



# Empowering Bystanders: A Call to Action through Awareness, Recognition, and Empowerment

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# Today's objective

- ▶ Disrupt and challenge us to better understand what keeps us from intervening when we see harm inflicted on others.



# Achieving our objective



Create awareness through discomfort and reflection



Improved recognition through challenge and reflection



Empowerment through responsibility and connection

# Rules and Agreements

We are all learners.  
We are all  
teachers

Assume positive  
intent. Address  
impact.

Think and speak  
from the “I”  
perspective

None of us are the  
SOLE POSSESSOR of  
knowledge

“Platinum rule  
applies” – Treat  
others as they  
want to be treated

Ask for clarification  
before offering  
solutions

## Complete the following...



- ▶ Write down your credentials, training certifications, other brief notable achievements at the top
- ▶ Jot down a few words related to a story where you felt “less than” at the bottom
- ▶ Fold the piece of paper twice and set it aside



Uncomfortable?

# Priming Questions



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How comfortable are we having difficult conversations about accessibility?

What about race, gender identification, sexual orientation, ethnicity?

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What are your barriers do you experience now when engaging in difficult conversations?

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What feeling do you experience when you are expected to challenge the status quo or have conversations with individuals receiving services or colleagues about identify?

# Poll time...

- ▶ Who has had DEI training?
- ▶ Who believes it is not enough?





Most of us want to do something... but we don't know what to do

Upwards of 45% of companies are not providing any training in Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (Color Us United, 2022)



When it is offered, the material is often a once over and provides participants little technical skills to become and advocate for change.

# Importance of this conversation

Even when people are easily taught to respond correctly about bias, they soon forget the right answers.

The positive effects of diversity training alone rarely last beyond a day or two, and several studies suggest that it can activate bias or spark a backlash

(Dobbin & Kalev, HBR, 2016)

# Harmful events happen all around us

- ▶ We are all bystanders to every day events unfold around us
- ▶ Events could make us feel uncomfortable, we might witness discrimination, harassment or bullying.
- ▶ When this happens, we can choose to lean into the discomfort and do something (active bystander), or do what feels comfortable and let it go (a passive bystander)



# The Bystander Effect...

- ▶ *“The reduction in helping behavior in the presence of other people, has been explained predominantly by situational influences on decision making.”*

▶ *(Hortensius & de Gelder, 2018)*





# Bystander Effect and the Diffusion of Responsibility



# Our lack of action has lasting consequences

- ▶ “What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander.”
  - ▶ - Elie Wiesel



# How do we decide to act

- ▶ Evolutionary processes does not favor selfless behavior
- ▶ Arousal – Cost Reward
  - ▶ Other's distress causes us arousal – either reduce theirs or leave
  - ▶ Cost vs. Reward





# How we react



- ▶ Evolutionary processes does not favor selfless behavior
  - ▶ Arousal and Cost/Reward
  - ▶ Meaning; we decide based on biological design
- ▶ Other's distress causes us arousal
  - ▶ We want to either reduce theirs or leave
- ▶ Cost vs. Reward
  - ▶ Is my effort worth the labor our potential outcome

Explanation  
continued...

## Arousal-Cost-Reward

- We will help when costs are low, rewards are high

## Empathy

- We will help when empathic identification is high, and ease of escape is low

# Explain it



## Empathy-Altruism

Helping others because you can empathize with the person in trouble



## Help bring a range of benefits:

Helps us feel better (egoism)

Helps the group (collectivism, inclusivity)

Upholding principles and morality

Social norms (improving or maintaining)

# We are empathetic industry, so why does it happen so much around us?

- ▶ Bias
  - ▶ About the situation
- ▶ Privilege
  - ▶ We are not the target



# We all have bias, yes you have it too!

- ▶ Bias is present in our implicit and explicit memory connected to stereotypes and beliefs; thus, our understanding, behavior, and choices are skewed.

▶ (Holroyd, 2015)





# Microaggressions are all around us

A pair of hands is shown from the bottom, gently cradling a small, realistic globe of the Earth. The globe is centered in the frame, showing blue oceans and green landmasses. The background is a dark, almost black gradient, which makes the hands and the globe stand out. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the details of the globe.

