

We need to talk ... about diversity

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It is hard for us to admit it, but we don't always celebrate diversity. For some of us, even talking about differences can be tough. This kind of dialogue is a strong reminder of experiences, thoughts, and emotions we may not fully understand or like. But we're professionals who are, at least intellectually, committed to the concepts of diversity and community. So we "talk the talk" and we try to "walk the walk." Some of us are learning to crawl and making steady progress. Some of us walk slowly at times and quickly at times. Some of us skip and run and fall sometimes. But most of us want to appear as though we're neck and neck in the marathon. Unfortunately, we've spent more on the apparel than we have on training for the sport.

Let's go back to basic training. Quite simply, let's talk. I am a strong proponent of the value of open, honest, and consistent dialogue as our training program. I said "simply," not "easily." The kind of dialogue I propose necessitates soul-searching reflection. We are required to think about who we are, and assuming we have "not yet arrived," who we want to become. And as if that process is not humbling enough, we have to share those reflections with others. It is in the process of sharing our reflections that we learn even more about ourselves, begin to learn about others, and assist others in learning more about themselves.

I believe, however, that we have lost—if we ever had it—the art of open, honest, and consistent dialogue. We tend to value those utterances that are most closely aligned with our own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Of greater concern is the fact that we value the people making the utterances for the same reason: They mirror our own. On the other hand, people with different experiences, thoughts, and feelings—despite all our slogans about celebration—are regarded with

suspicion, distrust, and downright dislike. And since most of us have a desire to be liked, trusted, and respected, we often either keep our utterances to ourselves or alter them to fit the present audience. As a result, we have safe and superficial engagements.

To more constructively engage with one another, it is critical that we learn to accept experiences, thoughts, and feelings as legitimate for those holding them. We don't need to accept them for ourselves, and we don't need to celebrate them. We should, however, endeavor to understand them in the context of their existence, and we should love the people who have them. We need a lot of practice in the art of evaluating and judging ideas and behaviors instead of people. As beings of thought and reason, we were created to do the first. And because we are not God, we are not qualified to do the latter. Yes, I said "God." I am a practicing Christian whose perspectives and behaviors are shaped by my beliefs. It is a part of my diversity. If it is not a part of me you can celebrate, that is your prerogative. It shouldn't mean that I couldn't talk about it with you. More importantly, I shouldn't be disregarded, disrespected, disliked, disempowered, or disgraced because of it.

What are you practicing? How and when were your practices formed? How do you feel about your



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practices? What do they teach you about yourself? How do they inform the way you think and feel about me? What can your practices teach me about myself? Can we talk?