

Excellence In Management  
Building Diversity Skills

The Color of “White”  
&  
White Privilege  
Becoming White Allies

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**WHAT IS WHITE?**

What is white? “Sociologists define whiteness as the cumulative result of whites having social power in the United States. Whites have privileges within institutions and at cultural levels. Whiteness is also a frame of reference through which white people view the world. It is a set of values and ideals often described as American (Spokesman Review, 1998).”

McIntosh (1998) states she recognized she had been taught about racism “as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.” Following this line, she writes

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize male privilege...I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.

McIntosh (1998) lists forty-six “ordinary and daily ways” in which she experienced having white privilege in contrast to her African American colleagues who worked in the same building as her. McIntosh acknowledged that she was aware that while “men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege...(and) much of their oppressiveness was unconscious” that as a white woman she was also the beneficiary of unearned advantages due to skin color and that there were “frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are just as oppressive, even when we don’t see ourselves that way.” McIntosh states, “At the very least, obliviousness of one’s privileged state can make a person or group irritating to be with.” Thus began her journey

...in counting the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence, unable to see that it put me “ahead” in any way, or put my people ahead, overrewarding us and yet also paradoxically damaging us, or that it could or should be changed.

**WHAT IS PRIVILEGE?**

Privilege is unearned advantages enjoyed by a group simply because of membership in that group (Swigonski, 1996). McIntosh (1998) defined privilege as those conditions of daily experience that are taken for advantage as normal, neutral, and universally available to everyone. McIntosh observed that:

some privileges allow one to feel at home in the world. Other privileges allow some groups to escape penalties or dangers which others suffer. Through privileges, we escape fear, anxiety, and the sense of not being welcome or not being real. Some keep us from having to hide, or be in disguise, or to feel sick or crazy...most keep us from having to be angry. (p. 11).

Swigonski, (1996) states: Privileges are the daily interactions with individuals and society that help individuals experience themselves in the center of their world. The center is where power, resources, and money (and a concomitant sense of social efficacy) are

located. Exclusion from this center of the social structure marginalizes individuals, who then have less access to social, economic, political, and other resources.

### **TYPES OF PRIVILEGE**

There are a number of types of privilege. These include capitalistic privilege, racial (white) privilege, gender (male) privilege, socioeconomic (high income) privilege, sexual orientation (heterosexual) privilege, married privilege, religious privilege, and age (youth) privilege (Swigonski, 1996).

### **BASIS OF PRIVILEGE**

The dominant culture in the United States has its roots in the Judeo-Christian, European tradition. Other ethnic groups either have to adapt to this culture or explain their deviation. The values expressed in the English language support white Judeo-Christian superiority. In this regard, white, European customs and cultures reflect the educational system, role models and heroes, which are of European ancestry. In this context, the most desirable education and high-paying jobs are “more readily accessible to health European American men...who are even privileged in terms of life span... (Swignoski, 1996).”

A mark of privilege is the lack of awareness of privilege (Swigonski, 1996). “Only 15 percent of all Americans have a proper understanding of the size of the black population (Nadeau, Niemi, and Levine (1993, 334).” It is common for European Americans to say:

But I don't think of myself as privileged or white.  
I don't feel very privileged.  
I just see myself as an average person who works hard for what I have.

Kivel (1996, p. 15) adds that ‘Whether it is easy or difficult to say that we're white, the phrase we often want to say next is “...but I'm not racist.” The author lists other ways of phrasing this denial:

I'm not racist.  
I don't belong to the Klan.  
I have friends who are people of color.  
I don't see color, I'm color blind.  
I do anti-racism work.  
I went to an unlearning racism workshop.

Swigonski (1996) asserts that this very notion, the lack of awareness of privilege, is at the very basis of privilege. “White people have the privilege of forgetting that they are white and middle-class. But it is impossible to be a person of color in the United States and not be deeply aware of that color and of white people.”

In their research examining white ambivalence toward racial policies, in which they contrast opinions about abortion practices and racial policies, Alvarez and Brehm (1997) state, “That the individual variability in attitudes toward racial policy stems from uncertainty, and not ambivalence, has significant political implications.” The authors cite Sniderman and Piazza (1993, p. 154).