- ▶ People from marginalized identities describe microaggressions as a consistent messages of being overlooked, under-respected, and devalued because of their identity.
- ▶ Most microaggressions are delivered by well-intentioned people in power (Sue, 2016)

# Be Mindful of Microaggressions

We all can be thinking about our part in creating a diverse, inclusive and equitable community. To do so, we must discuss more than just overt acts of any ism.

Many acts of oppression are subtle (Microaggressions)

Microaggressions are cumulative. Something that may seem like a small “miss” to others may feel far heavy to the recipient because of the weight of all that has come before.

To create a safe environment, we must recognize them in ourselves and others, and have the courage to feel empowered to change that behavior.



# Examples from study conducted in our industry



- ▶ “I think for my professional behavior, I have been in a place where I’ve had to strip any identity. I try not to go into anything that could be viewed as a stereotypical response. I think that during my time, there are things that have angered me and things that I have been upset about, but I cannot display any type of emotion. When I have in the past, comments have been made about me being a typical angry Black Man,” Mike stated.
- ▶ “One time, one of the days in our program was Crazy Hair Day. One of the program managers working in the day program was like, Oh my God, look at your hair. Today is crazy hair day. You should come over for the crazy hair day party. I was so offended because, again, it is like, look at the definition of crazy is abnormal, unusual. This is my hair, how it naturally grows out of my head,” Eva recalled.
- ▶ (Manning, 2020)

# More examples from within the industry

- ▶ My “provider told me I was **ALLOWED** to go see my dad this weekend” PRS reported.
- ▶ “I have this cool Mexico jersey my uncle gave me, and I didn’t wear it, and I never wore it because I was too scared of what my friends would say because the big thing that went around then was, you’re in America. Don’t be wearing that kind of stuff. Like, what are you not American? You know? He added, & “ I was like, you’re right. I am in America. I shouldn’t be wearing this,” Mamba stated.
- ▶ “You aren’t really Black, you are only half, that doesn’t count,” - Me
- ▶ (Manning, 2020)



# Is this person worth the trouble?

- ▶ We hesitate to help when we believe the person in distress could have prevented the problem
- ▶ We “hold the person accountable” for their circumstances
- ▶ (Batson, 2010)



# Intersectionality and how it can help us empathize

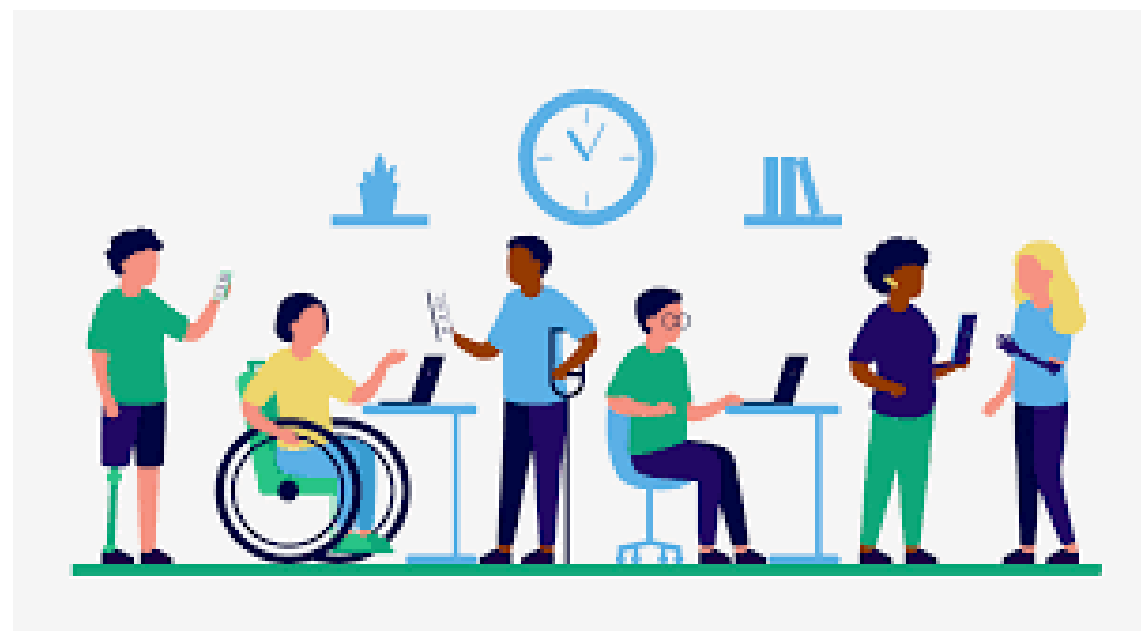
- ▶ Intersectionality strengthens the understanding of people's experiences being shaped by their identity.
- ▶ Links identities as interconnected and necessitates a view of people in context of their whole and intersecting identities,
  - ▶ Not only looking at people as encompassing a singular identity.
    - ▶ Ability, Race, Gender, etc., etc.
- ▶ Intersectionality is also the understanding that race, gender, class and sexuality jointly influence one's experience of discrimination and oppression .
- ▶ (Crenshaw, 1989)



