

DEI Committee Friday Thoughts

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It's All About R-E-S-P-E-C-T
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Over the past few months, we have been asked to wear face masks or coverings to help keep the spread of coronavirus down. We may not like it, but we respect the request. Each time I put my mask on, I remind myself that I am wearing it to protect others from what I may have and could inadvertently spread to them. It's a small way for me to let others know that I value and respect them as human beings.

But what happens when I think about the ways I might not have shown that I respect and value others? Did I watch a parent in the grocery store devalue a child without saying something to that parent, did I engage in a conversation with coworkers that was based on ageism, or did I stand by and listen to a resident or member refer to a staff person by using a derogatory name or term? Then I ask myself 'why' because my mouth may have been covered by my mask, but that doesn't mean I was silenced.

Why are we so afraid or hesitant to approach someone we see or hear who is disrespectful to another person, or mistreating another person, but we are very vocal in the comfort of our homes? When I reflect on my silence, it is often the result of my own fear, of suffering the same disrespect, of staying out of others' business, or of trying to fit in with the crowd. But have you ever noticed that you feel better when you treat others with respect or advocate for someone, than you do when you replay the events of their mistreatment in your mind and know that you did nothing?

I often hear people say, "I try to treat everyone the same" and they are truly proud to make that statement. However, I believe that statement is very telling because we are not all the same, and we each should be respected for our individuality and for our uniqueness. There are negatives and positives in every culture, in every race, and in every human, so treating everyone the same may not be reflective of our acceptance of each other.

As a Black woman, I am not the same as every Black person and I am not the same as every woman, so “grouping” me into a category could bring negative or positive thoughts. Think about it more simplistically. Should you be treated or thought of the same as your siblings because you grew up in the same home, and with the same parents? Maybe rather than treating everyone the same, a better statement would be, “I try to treat everyone with dignity and respect.”

Each time I go to a gas station to put gas in my car, I am reminded of my father. When I was a child, we would go to the gas station and inevitably, there would be a person filling their tank, with music blaring or singing some tune with foul language and words that were negative about relationships. (You know...the same music I listened to as a teen.) My father would politely ask the person, “Would you turn your music down, please?” Then, like clockwork, the person would yell, “I have the right to listen to my music as loud as I want in my car!!!” As always, my father would calmly say, “Where your rights end, mine begin and I don’t appreciate you infringing on my rights. I have treated you with respect and am not infringing on your rights by turning down my Lawrence Welk, so now I expect the same of you.”

I was mortified as a teen, but now that I am older, I understand my father’s request and often turn my music down when I am near others. It’s not just about the music, but the larger lesson that has surrounded the way I try to treat others, educate others, and advocate for others each day.

When we talk to, comment about, talk about, or stereotype an individual based on their culture, race, sexual identity, economic status, gender, or for any other reason they are different from us, we have missed an opportunity to see that person as a human being who deserves the same dignity and respect that we deserve.

Here are three steps we can all take as we seek to do better:

- 1) Before you can understand others, you must understand yourself. Although it sounds silly, take time to think about your thoughts. We sometimes judge others without knowing them so spend a few minutes each day evaluating some of the judgmental thoughts you may have had and change that thought to one of non-judgement. (Ex: I am sure that resident has dementia because he keeps asking me to repeat myself. Instead think...This resident keeps asking me to repeat myself. Let me ask if he has hearing aids or prefers another language.)

- 2) Reverse the situation. Ask yourself, "What if someone said those things to me? How would I feel? (Ex: You are so stupid and I want someone else to help me!!! Instead say....I really appreciate you trying to help me. Maybe I can make my needs more clear. Let's start again.)

- 3) Avoid right/wrong dichotomies. It's very tempting to see the world in your eyes, but aren't you happy that there are others who have visions of the world? Everything is life does not have to be black and white, right or wrong, or "right" for me according to your views. Everyone's views about life should be respected for what is acceptable in their life. (Ex: I can't believe you have to pray five times a day. Why don't you just go to church on Sundays like I do? Instead think....I am happy that she is at peace with her spiritual decisions in life and I am going to ask her to educate me about her spiritual beliefs and practices.)

"You don't have to disrespect and insult others to simply hold your own ground. If you do, that shows how shaky your own position is. ~ Red Haircrow

About the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) Committee: We are a group of staff and residents who together serve a mission to educate, embrace and empower a workplace of diversity, equity and inclusion. Our vision is to seek open and honest communication and collaboration that will inform and celebrate the cultural, ethnic and sexual orientation of all members of our staff without bias.

Questions or comments? Please contact us dei@goodwinhouse.org.