The most important thing to appreciate about the thinking of whites on race, we now believe, is that many of them do not very often think about it at all...But there are good reasons why whites might not make the issue of race central to their concerns. They neither suffer directly from the problem of racial inequality, nor see themselves as directly responsible for it. The problem of race is, like many other problems of public policy, a secondary concern in the daily lives of whites and of only occasional interest to them.

To avoid the discomfort of addressing “whiteness” in other-than-white contexts and to avoid being called a racist Kivel (1996) asserts that white persons may state they are color blind and do not treat people differently based upon their color. The important fact, however, in these situations is that people of color have to notice color all the time, “it’s too pervasive a construct of our society to avoid.” Kivel (1996) states:

When we say things like, “I don’t see color,” we are trying to maintain a self-image of impartiality and fairness (and whiteness). Some of the motivation behind the claim that we are color neutral is to establish that we don’t mistreat people or discriminate against them because of their race. Ultimately, this disclaimer prevents us from taking the responsibility for challenging racism because we believe that people who see color are the problem.

The only way to interact with people with dignity and fairness is to recognize the profound effects of color and racism on our lives. To counteract the negative effects of racism and well-intentioned color blindness which makes persons of color invisible, “we need to notice much more acutely and insightfully exactly the difference that color makes in the way people are treated (Kivel, 1996).”

### **CONDITIONS OF PRIVILEGE**

In order to make privilege visible it is helpful to contrast privilege to the lives of individuals denied privileges. To understand privilege it is helpful to explore the advantages of being white, male, middle-class, affluent, heterosexual, married, educated, physically healthy and able-bodied. McIntosh (1988) listed 54 conditions of privilege that permeate the general areas of living and markedly affect the quality of our lives.

### **WHITE BENEFITS OF MIDDLE CLASS PRIVILEGE**

Kivel (1996) states that “Privileges are the economic “extras” that those of us who are middle class and wealthy gain at the expense of poor and working class people of all races.”

The author defines benefits as “the advantages that all white people gain at the expense of color regardless of economic position.” Not all white people enjoy economic privileges of those with much money, however white people generally enjoy the benefits of being white. What do these benefits include? McIntosh (1988) describes a number of benefits:

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and

who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.

4. I can be reasonably sure that my neighbors in such a location (that I can afford and want to live) will be neutral or pleasant to me.

5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives.

8. I can be sure that my children will be given curriculum materials that testify to the existence of their race.

18. I can swear, or dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.

30. If I declare that there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.

41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

### **AWARENESS OF PRIVILEGE**

Swigonski (1996) states that "European Americans, as members of the dominant culture, need only know that culture. European Americans can ignore the values and world views of other groups without endangering their existence." At the same time members of marginalized groups and ethnic minority groups must all be bicultural.

- a. People of color must know the patterns and habits of the culture of the dominant society.
- b. Low-income people must learn middle-class values.
- c. Gay men and lesbians must know how to act straight.

As an example of the dual tasks of persons of color in a white dominant culture, Dickens and Dickens (1991) state "Successful blacks have had to learn to develop increased behavioral observation. "Successful blacks have developed a facility for focusing on behavior. They have learned the art and process of behavioral observation-that is, they have learned to recognize the conditions in which behavior should be closely observed. They know what to look for, especially in a conflictual situation." p. 10. Dickens and Dickens go on to say that successful blacks learn two things from each other which often cannot be learned from white dominant culture members.

“The first cultural skill successful blacks learn from each other is the acquisition of cultural paranoia.” Dickens and Dickens (1991) state, “...cultural paranoia is a sociological and anthropological concept and does not refer to the psychological concept implying a mental disorder. Cultural paranoia is a coping mechanism that has developed as a group coping mechanism to address the consequences of racism.”

The second skill learned by successful blacks is protective hesitation. This behavior derives from cultural paranoia which enables a black person or person of color to hesitate and monitor the environment to protect themselves from possible psychological assault before interacting or preparing to interact with a white individual.

To emphasize the benefits and privileges of white privilege and potential loss of privilege, due to color, Hacker (1992) describes a visit, a mistake, and a choice.

### **THE VISIT**

You will be visited tonight by an official you have never met. He begins by telling you that he is extremely embarrassed. The organization he represents has made a mistake, something that hardly ever happens. According to their records, he goes on, you were to have been born black to another set of parents, far from where you are raised.

