

## ***Candid Conversations ~ Leveraging Neurodiversity for Innovation***

### **Practices to Design a More Neurodiverse Inclusive Workplace**

**#1: If the behavior of a creator or innovator isn't driving the results you want or is negatively impacting the team morale, remain unemotional and calmly "call it out so you can talk it out" using the SBI model from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL).**

**S = Situation** → *Provide situational context for the behavior that's not working.*

**B = Behavior** → *State the behavior in terms of what you saw and heard.*

**I = Impact** → *State the impact of the behavior that's not working. After stating the impact, be sure to suggest a win-win replacement behavior.*

#### **Example:**

**S = Situation** → "This morning at the 11 a.m. team meeting...". *Avoid generalities, such as "One morning last week", as they can lead to confusion.*

**B = Behavior** → "You interrupted me while I was telling the team about the monthly budget", *instead of "You were rude".*

**I = Impact** → "I felt frustrated when you interrupted me because it broke my train of thought, and I'd like to know if you'd be willing to pause before sharing your reactions". *Because you're describing exactly what happened and explaining your true feelings while suggesting a win/win replacement behavior—instead of getting angry and passing judgment—the individual is more likely to listen and learn. Remain open to discussion and be prepared to hear the other person's perspective. The goal is to find a truly win-win replacement behavior.*

#### **Check out these websites to learn more:**

- <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/hr-pipeline-a-quick-win-to-improve-your-talent-development-process/>
- <https://www.mindtools.com/blog/corporate/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/05/SBI-Feedback-Tool.pdf>

**#2: If your creators and innovators are not driving desired results, arrange the environment in a way that makes it easy to focus on what really matters.**

#### **Create the space**

- *Caves and Commons* → *Spaces for deep thinking as well as verbal processing and team ideating*
- *Visual prompts* → *Job aides, Kanban boards, etc.*
- *Role and Expectation Clarity* → *Be specific and set parameters through establishing team ground rules*

#### **Check out these websites to learn more:**

- **Caves and Commons:** <https://hbr.org/2013/03/give-workers-the-power-to-choose-cave>
- **Job aides:** <https://thrsc.com/essential-skills/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Tips-for-developing-Job-aids.pdf>
- **Kanban boards:** <https://zapier.com/learn/project-management/kanban-board/>
- **Team ground rules:** <http://meetingsift.com/ground-rules-for-meetings/>

#### **Establish the rituals**

- *Daily Standups* → *Spend 15 minutes each morning inviting your team members to share (1) what they did yesterday; (2) what they will do today; and (3) what is blocking progress.*
- *Regular Retrospectives* → *Take time each month to examine what is and is not working in terms of your team's behavior and environmental arrangement for optimizing performance and productivity.*

**Check out these websites to learn more about daily standups and regular retrospectives:**

- **Daily Standups:** <https://www.atlassian.com/team-playbook/plays/standups>
- **Regular Retrospectives:** <https://builttoadapt.io/how-to-run-a-really-good-retrospective-8982bd839e16>

### **#3: Expect some creators and innovators to start with the details and ask questions**

*Assume positive intent – creators and innovators have brains wired to pick up lots of details. They could ask lots of questions at the beginning of a new project, task, or initiative to create context. In these cases, employ strategies that could help naturally reduce questions resulting from getting “stuck in the weeds”.*

**Check out these websites to learn more:**

- <https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-train-people-to-ask-you-fewer-questions-and-figure-things-out-on-their-own>
- <https://work.chron.com/handle-employee-asks-many-questions-22418.html>

### **#4: Always look for ways of applying your team’s detailed insights because these insights ARE your team’s competitive advantage.**

*As leaders, it’s easy to overly commit to a strategy and lose sight of the purpose. Creators and innovators have insights that can take your strategies and tactics to the next level if you invite them into the process and resist shutting them down through command-and-control management.*

**Check out these websites to learn more:**

- <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/oct/17/autistic-employees-can-give-companies-an-edge-in-innovative-thinking>
- <https://phil.yeah.mckinney.com/neurodiversity-and-innovation-the-benefits-of-hiring-employees-who-break-the-mold/>

### **#5: Gently redirect focus when your team gets lost in the conceptual weeds through creating an environment that minimizes distractions and makes clear the behaviors required for success.**

