DEI TERMINOLOGY CHEAT SHEET

You already know that diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) are important concepts for creating a positive and inclusive work environment in any organization. Unfortunately, many organizations don't dig deep enough into these concepts to make a true difference in the lives of their employees.

A one-off training, or a promise to bring more diversity into the talent pool isn't enough. If you're going to dig into the EIB parts of DEIB, you've got to be sure your workforce understands that the language they use can sometimes be unintentionally racist or gendered and can perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

It's absolutely essential to be aware of and avoid using language that can be harmful to marginalized groups. We need to keep the conversations around DEIB focused on self-awareness, learning, and a willingness to think through the words society tells us are "normal" when they can actually cause a lot of pain.

So here are 20 terms you should know if you're involved in DEIB in your organization.

1 Diversity

The presence of different groups of people with different characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and abilities.

2 Inclusion

The act of creating a work environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and supported.

3 Equity

The fair treatment of individuals based on their needs and the provision of resources to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

4 Belonging

The sense of feeling accepted, valued, and supported in a work environment.

5 Privilege

Unearned advantages that individuals have based on their social identity.

6 Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of social categories such as race, gender, and class, and how they overlap and intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

7 Bias

A preconceived opinion or inclination, particularly one that is not supported by facts or evidence.

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8 Implicit Bias

Unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that can influence our perceptions and behaviors.

9 Cultural competence

The ability to understand, appreciate, and work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.

10 White privilege

The unearned benefits that white people receive in society due to their race.

11 Allyship

The act of supporting and advocating for marginalized groups.

12 Affinity groups

Groups of people who share a common identity or experience and come together for mutual support and empowerment.

13 Tokenism

The practice of including a small number of diverse individuals in an organization or group to appear inclusive without actually creating an inclusive environment.

14 Glass ceiling

The invisible barrier that keeps marginalized groups from advancing to higher levels in an organization.

15 Stereotyping

Assigning characteristics to individuals based on their membership in a particular group.

16 Unconscious bias training

Training designed to help individuals recognize and challenge their unconscious biases.

17 Inclusive leadership

The practice of leading in a way that values diversity and promotes inclusion.

18 Colorblindness

The practice of claiming not to see race, which can actually perpetuate discrimination by ignoring the ways in which race impacts individuals' experiences.

19 Empowerment

The process of giving individuals the tools and resources they need to take control of their own lives and achieve their goals.

20 Microaggressions

Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to people based on their membership in a marginalized group.

Below are 20 terms or phrases you should remove from your vernacular as of now because, quite frankly, they perpetuate our nation's systemic problem with discrimination. You might think we're being dramatic, but they're so entrenched in our language most people don't think twice about using them. And that's a problem.

1 Minority

This term implies that certain groups are in the minority and implies a power imbalance. If you're trying to make things equitable, use the term "underrepresented groups" instead.

2 Illegal alien

This term dehumanizes individuals and should be replaced with "undocumented immigrant."

3 Inner city

This term implies that certain areas are inherently dangerous and is often used to stereotype African American and low-income communities.

4 Insane or Crazy

These terms are used to describe mental health conditions and can be stigmatizing. Instead use "people living with mental health conditions" or "person with a mental illness".

5 Lazy

These terms are often used to stereotype certain groups of people, particularly people of color and those living in poverty.

6 Oriental

This term is offensive and outdated and should be replaced with "Asian" or "Asian American."

7 Handicapped or disabled

These terms are considered offensive and should be replaced with "person with a disability" or "people with disabilities."

8 Illegal or illegitimate

These terms are used to describe people or actions that are deemed as not conforming to the law or the norm, but it can be harmful and dehumanizing.

9 Master bedroom or bathroom

Whether rooted in our nation's history of slavery or not (the answer is unclear), it certainly can evoke some pain for those whose ancestors lived through the terrible ordeal of slavery.

10 Peanut gallery

When someone says, "no comments from the peanut gallery" it implies that the group is uninformed, as the term dates back to the late 19th century and refers to the section where Black people sat.

11 Uppity

An epithet used by White people in the Jim Crow era to describe Black people who weren't showing them enough respect. It could even lead to lynching by White mobs.

12 Wife or husband

Instead of assuming that your co-worker has one of these, try using spouse or partner instead.

13 Open the kimono

This business jargon means to disclose information about the inner workings of a company. Everyone needs to feel safe at work to do their best, and these words are dripping with misogyny and racism.

14 Circle the wagons

While these phrases may seem harmless, they have racist origins and portray the original inhabitants of this land as savages.

15 "You guys"

Some might think that these terms are gender-neutral but it actually positions "men" as the default which causes others to feel excluded by using these words.

16 Cakewalk

It's what we refer to as an effortless victory, or something that can be completed with ease. But these words originated as a dance performed by enslaved Black people on plantations before the Civil War.

17 Sold down the river

While this phrase now refers to a devastating betrayal, its history is more fraught. In the 1800s, Black slaves were literally sold down the river.

18 Gyp or Gip

It's a racial slur to the Roma people. It's crucial for everyone to understand that these origins still have a direct negative impact today.

19 "Chop Chop!"

This expression, which derives from the Cantonese word kap, or "make haste," is typically used in a condescending manner against someone who the speaker perceives to be beneath them in status.

20 Fuzzy Wuzzy

Although they appear endearing and cuddly, these terms have racist origins as a mockery of East Africa's dark-skinned, curly-haired nomads.

It's important to note that language is constantly evolving and new terms or phrases may become more common - while currently popular terms or phrases will become obsolete - as understanding and awareness of DEIB continues to grow. Stay informed and educated on proper language and best practices in DEIB.

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