

Spinning Straw Into Gold: Microaggressions as Teachable Moments

Levitt Foundation, Fall 2024



www.thinkagaintraining.com



ThinkAgainTraining



@ThinkAgain_TC

Introductions

- Please put your name and pronouns (he, she, they, something else, or none) in your Zoom name
- In the chat, please share your organization & role and answer: What is one question you are bringing today?

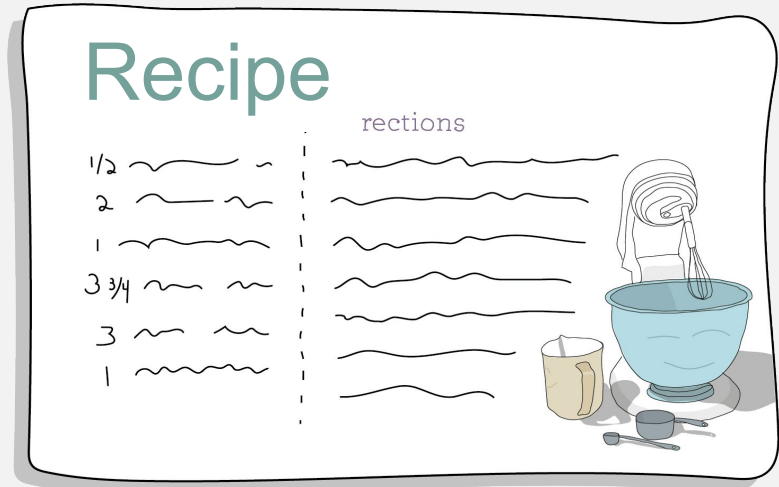


Ingredients we bring:

- Information about microaggressions
- Experience and wisdom from marginalized communities

Ingredients you bring:

- Your personal and professional experiences
- Experiences with your identities in the world
- Honest questions
- Openness to learning even when it's uncomfortable
- Respect for each other's learning processes

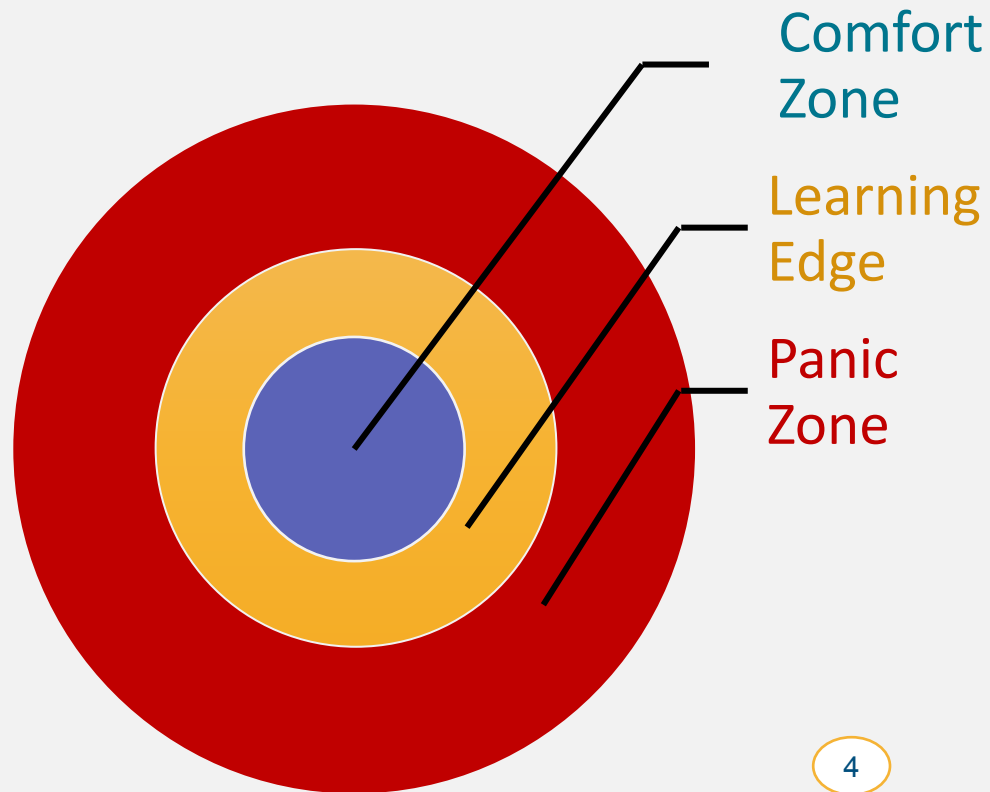


Directions:

1. Introductions
2. Learning frameworks
3. What are microaggressions
4. Spinning straw into gold
5. Practice
6. Q&A

Learning Frameworks

- ❑ We are **all** learners.
- ❑ We learn with our **whole selves** - body, emotions, spirit, and intellect.
- ❑ We learn through **making mistakes** in ways that are safe for us and others.
- ❑ We learn through **productive discomfort**, at the edge of our comfort zones



Pause and reflect



Think of a time when you said or did something (or saw someone else say or do something) that you later realized was problematic about/biased against a social identity (like race, gender, socioeconomic class, religion, disability, sexual orientation, etc.).

How did you realize it?

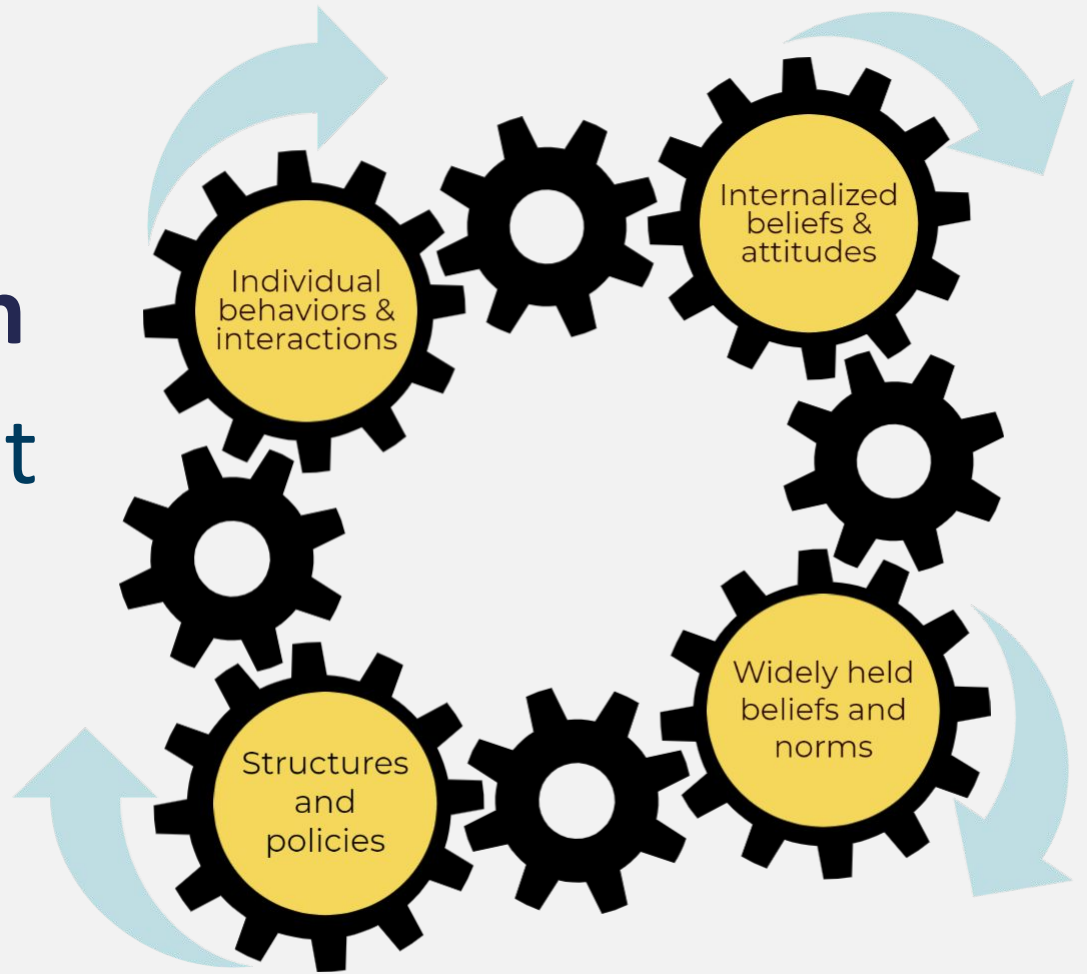
Microaggressions

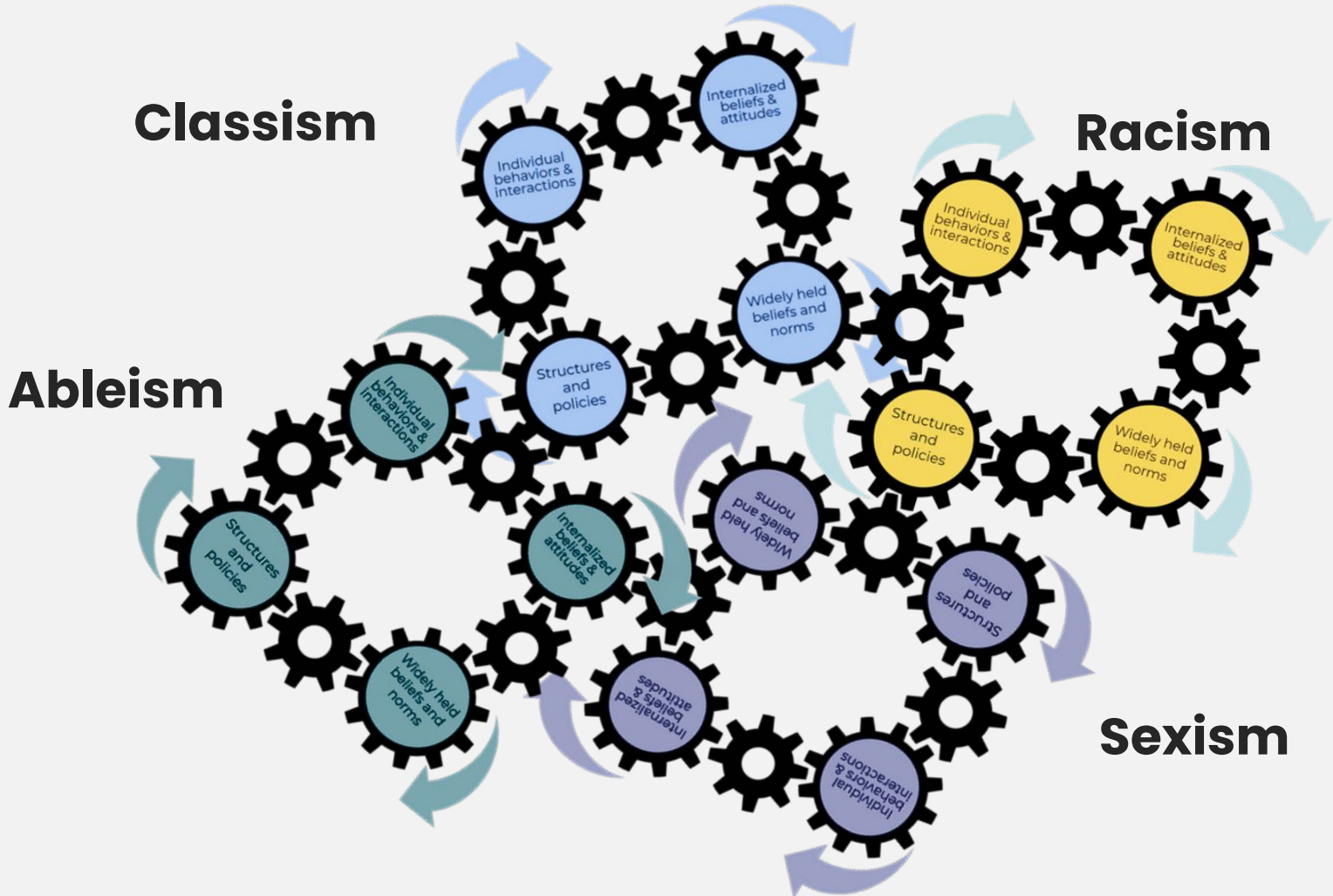
Everyday, subtle, and/or relatively minor instances of bias that can seem like “no big deal,” and are often **unintentional**, but can have a big impact.