(Simpson, 2009)

# Inclusion helps us want to act

- ▶ We help people more often when ***we see them as apart of our community***
- ▶ An assault on one is an assault on us all
- ▶ Us instead of them...
- ▶ Be an empowered bystander



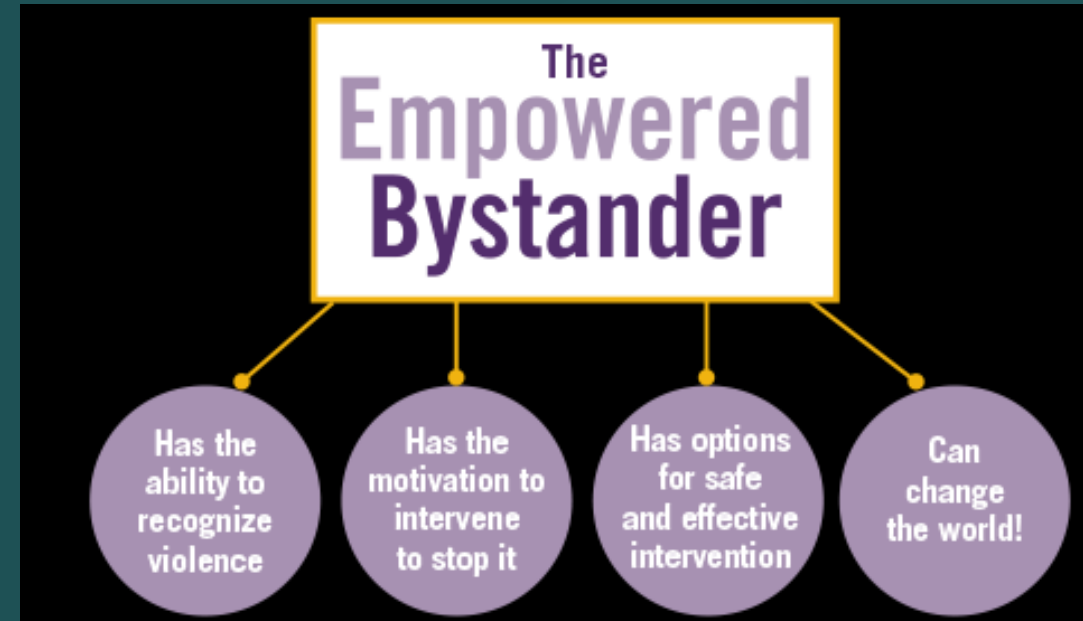
# What is an Empowered Bystander?

- ▶ “Empowered bystanders are people whose behaviors intervene in ways that impact the outcome positively.”