*Checkout #1 and #2 above and make sure this includes team ground rules for ideating and brainstorming to ensure conceptual exploration can happen without editing or judgement. Editing and judging shuts down creativity and innovation!*

**Check out these websites to learn more:**

- <https://officesnapshots.com/articles/study-the-key-to-workplace-effectiveness-is-focus-not-collaboration/>
- [https://www.gensler.com/uploads/document/306/file/Focus\\_in\\_the\\_Workplace\\_10\\_01\\_2012.pdf](https://www.gensler.com/uploads/document/306/file/Focus_in_the_Workplace_10_01_2012.pdf)
- <https://www.wikihow.com/Improve-Concentration-at-Work>

## **Using a Framework to Build a More Diverse Workforce**

*Inclusion@Work provides a path.* Developed by the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) and the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor with input from a range of employers with exemplary track records in disability employment, the framework outlines seven core components of a disability-inclusive workplace, along with a menu of strategies for achieving them.

- Access the framework here: <http://www.askearn.org/inclusion-work/>
- EARN’s resources on laws, training and education, recruitment, accessible technology and business membership associations: <http://www.askearn.org/inclusion-work/resources/>

### **Lead the Way: Inclusive Business Culture**

Leaders seeking to acquire neurodiverse talent to innovate and compete are making equal employment opportunity an integral part of the company’s strategic mission. This starts with changing policies – and making those public – and is supported by a comprehensive, continual series of initiatives with supporting infrastructure. Leadership is the catalyst for this shift.

- Expressing leadership commitment to disability inclusion: <http://www.askearn.org/topics/recruitment-hiring/expressing-a-commitment-to-disability-inclusion/>

### **Build the Pipeline: Outreach & Recruitment**

Train recruiters and other human resource professionals on the neurodiverse strategies for successful engagement. Then create partnerships with the neurodiverse community service providers, educational institutions and leverage apprenticeship programs to capture the desired talent, including STEM and beyond. Once the talent arrives in the pipeline, appropriate policies and practices need to be tapped to ensure they aren't filtered out. In short, stop pipeline leakage by changing policies and practices of mind-reading and enabling detail-oriented question and answer sessions. And also be prepared to make a few mistakes and correct them along the way. It's okay to have a learning curve.

- Resources for Outreach and Recruitment: <http://www.askearn.org/topics/recruitment-hiring/>
- Resources from the Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology (PEAT) for accessible human resource systems: <https://www.peatworks.org/>

### **Hire (and Keep) the Best: Talent Acquisition, Reasonable Accommodation and Retention**

By updating policies and practices, a neurodiverse pipeline will be filtered in rather than out of the organization. Some of these individuals may need "reasonable accommodations" to perform the essential functions of a job. Others will benefit from employee resource groups (ERGs) and/or mentors to help them assimilate into the culture and access professional development opportunities.

- Learn more about reasonable accommodations: <http://www.askearn.org/inclusion-work/reasonable-accommodations/> and from the Job Accommodation Network: [www.askjan.org](http://www.askjan.org)
- Resources for retention and advancement: <http://www.askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/>
- Access EARN's Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful ERGs: [http://www.askearn.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/erg\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.askearn.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/erg_toolkit.pdf)
- Access Diverse-By-Design Connect ERG Toolkit: <http://www.cincinnati-chamber.com/the-inclusive-chamber/diverse-by-design/connect-erg>

### **Communicate: External and Internal Communication of Company Policies and Practices**

With a new mindset to tap "The New Normal," diversity and inclusion professionals need to work with their marketing and communications teams to share policies and practices with authentic voices and images – meaning you need to include the ERGs and employees with disabilities to center their voice.

- Resources on Communications: <http://www.askearn.org/inclusion-work/external-internal-communication-company-policies-practices/>
- Also consider using authentic images and check out The Disability Collection: [www.thedisabilitycollection.com](http://www.thedisabilitycollection.com)

### **Grow Success: Accountability and Continuous Improvement Systems**

Once the policies and practices have been implemented, measure and report on the outcomes realized by employing a divergent workforce. Discover and share successes internally and externally to enhance your race for talent and your value proposition in reaching the estimated \$3 trillion global disability segment.

- Resources to Grow Success: <http://www.askearn.org/inclusion-work/accountability-continuous-improvement-systems/>

### **Contact Information**

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