However, the rules being what they are, this error must be rectified, and as soon as possible. So at midnight tonight, you will become black. And this will mean not simply a darker skin, but the bodily and facial features associated with African ancestry.

However, inside you will be the person you always were. Your knowledge and ideas will remain intact. But outwardly you will not be recognizable to anyone you now know.

Your visitor emphasizes that being born to the wrong parents was in no way your fault. Consequently, his organization is prepared to offer you some reasonable recompense. Would you, he asks, care to name a sum of money you might consider appropriate? He adds that his group is by no means poor. It can be quite generous when the circumstances warrant, as they seem to in your case. He finishes by saying that their records show you are scheduled to live another fifty years - as a black man or woman in America. How much financial recompense would you request?

### **TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS OF SUE'S CULTURAL IDENTITY**

**QUADRANTS** (adapted from Sue and Sue, p. 146-155)

<b>Internal Locus of Control Internal Locus of Responsibility</b>	<b>Internal Locus of Control External Locus of Responsibility</b>
<p>I. (Assertive/Passive) I'm O.K. and have control over myself.</p> <p>Society is O.K. , and I can make it in the system.</p>	<p>IV.(Assertive/Assertive) I'm O.K. and have control, but need a chance.</p> <p>Society is not O.K., and I know what's wrong and seek to change it.</p>

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<b>External Locus of Control Internal Locus of Responsibility</b>	<b>External Locus of Control External Locus of Responsibility</b>
<p>II. (Marginal/Passive) I'm O.K. but my control comes best when I define myself according to the definition of the dominant culture.</p> <p>Society is O.K. the way it is; it is up to me.</p>	<p>III. (Passive-Aggressive) I'm not O.K. and don't have much control might as well as give up or please everyone.</p> <p>Society is not O.K. and is the reason for my plight; the bad system is all to blame.</p>

### **PRIVILEGE AND SOCIAL WORKERS**

Swigonski (1996) states that white social workers are both members of the oppressor group as well as advocates for oppressed groups. As a result they need to understand how they "...perpetuate and reinforce privilege in their lives and practice."

Specht and Courtney (1994) express marked concern that a large number of certified social workers have left social services to enter private practice. These social workers have, as a result, turned away from the poor, who cannot afford psychotherapy, and have turned toward the middle class who can afford services. In this regard, social workers are referred to, in the title of their book, as "Unfaithful Angels" who have abandoned their mission of service to the poor.

The authors describe social work's primary objective as to "strengthen the community's capacities to solve problems through development of groups and organizations, community education, and community systems of governance and control over systems of social care." This is in marked contrast to the chosen field of psychotherapy whose main concern is to "deal with feelings, perceptions, and emotions that prevent them from performing their normal life tasks because of impairment or insufficient development of emotional and cognitive functions that are intimately related to the self." (page 26).

The authors state that, "Generations of Americans have been brainwashed with psychological and psychiatric theories that identify the individual as the source of many problems that are basically social in origin." ( p. 131 ). In this regard, the authors state:

Americans are socialized and educated to believe that with proper attitudes, insight, behavioral training, and motivation, the individual can overcome almost any social problem: child abuse, depression, loneliness, anomie, chemical abuse, and others. Thus, Americans of all social classes-poor and rich alike-have a trained incapacity to see the community as either the cause or the solution of social problems. p. 131.

### **INDIVIDUALISM MAINTAINS SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Specht & Courtney (1994) describe a number of difficulties associated with an individualistic approach toward dealing with individual, family, and community-based

problems, which have direct applicability with blaming the victim, and maintaining white privilege and benefit.

1. Human services professions find it difficult to incorporate the notion that service users and their family constitute a major resource for helping.
2. Values placed upon individualism often prevent the worker from maximizing their own resources.
3. Middle-class workers often prefer to work with individuals rather than families, groups or communities.
4. Service providers from working class backgrounds become socialized to middle-class values, embracing them and rejecting their own family-of-origin values.
5. Upwardly mobile providers may denigrate the lifestyles and values of lower-class service users.
6. Consequent value differences may result in service providers “setting greater value on individual achievement, initiative, and independence than on more communalistic and noncompetitive behaviors.
7. Most service providers work in bureaucratic systems which are not set up to deal with clients as groups or members of groups.
8. “Most professionals receive their education and are socialized into the human services profession when ...they are emotionally and socially divorced from the major concerns of family and community life.
9. Schools of social work in the United States have courses on the individual life cycle “but no required courses on the family and community.”