# Why is this important?

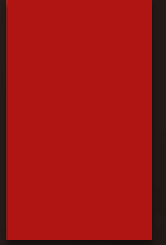
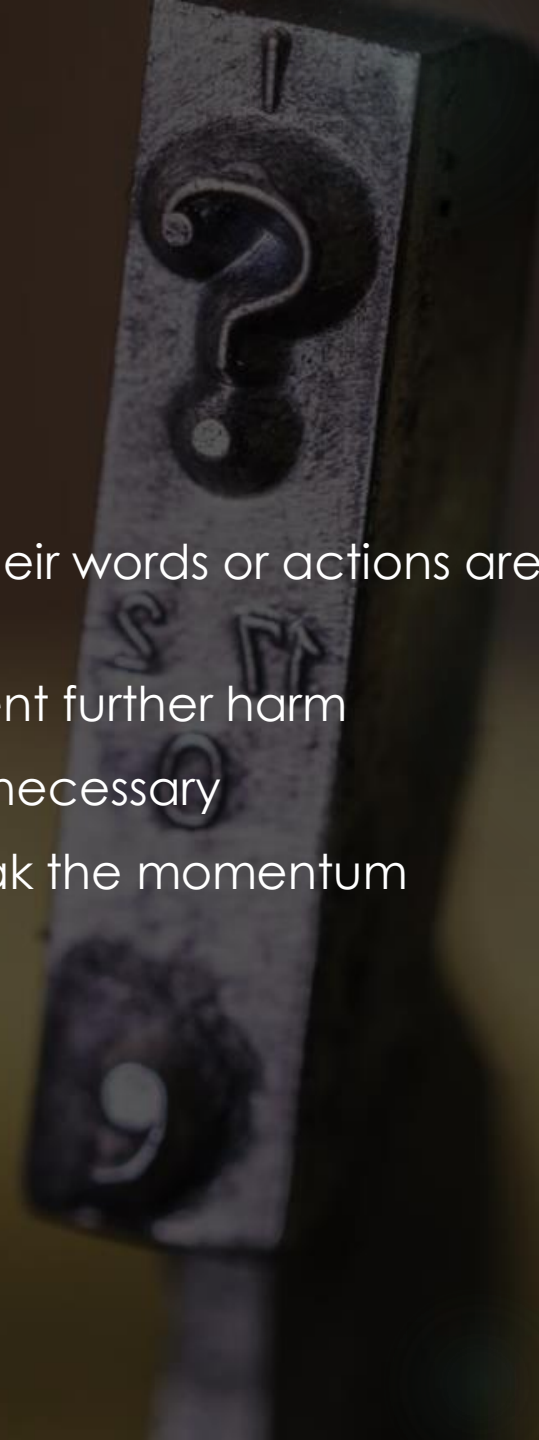
- ▶ Research University of New Hampshire found that after students are trained in the bystander approach and exposed **believe** using these skills and that they see intervening as their **responsibility**.



# Interrupting Bias

- ▶ Calling Out

- ▶ When we need to let someone know that their words or actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated
- ▶ When we need to interrupt in order to prevent further harm
- ▶ Will likely feel hard and uncomfortable, but necessary
- ▶ Allows us to hit the “pause” button and break the momentum





# Interrupting Bias

- ▶ Calling In:
  - ▶ When there is an opportunity to explore deeper, make meaning together, and find a mutual sense of understanding across difference
  - ▶ When we are seeking to understand or learn more
  - ▶ When we want to help imagine different perspectives, possibilities, or outcomes
  - ▶ Provides for multiple perspectives and encourages paradigm shifts • Focused on reflection, not reaction
  - ▶ Is not just a suggestion with an uptick (Don't you think you should...?)



