Interrupting Oppression: Techniques & Strategies

Diversity Training  |  [Insert Date]

When you witness or experience an act of oppression:

● As you’re determining whether or not to engage...
  ○ Try to understand the person’s individual behavior in the context of the societal structures and patterns that affect us all: remember, most microaggressive behaviors are inadvertent and/or well-intentioned

● If you feel comfortable engaging the person in conversation...
  ○ Try to connect with them and meet them where they’re at: What are their needs? Why did they say or do what they did?
  ○ Tell them why you decided to talk with them and invite them into a dialogue
  ○ Use “I” statements and speak from personal experience
  ○ Make a distinction between the good character you know they possess and the problematic behavior you witnessed them perform
  ○ Give them the grace to make mistakes
  ○ Circle back and reflect at the end of the conversation

● If you do not feel comfortable engaging the person in conversation…
  ○ It’s okay to walk away, for any reason: self-care is essential and requires no explanation
  ○ Call upon your support system: whether that’s a colleague at the desk who can step in at the moment, or a friend you can confide in afterward

When you offend someone:

● If you are “called out” on your behavior...
  ○ Recognize your natural defensive tendencies: focus on the impact of your words or actions rather than your intent
  ○ Listen for understanding:
    ■ Try to connect with the other person’s feelings and needs
    ■ Allow them to tell their story
    ■ Avoid offering advice: give feedback that demonstrates your full engagement in the conversation
    ■ Recognize your own filters and blind-spots
  ○ Take responsibility for and acknowledge your own behavior
    ■ Avoid “but” and “ifs” (e.g. “I’m sorry if I offended you…”)
  ○ Make a commitment to change your behavior and follow through
  ○ Say “thank you”

● If you notice a problem with your own behavior, but have not been “called out”...
  ○ Ask the other person if they’re comfortable discussing the situation with you: remember, someone may choose to walk away for any reason

Whichever side of the conversation you are on...

● Ask open-ended, clarifying questions
● Know that the other person’s perspective is their reality
● Talk about emotions and describe feelings in ways that can help others understand them
● Recognize that we all have prejudices and biases; always be interruptible yourself