### **ASSESSING CULTURAL COMPETENCE (Cross 1988)**

To help individuals understand where they are in the process of becoming more culturally competent, it is helpful to think of a continuum which ranges from being culturally proficient to culturally destructive. This exercise is a helpful, non-intrusive way to attach language to our experiences.

- 1. CULTURAL DESTRUCTIVENESS:** Attitudes, policies and practices that are destructive to cultures and the individual within it. Examples are cultural genocide (Indian boarding schools); practicing social or medical experiments without knowledge or consent, denying people of color access to natural healers and helpers.
- 2. CULTURAL INCAPACITY:** The intention to be culturally destructive is not present, but the agency professional or individual lacks the ability to help minority clients or individuals. The system is biased and assumes a superior attitude toward “lesser”/ minority races. Examples are agencies that support segregation, enforce racist policies, maintain stereotypes, and expect less from minority clients.

**3. CULTURAL BLINDNESS:** Individuals and agencies believe that they are not biased and view all people, regardless of race or culture as the same. This belief is so ethnocentric that services are inappropriate except for the most assimilated person of color. Access to services is determined by need and appropriateness as viewed by the dominant culture.

Culture blindness or colorblindness developed as a progressive argument against racial bigotry, which ranked whiteness as on top of the scale of racial differences. While this may have been a well-intentioned response to bigotry, Louise Derman-Sparks (1989) states “It establishes the White experience as the norm, and the differences in others’ experience become unimportant. It promotes tokenism and a denial of the identity of persons outside the mainstream.”

**4. CULTURAL PRE-COMPETENCE:** The individual or agency realizes that they are unable to serve or meet the needs of minority individuals effectively and attempt to improve their performance. They may hire a few (highly assimilated) people of color as staff, initiate training for workers on cultural sensitivity, enter into needs assessments for the minorities in their catchment areas, and recruit minority individuals for boards of directors or advisory committees. Having done this, precompetent agencies and individuals may be lulled into a false sense of security.

**5. BASIC CULTURAL COMPETENCE:** The agency or individual accepts and respects the concept of difference. Ongoing self-assessment regarding service delivery and expansion of resources and knowledge occurs. A culturally competent agency hires unbiased workers and trains them. It seeks consultation with the minority community to discuss what services are most appropriate from the agency, and what services the agency cannot provide.

**6. ADVANCED CULTURAL COMPETENCE:** Proficiency. Culture is held in high esteem. The individual or agency adds to the knowledge base of the community by conducting research, developing new models and therapeutic approaches. The culturally proficient individual or agency hires staff who are specialists in culturally competent practice.

### **WHITE PRIVILEGE DAMAGES BOTH THE PRIVILEGED AND NONPRIVILEGED**

Professional elites and white privileged individuals are vulnerable economically in a culture that makes the labor of professionals a commodity, “thingified”, or made into a means for another’s end (Hobgood , 2000, p. 97). The author states all areas of employment are facing a process of “deskilling” and degradation of work occurring across all occupational lines. As over supply of privileged workers continues, the working class of society will experience hardship as the top rungs travel down and assume lower-paying jobs. “Thingification,” as described by Hobgood may be easier understood in the context of domestic violence, rape and violence against women.

### **RAPE IS THE COMMON COLD OF SOCIETY**

Pearson (2000) asserts “Rape is the common cold of society.” She says, “We have assimilated rape into our everyday culture much as we have the cold. To be a young

woman today means to live with the rape culture in all its subtleties. It means to act in accordance with the roles that keep men forever in power...To be a young woman often means to buy Glamour and Vogue and take the advice that pleases men. It means to fluctuate body weight to please the day's fashion archetype. Being a young woman today means to be unhappy if men don't like the way you look..."

Look through any supposed woman's publication and notice the ads that display women at the mercy of a man or at the mercy of the male gaze.

Notice the articles that emphasize dependence and passivity and avoid portraying independence and strength in women.

Watch TV shows that display precocious models of sexually manipulated teen-aged women.

Walk into any bar and watch the women primp and the men pounce.

Watch as the number of unreported rapes turn women into not even recognizing rape when it occurs.