# How do we improve it?

## Culture

- We have a collectivist industry, and community
  - Identify as a member of the community and it makes it much easier to prioritize the interests of others

## Norms

- Starting with this group, make it a rule to be vigilant and usually good deeds find their way back around

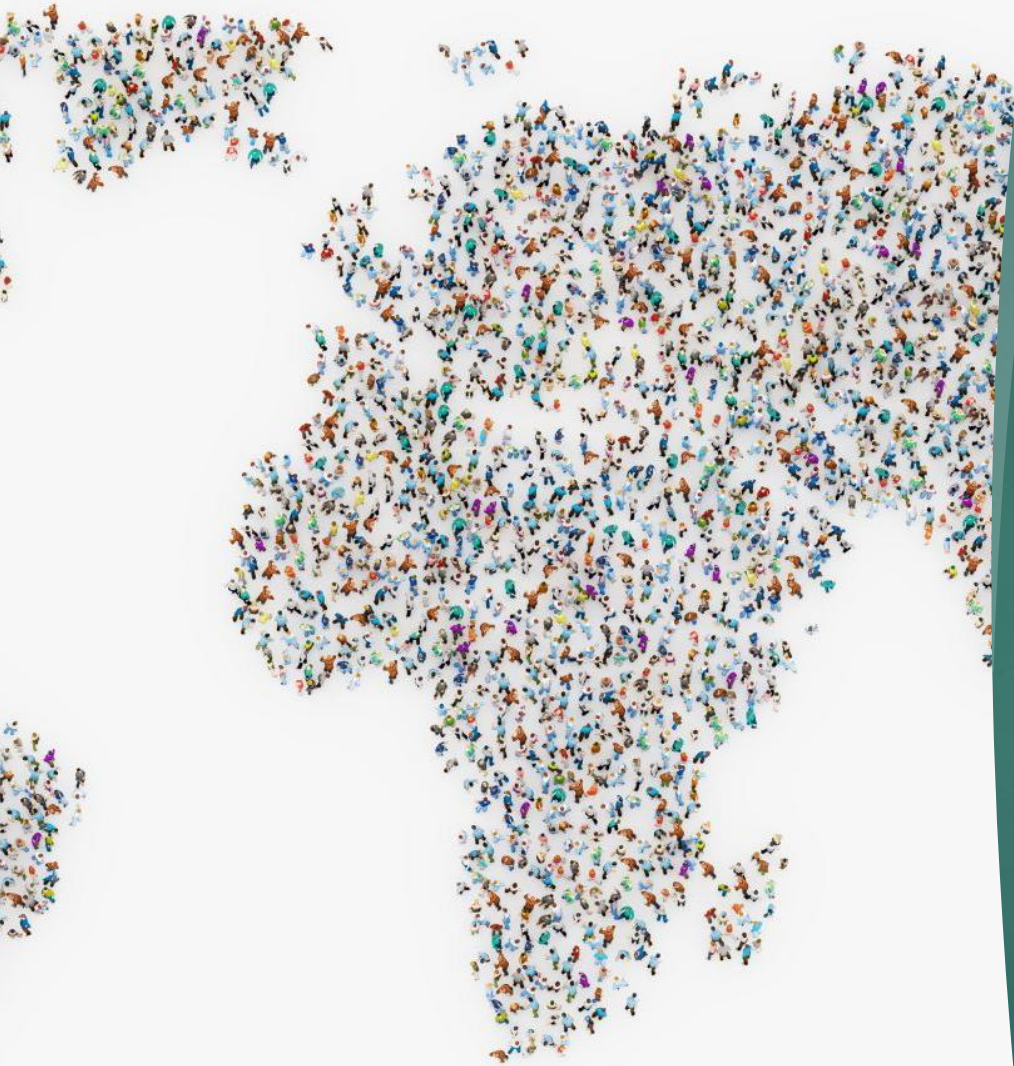
## Embrace being uncomfortable

- Offer support by asking questions
- Ask for feedback from the perceived victim and or a trusted teammate
- Don't hold the information to yourself



# Review

- ▶ Microaggressions – thinly veiled comments or jokes that harm people from a marginalized community
- ▶ Bystander Effect – Reduction of helping behavior
- ▶ Empowered Bystander – Someone who witnesses potentially harmful behavior and takes action that can have a positive outcome.
- ▶ Why don't we respond?
  - ▶ Bias, privilege
- ▶ Connection to our community intentionally helps our response patterns
- ▶ Interrupting bias



# Reminder

- ▶ You may not be able to change the world, but...
  - ▶ You can change the world of someone else.
- ▶ Our organizations are relatively small, autonomous entities and we are afforded a higher level of control than we think
- ▶ Power to change cultural norms and procedures
- ▶ Our industry is filled with ideal places to develop policies and practices that promote equity.