- Contain a “**hidden message**” that is often connected to a stereotype and system of oppression
- Are **repetitive** – the impact builds up over time & varies day-to-day
- Create **emotional work** for the target

“-isms” - racism,
sexism and so on
- are systems that
operate through
a variety of
mechanisms





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I notice some kinds of
microaggressions at... (choose
one)

① Click **Present with Slido** or install our [Chrome extension](#) to activate this poll while presenting.

What makes this a microaggression?

What's the "hidden message"?

What stereotype or pattern does it align with?

What impact might it have?

Where are you
from? (Chicago) No
like where are you
really from?



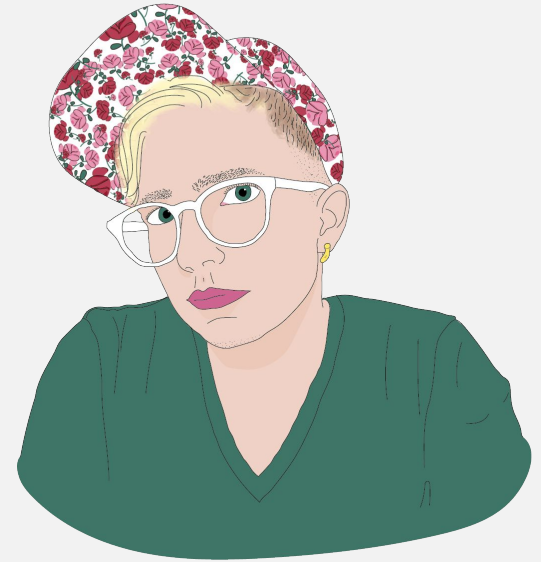
What makes this a microaggression?

What's the "hidden message"?

What stereotype or pattern does it align with?

What impact might it have?

Wow, that
hat is ... really
girly, for you.



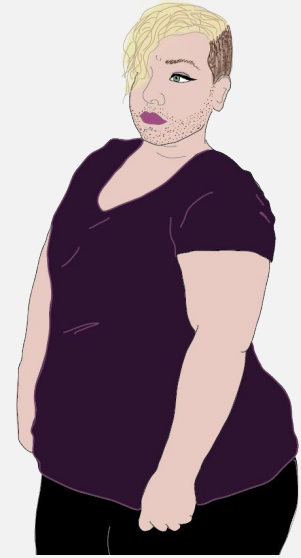
What makes this a microaggression?

What's the "hidden message"?

What stereotype or pattern does it align with?

What impact might it have?

You look great lately! Have you lost weight?



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**What kinds of microaggressions
have you seen at your events?
(choose all that apply)**

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Spinning Straw into Gold

- Notice
- Understand

Personal

- Inquire
- Name impact
- Explain / teachable moment
- Apologize

Interpersonal

- Build relationships of support and accountability
- Create systems to support effective responses

Community /
Organizational Repair



Considerations for Responding

What are your goals?

What are the risks for you (& others)?

What resources are available to you?

What are the power dynamics and relationships in play?

When you RECEIVED the microaggression ...

What are your goals?

- stop the person from continuing the behavior
- educate the aggressor
- protect your emotional boundaries / mental health / collegial work environment
- preserve a relationship

What are the risks for you?

- physical safety
- job safety / being fired or written up
- loss of relationship(s) / social capital / access
- perception as “difficult” / “not a team player” / “not a culture fit”

What resources are available to you?

- organizational policies or systems to address microaggressions
- supervisor or another person
- language from this training
- HR
- your own clarity, values, mindfulness
- ability to exit the situation
- time (to prepare; gather your ideas, etc.)

What are the power dynamics and relationships in play?

- relative positions in organizational hierarchy
- additional social identities (positionality)
- culture of retaliation vs culture of supportive problem-solving / restorative practice
- likelihood of being taken seriously / being believed
- existing relationship dynamics
- larger context (what’s going on in the event / community / country / world)

When you WITNESS the microaggression ...

What are your goals?

- stop the person from continuing the behavior
- educate the aggressor
- **protect colleagues' safety / emotional boundaries / mental health / well-being / collegial work environment**
- support colleague
- **social pressure on aggressor to avoid behavior again / reassert inclusive work culture**

What resources are available to you?

- organizational policies or systems to address microaggressions
- supervisor or another person
- language from this training
- HR
- your own clarity, values, mindfulness
- ability to exit the situation
- time (to prepare; gather your ideas, etc.)