Just as violence against women "thingification," occurs for entertainment and profit Hobgood (2000) states our current capitalistic system is increasingly letting managers and professionals go, much like lower-tiered workers have been, for corporate profit. In this regard the labor of professionals, laborers, technicians, women etc. is purchased for their labor and tossed away when their labor does not yield the highest possible profits.

This capitalist, racist and sexist orientation reflects the belief that the main value people serve is to benefit or be manipulated for the purposes of others. In the work setting, Gardner (2000) describes the eighty-hour work week as a practice which inhibits empathy. Gardner (2000) states that overtime by the privileged and affluent functions "to isolate high-paid professionals from their families and their communities and from fellow feeling with the poor whom they believe work less hard and deserve less."

Even when men are victims, men generally deny this in terms of gender orientation. The author states, "Men in our culture typically prove their manhood by resisting impulses to empathize with victims and by showing themselves impervious to the insults of others."

### **TOBACCO, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND RACISM**

Our society has made more progress in reducing tobacco use than in preventing violent crime (Biglan, Taylor 2000). Progress in tobacco control resulted from "a clear, cogent, and empirically based analysis of the tobacco problem and what can be done about it, and from a set of organizations that are effectively advocating programs and policies that discourage tobacco use." The authors argue that progress on tobacco control is the result of articulating:

- a. the harms associated with tobacco use,
- b. the causes of tobacco use,
- c. the programs and policies that could reduce tobacco use.

In contrast, the authors state, "...there is not a widely shared, cogent, and empirically-based analysis of the problem of violent crime. As a result, efforts to combat violent crime are fragmented and it has proven difficult to generate support for preventive programs and policies."

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE**

Much can be said regarding the need to develop an empirically-based analysis of the problems of white privilege, and racial policies. Alvarez and Brehm (1997) state that the political implications involved in changing the minds of white Americans regarding their ambivalence toward racial policies is to reduce their uncertainty about racial policies. The authors report, "What is surprising in our results is that the most pertinent source of information is not the domain-specific information about racial conditions, but the extent to which the respondent is stocked with chronic political information...ambivalence about racial policies is not the result of conflicting core values, but rather is the consequence of a lack of political information."

### **WHAT IF WE TREATED WHITE PRIVILEGE AND RACISM THE WAY WE TREAT TOBACCO USE AND ADVERTISING?**

If we used counterresistance to the use of people and their labor as commodities we might do the following to address the issue of racism, discrimination, and the use of people as "things" to be manipulated for the purposes of other's desires.

We would review the billboard use of images portraying cultural interaction as well as violence against women, children and men.

We would restrict the sale and use of videos, games, and music that provide inaccurate cultural relations and portray violence or glorify violence against women and people of color.

We would sue the manufacturers of violent and inaccurate social imagery and use the proceeds to treat victims and perpetrators of violence.

We would make it illegal for anyone under the age of legal consent to either use, or have violent or exploitive media material on their possession.

We would ensure that media violence was not directed toward children, and initiate sanctions against advertisers who provided violent imagery to children and teens.

We would have twelve-step programs, seminars, and even hypnosis classes for persons addicted to inaccurate and racist portrayals.

We would recognize that the harm of racist media violence was immediately reduced once we quit our habit.

We would not allow our children to be exposed to racial and cultural misrepresentations and violence on T.V.

We would encourage our friends, partners and family members to "Kick the habit," of white privilege.

Victims of racist, physical, sexual, psychological and emotional violence would sue the manufacturers violent imagery for creating a racist -supportive environment.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK**

Attempting to help individuals adapt to their environment is not a necessarily desirable end for people of color and members of marginalized groups (Gould, 1989). This approach does little more than maintain the status quo. "Instead, transformation of social institutions must be the basic goal." Swigonski (1996) cites an individualistic approach toward multiculturalism as keeping the existing power structure in place, thus maintaining white privilege and benefits.

Traditional multicultural social work practice acknowledges the unique culture of the client. As representatives of the dominant culture, practitioners often work to help clients adapt their lifestyles to fit with the dominant culture (Everett et al., 1991; McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992; Montiel & Wong, 1983). The outcome of that kind of work ensures the perpetuation of the privilege of the existing power structure and falls short of larger goals of social justice.