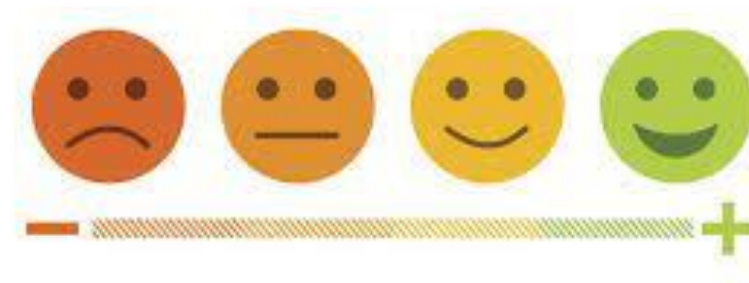
# Debriefing Questions


How comfortable are we having difficult conversations about accessibility?

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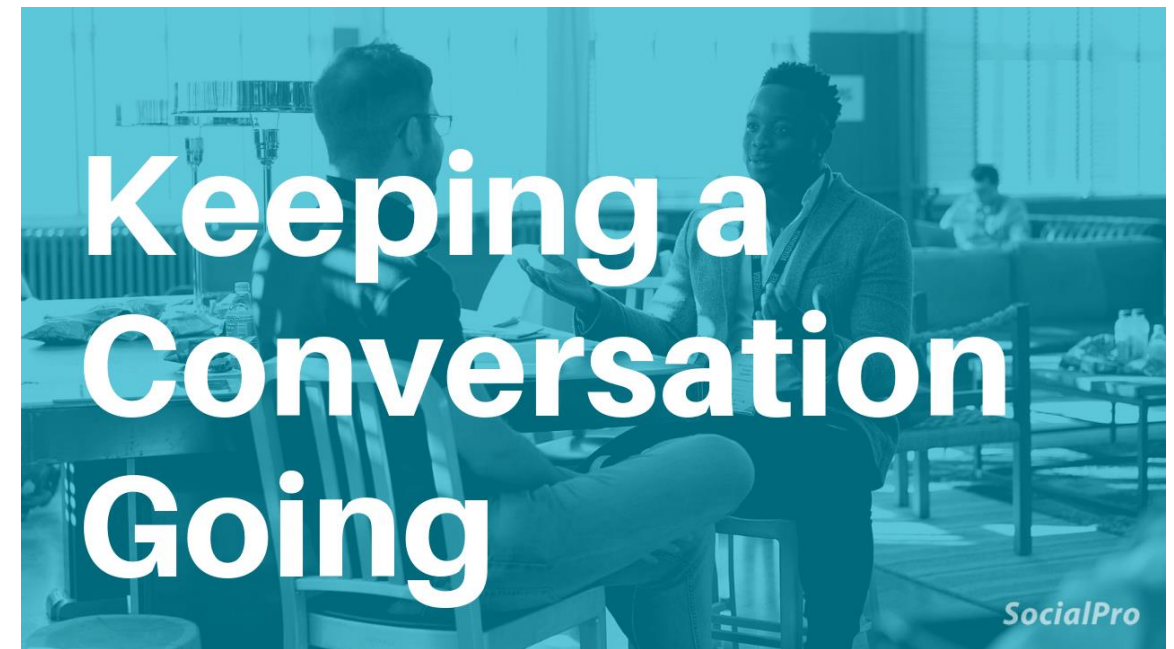


“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

– Maya Angelou

# Feeling Empowered to Act: Action Steps to Feeling Comfortable Addressing the Uncomfortable

- ▶ Techniques to engage in difficult conversations with victims of microaggression
- ▶ Steps to respond including
  - ▶ Calling In
  - ▶ Calling out
  - ▶ Microresistance
- ▶ Internal Accountability
  - ▶ What if I am the aggressor



References upon request