What are the risks for you?

- physical safety (less risk)
- job safety / being fired or written up
- loss of relationship(s) / social capital / access

What are the risks for others?

- **all of the risks of being target**
- **retaliation by aggressor**
- **have to engage with situation / manage aftermath**

What are the power dynamics and relationships in play? (consider self, aggressor, & target)

- relative positions in organizational hierarchy
- additional social identities (positionality)
- culture of retaliation vs culture of supportive problem-solving / restorative practice
- likelihood of being taken seriously / believed
- existing relationship dynamics
- larger contexts (event/comm./country/world)

Large Group Practice

At the post-event celebrations with volunteers and artists, an artist “jokingly” imitates a volunteer’s accent. You aren’t sure if the volunteer heard.

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of?
- What “hidden message” might the team members be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior?
- What might be the impact on the volunteer they’re imitating? On the volunteers and artists that heard it?
- What do you need to consider (goals, risks, resources, power dynamics) to respond effectively?



Small Group Discussion

We will spend a few minutes in the small group discussions with a facilitator. For your scenario, think about:



- What stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of?
- What “hidden message(s)” are the aggressor sending, even unintentionally?
- What might be the impact on the target? On witnesses?
- What do you need to consider (goals, risks, resources, power dynamics) to respond effectively?

Scenario A

In a volunteer orientation led by 3 men and 1 woman, the woman notices that the men seem attentive to each other. But when she presents her section to the volunteers, the 3 men seem to stop paying attention and start multitasking. One of them jumps in and interjects to answer a volunteer's question, before she has a chance to.

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of?
- What “hidden message” might these 3 men be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior?
- What might be the impact on the one woman in the team? On the volunteers attending orientation?
- What do you need to consider (goals, risks, resources, power dynamics) to respond effectively?



Scenario B

At the end of a concert, a few concertgoers are filling out the audience survey near the main exit of the park. At one point, one of them has their eyebrows raised, scrunching their face. They make a loud outburst about the “gender identity” question, exclaiming “Why are they asking me that?!” while their friends snicker and laugh. A group from the organizing committee is nearby, including one who recently disclosed that ze is trans.

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of?
- What “hidden message” might these concertgoers be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior?
- What might be the impact on your colleague? On other concertgoers?
- What do you need to consider (goals, risks, resources, power dynamics) to respond effectively?



Scenario C

Two people approach the information table. One of the people, who happens to be in a wheelchair, asks the person behind the table where the restrooms are. The person behind the table stands up and pointing in the direction of the restrooms, says, “Tell your grandparent that there is a huge line already and the accessible bathroom is broken anyway.”

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of?
- What “hidden message” might the person at the table be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior?
- What might be the impact on the person in the wheelchair? On the other person? On anyone who overheard?
- What do you need to consider (goals, risks, resources, power dynamics) to respond effectively?

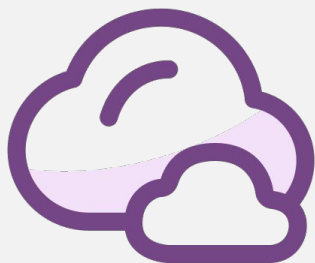


Levitt Foundation Team Scenario

A new employee gets hired and is introduced to her supervisor. For the next few months, at each of their check-in meetings, he calls her Sue instead of Su-Yeong, and she corrects him, kindly. Eventually she tries to get help from HR, but is told “that’s how he is” and not to make a big deal out of it.

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of?
- What “hidden message” might the supervisor be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior? What about HR?
- What might be the impact on Su-Yeong?
- What do you need to consider (goals, risks, resources, power dynamics) to respond effectively?

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How are you feeling now that you have had a chance to practice?
(share a word or phrase)

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CORRECT/CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPE

- “In my experience _____.”
- “I think that’s a stereotype. I’ve learned that _____.”
- “Another way to look at it is _____.”

SAY STOP

- “Just stop. It’s not funny.”
- “Come on. Cut it out.”
- “Do not use language like that around me.”

MIRROR

- “Where are YOU really from?”
- “Can I touch YOUR hair?”

PRETEND YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND

- “I don’t get it...”
- “Why is that funny?”