### **STRATEGIES TO CONFRONT PRIVILEGE AND DEVELOP SELF-AWARENESS**

In his National Best-Seller, "Faces At the Bottom of The Well: The Permanence of Racism" Derrick Bell, (1992), states that in spite of efforts to gain full equality in the United States, that Black people will not succeed.

...I want to set forth this proposition, which will be easier to reject than refute: Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, but not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance.

### **ALLPORT'S CONTACT THEORY OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

Maluso (1995) states the most extensively studied interventions designed to reduce racist prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination are based upon Gordon Allport's (1954) contact theory of intergroup relations. Allport's theory postulates that racism

may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports...and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups. (p. 281)

Maluso cites research by Cook, (1988) that states that the necessary conditions to reduce prejudice suggested by Allport's contact theory include the following features:

- a. Interracial contact must be sustained
- b. Individuals must be of equal status,

- c. Individuals must work toward common goals,
- d. There must be an absence of competition for scarce resources,
- e. There must be strong support from relevant authorities.

Social workers need to work more effectively to transform the social structures that perpetuate racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, heterosexism, and all other forms of oppression (Swigonski, 1994).

### **DIVERSITY WORST PRACTICES**

Frost (1999) states current diversity best practice fails in a number of areas including,

- a. establishing clear standards for success,
- b. correlate results with bottom-line outcomes,
- c. collect data from all levels of organizations,
- d. and measure the impact of different business cultures on success.

Following is an adaptation of Frost's review of 10 "Worst Practices" to consider in regard to what has not worked in diversity efforts and why. By examining what does not work, the reader will be better able to practice what does work in their ongoing efforts at reaching beyond culture.

#### **1. Broadening the focus of diversity to include "all individual differences" when the real issues are group identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, national identity, age and or ability.**

- a. A focus on "all individual differences" insults the intended groups and dilutes the focus, and prevents measurable outcomes.

#### **2. Using euphemisms such as "ethnic" or "culture" when you mean race, or using "lifestyles" when you mean sexual orientation.**

- a. It takes courage to use direct language to name an identity or an issue. Failure to do so shows a clear sign of the agency's or provider's discomfort with the real issues.
- b. The use of terms 'ethnic' and 'cultural groups' refers to national and ethnic identities. They are not the same as racial identity. A Puerto Rican (ethnic identity) can also be black (racial identity).
- c. People sound like they are avoiding dealing with race if they continue to use words like ethnic and cultural groups.

#### **3. Continually researching and restating that "Diversity is good," or "Diversity is right!"**

- a. Most senior leaders wait for a crisis to happen before they see diversity as a necessary measure. Their resistance is based upon emotion, not lack of information.
- b. Resistance by white managers, leaders and providers must be met with energy, caring and thoughtfulness, rather than intellectual arguments which only misdirects the conversation and successfully avoids the issue.

#### **4. Taking the advice of overly cautious legal counsel, or in some cases human resource professionals, to avoid collecting and using data.**

- a. People know in general important agency and business practices are analyzed and measured. When outcome measures are not undertaken, most people sense that the issue does not have the support of higher-ups.
- b. It is important in diversity initiatives to collect and analyze baseline data on employee and client demographics, as well as employee and consumer opinions. This helps establish specific target areas for change.
- c. If attempts to reach across culture do not start with baseline data, how serious can senior leadership be in its commitment to change?

**5. Senior leadership delegating the formation of a diversity philosophy and approach to people in staff positions.**

- a. True change in a corporate or agency culture starts at the top, not in the middle or at the bottom.
- b. Success in diversity change efforts requires full leadership commitment, with senior staff and managers experiencing and modeling personal and business changes.

**6. Focusing the change strategies and actions on the subordinated or excluded groups.**

- a. The wrong thing to do is to attempt to “fix” groups of excluded consumers, stakeholders, clients etc in an attempt to help them get along with the dominant culture.
- b. Experience shows that diversity efforts fail when change is focused on employees of color, women, gays and lesbians, the disabled and other excluded groups.
- c. The Primary change strategies for diversity must engage the dominant organizational culture, and those who benefit most from keeping the status quo.
- d. The focus of change is better placed on group behavior and organizational values and norms that keep excluded groups from reaching their full potential.

