and/or harmful (even if that was not your intent)? How did you feel? What did you do?
2. What has been your experience when you have held someone else accountable for behavior that was insensitive, biased, and/or harmful (even if that was not their intent)? How do you think they felt? What did they do? How did you feel about how you held someone accountable – was it easy or difficult?
3. Is there anything that gets in the way of you holding another person accountable for behavior that is insensitive, biased, and/or harmful?

MANAGING PUSHBACK

Pushback to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts is common – and shows up in different ways, as evidenced by the following statements:

- “I live by the Golden Rule – treat others as you want to be treated – and it’s worked well for me. Why is it no longer good enough?”



white men. They're the ones who won't be getting jobs or promotions."

• "Everything this organization is doing around DEI feels performative; I don't think they're going to make real, lasting change. It's all just for show."

• "Of course I want to be inclusive, and I do support diversity, but it's not actually in my job description. I need to focus on what they're paying me for – and it's not this DEI stuff."

Consider the ideas in these statements:

1. Do any of these statements sound familiar? Have you ever heard a colleague say anything close to one or more of these statements?

2. If you have heard a colleague say something similar, did you respond to them? Why or why not?

3. How could you respond to each of these statements, such that your colleagues could come to understand that:

- DEI efforts are more than just being respectful to everyone
- DEI efforts are not aimed at excluding or marginalizing any group of people, including white men
- Your support of DEI efforts are not just for show; you are working for real, lasting change
- DEI efforts are the responsibility of everyone in an organization, even if it's not in someone's job description

Reflective Practice

Catherine Mattice of Civility Partners suggests that "bystanders" to bullying and incivility (and microaggressions and bias) should be renamed "reinforcers." Her idea is that by not saying anything when we witness biased and harmful behavior, we are still reinforcing that behavior. Silence is often seen as agreement. When we don't say anything, people often (mistakenly) assume we agree with them. We need to remember that people cannot read our minds. So, we need to speak openly in ways that reflect our values and offer others the chance to learn from us.

Consider how you can pay attention to the ways you reinforce biased and harmful behavior – and the ways you actively work against biased and harmful behavior. Ask yourself, at the end of each day:

- Did I witness any behavior that was disrespectful, biased, and/or harmful?
- If so, did I do anything about that behavior?
- If I did something, how do I feel about what I did?
- If I didn't do something, why didn't I? What kept me from acting?
- What could I do differently the next time I witness such behavior?

We won't be able to step up and hold everyone accountable for every challenging behavior we witness. But we can get better about speaking our truth in ways that are direct, respectful, and relational, so that we stop being reinforcers of biased and harmful behavior.