PROMOTE EMPATHY

- “I know you don’t like the stereotypes about _____ (their group), how do you think he feels when he hears those things about this group?”
- “How would you feel if someone said that about/did that to your sister or girlfriend?”

USE HUMOR

- “She plays like a girl? - You mean she plays like Serena Williams?”

SHARE YOUR OWN PROCESS

- “I noticed that you _____ (comment/behavior). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned...”

SEPARATE INTENT FROM IMPACT

- “You probably didn’t realize this, but when you (comment/behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because _____. Instead, you could _____ (different language/behavior.”

TELL THEM THEY’RE TOO SMART OR TOO GOOD TO SAY THINGS LIKE THAT

- “Come on. You’re too smart to say something so ignorant/offensive.”

ASK FOR CLARIFICATION OR MORE INFORMATION

- “Could you say more about what you mean by that?”
- “I’m wondering how you have come to think that?”

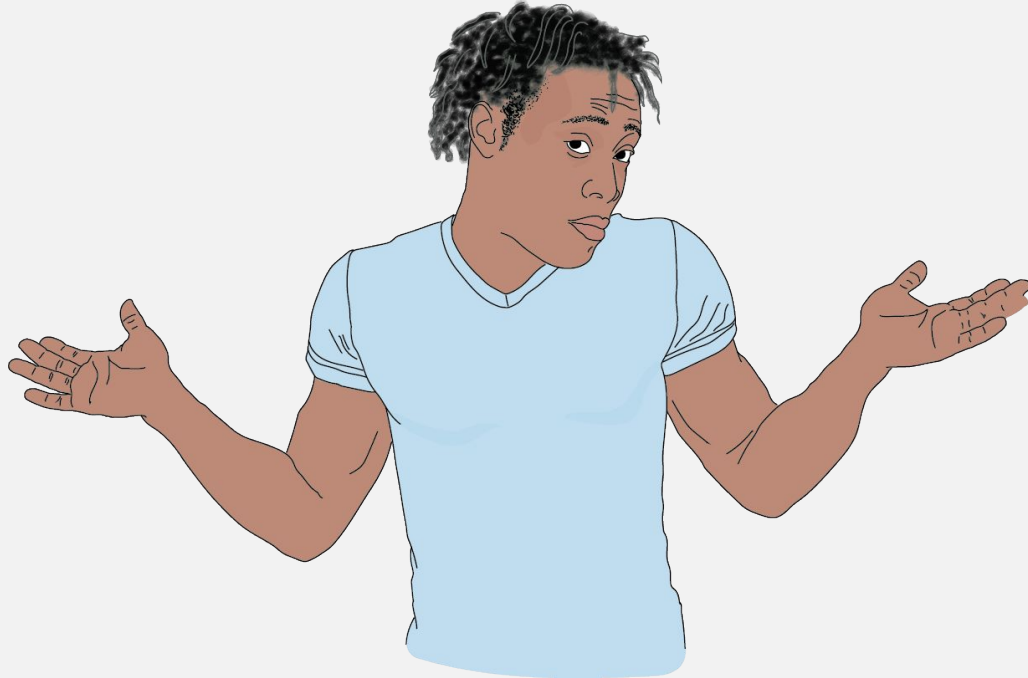
REMIND THEM OF THE RULES, POLICIES, OR ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

- “That behavior is against our code of conduct and could really get you in trouble.”

EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

- “When you _____ (comment/behavior), I felt _____ (feeling) and I would like you to _____.”

Questions?



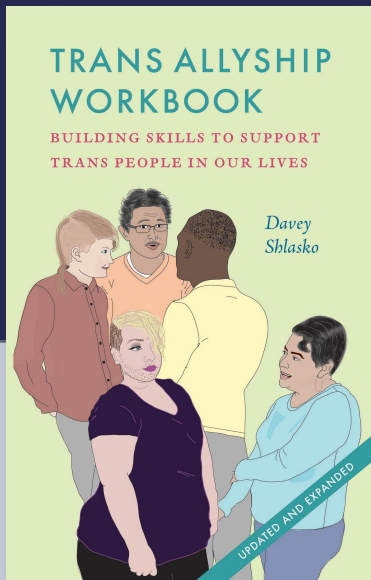
Closing Reflection...



What's one piece from this training you are going to practice at your events/in your organization in the future?

Thank you!

Check out our book:



Get in touch any time:



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