**7. Creating a series of activities that have no link to agency success.**

- a. “Ethnic” dinners, “cultural exchange” days, brown bag lunches with knowledgeable speakers, and community involvement programs are some of the many activities agencies have used to demonstrate their commitment to diversity.
- b. Although these activities are important as components of larger strategic business or agency goals, if they are not a part of a larger strategic plan, over time supervisors, employees and consumers will clearly see the agency’s lack of focus, true commitment & subsequent results.

**8. Believing that a diversity effort can be implemented without making some employees unhappy, or, worse yet, developing a plan aimed at keeping everyone happy.**

- a. When do new accounting systems, changes in benefit plans meet with enthusiasm?
- b. Do companies stop mergers and downsizing because employees are unhappy?
- c. Leadership must be committed to diversity strategies because they are necessary for continued best practices and agency viability.

d. Leadership must then work with employees to change rather than working with them to keep them satisfied in an inequitable system.

**9. Assuming that training changes behavior.**

- a. Awareness training to shift perceptions and unarticulated assumptions is critical to change.
- c. However, it must be part of an overall strategy that includes specific goals, measurement, skills training and accountability.
- d. Research data continues to show that awareness training alone will not change behavior.

**10. Beginning a corporate or agency diversity effort focused only on clients and external public relations.**

- a. Creating internal culture change must be the company's first priority.
- b. Once employees trust the commitment of leadership and experience the impact of diversity work, they will expand the effort themselves to both clients and the public.
- c. Presenting an organization or agency as a leader of diversity before employees are committed to change will foster the belief that leadership does not "walk its talk."

**PERSONAL TACTICS IN ADDRESSING WHITE PRIVILEGE AND BEING A WHITE ALLY**

White privilege is maintained through white talk, easy talk, Simpson (1996). Much of white discussion "about economics, military issues, neighborhood affairs, public safety, and welfare, education, sports and movies is about race. Some of the code words we use are "underclass," "welfare mothers," "inner city," "illegal aliens," "terrorist," "politically correct," and "invasion...We can count on a mutual (white) understanding of the implications of the words without having to specify that this comment is about race (Kivel1995).

In order to be allies of persons of color it is instructive to observe the effects of white privilege, watch how we play the "Easy talk, white talk," game Simpson, (1996). The author describes easy talk 101 "for people who grew up in comfortable situations, and want to keep life that way." Easy talk occurs when we feel we can talk about anyone we want in words we choose. In easy talk we take the "power to mark" as joking. "The first three rules of the easy talk game are selective hearing, creative interpreting, and complicitous forgetting." In this game, "Discussion should be enjoyable, engaging and mildly enlightening." And all serious thoughts should be kept to oneself.

Selective hearing: He didn't really say that. I must be remembering it wrong.

Creative interpreting: Oh, he didn't really mean it that way. It's not that serious.

Complicitous forgetting: Let's keep on going, leave that topic and find another.

Simpson describes easy talk and white talk as being "taught in ways that disguise the teaching." Wong (1994, p. 136) describes Easy talk and White talk are the lessons presented through television, ...The New York Times, university education, "popular" music, most movies, and many academic journals. In this regard, Easy talk and White

talk pass for normal and “are not interested in being noticed.” Whiteness asserts its presence on social and cultural levels but remains transparent, that ensures its absence, thus evading the subject of discourse (Wong 1994, 136).

“Back talk” counteracts the “marking” effects of ‘easy talk, white talk.’”

Back talk is not taught often, easily, or effortlessly.

Learning to back talk especially for those of us who practice White talk is never simple.

Back talk...dares to intervene, interrupt, intercede, and interrogate

Back talk is neither popularly practiced nor popularly received.

Back talk has nothing to do with popularity.

Back talk requires that privilege be noticed and that messiness be accepted.

Kivel (1996) provides some general guidelines in how to make a difference in being a strong white ally with persons of color.

1. Assume racism is everywhere, and that it influences everything we do.
2. Notice who is the center of attention and who is the center of power. Violence and blame are directed toward persons of color and power and privilege is consolidated with white people.
3. Notice how racism is denied, minimized and justified.
4. Understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism.
5. Understand the connection between racism, economic issues, sexism, and other forms of injustice.
6. Take a stand against injustice.
7. Be strategic, Decide what is important to challenge and what is not.
8. Don't confuse a battle with the war.
9. Don't call names or be personally abusive.
10. Support the leadership of persons of color consistently but not uncritically.
11. Don't do it alone.
12. Talk with your children and other young people about racism.

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