

American Chemical Society



# The value of storytelling to build empathy, awareness, and inclusivity in EHS

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# Benefits of encouraging diversity in the workplace



- The business case for diversity in the workplace is now overwhelming
  - We are not having a conversation anymore about whether it is something we need
- Greater innovation and creativity
  - Improved productivity
  - Wider talent pool
  - Greater employee retention
  - Better understanding of customers
  - Positive employer brand
  - Employee happiness
  - Knowledge-sharing between cultures
  - Cognitively diverse problem solving
  - Better decision-making
  - Increased employee engagement
  - Etc.

# Diversity in the workplace succeeds with inclusion



- Inclusion creates a sense of belonging among co-workers
- This translates to greater productivity, more innovation, and better decision-making
- Team performance improves when employees feel more connected
- Research shows that leaders are the key to a successful inclusion strategy

66%

of leaders overestimate their inclusion efforts

80%

of organizations say their inclusion strategy is ineffective

86%

of Millennials and Generation Z say inclusion strategies influence who they want to work for

# Necessity of practicing inclusion as a safety professional



- People skills are repeatedly cited as necessary for being an effective safety professional
  - Includes:
    - Compassion
    - Empathy
    - Conversation
    - Communication
- Incident response and investigation
  - Perform workplace inspections
  - Drive employee engagement
  - Enforcing safety standards and processes
  - Communicating safety requirements
  - Making decisions about safety programs
  - Influencing senior managers
  - Empowering future safety leaders
  - Training and skill development
  - Answering safety-related questions
  - Review of safety procedures and documentation
  - Etc.

# Diversity and inclusion: Where to start?

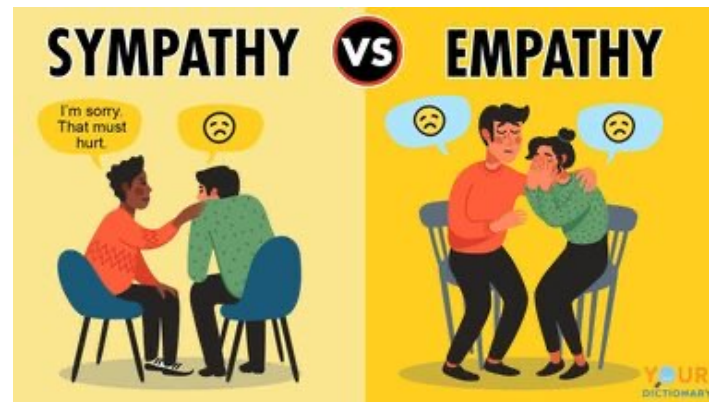


- Diversity is the “what”, inclusion is the “how”
- Complex topic with new data appearing daily
- Many strategies and approaches
- Jargon can overwhelm and offput new learners
- It is the responsibility of each individual to educate themselves



# Empathy increases awareness and understanding

- Empathy is feeling with people
  - Recognize that you have bias
  - Listen to people's stories
- Four qualities of empathy
  - Perspective taking
  - Staying out of judgement
  - Recognizing emotion
  - Communicating that emotion
- Avoid pity or silver lining or using “at least” statements (creates alienation)



# The use of storytelling to build empathy



Merely reciting or explaining the policies and procedures will not motivate others to adopt safe work practices. What else can we do? Being good storytellers will improve our powers of persuasion.

– *Chem. Health Saf.* **2003**, 10 (1), 56

As safety professionals, we must learn to be good storytellers. With added experience, I understand and appreciate the need for established procedures and even rules that must not be disobeyed.

– *Chem. Health Saf.* **2004**, 11, 3, 9-11

Storytelling shares experience and context, accommodating various perspectives and realities. This enables students to participate from their own cultural frame, creating better self-awareness, and bringing cognition, emotion, and action together to promote reflective learning.

– *J. Chem. Educ.* **2015**, 92, 58-65

Students identified that the inclusion of storytelling helped them to make connections between the scientists and the science, and also helped them engage with the course material.

– *J. Chem. Educ.* **2022**, 99, 472-479

# Stories unravel the complexities of fairness



## Sameness

- Everything is equal
- Pay same price regardless of age
- Infant and adult will receive the same amount
- Average and apply it across the board
- Fairness as equality of outcome

## Deservedness

- You get what you deserve
- Brightest and most talented should have more
- Deserving nothing if it isn't earned
- Fairness is a rational calculation

## Need

- Those who have more give to those who have less
- Obligations and responsibilities to one another
- Compassion plays a role in the calculation
- Fairness as social justice

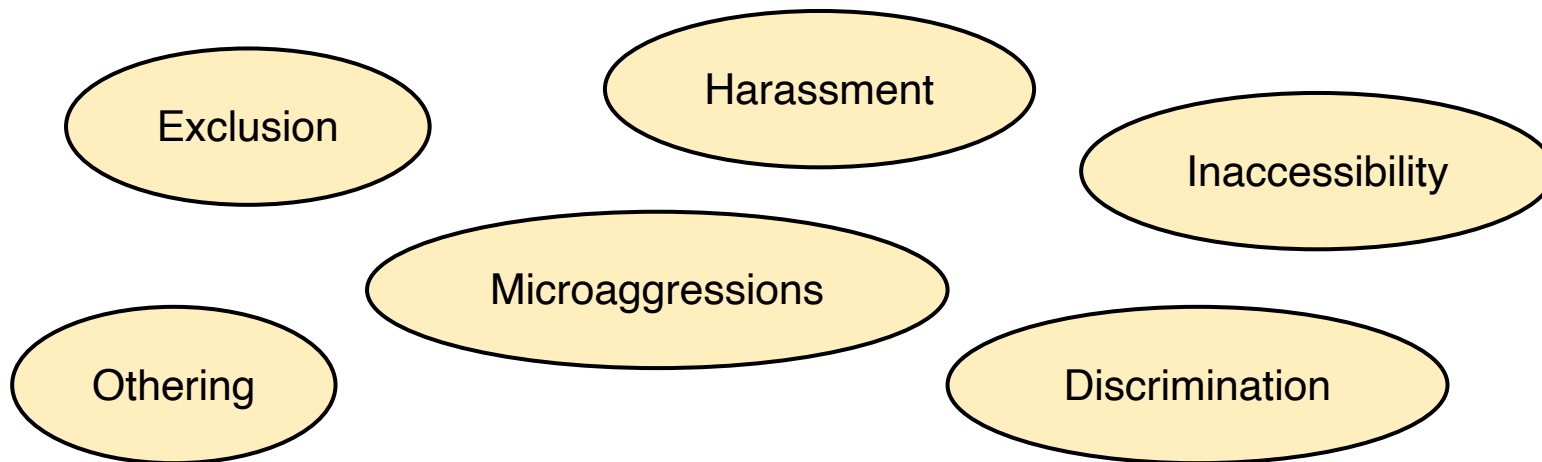


# Stories are particularly important for those in leadership roles



- Scientifically speaking, people with social or institutional power
  - Act more decisively
  - See fewer risks in their behavior
  - Have lower levels of cortisol (stress hormone)
  - Have a hard time relating to people who have less power
- People with power see fewer barriers, mainly because they believe they deserve to have whatever they want (sense of entitlement)
  - Great qualities for a CEO or trailblazing genius
  - Not great for impulse control, empathy, or setting healthy boundaries
- Creates situations where people dismiss concerns because they don't understand why they are an issue

# Actions that negatively impact inclusivity



Consequence: Opportunities lost, not because of an individual's lack of ability or skill, but because of the personal biases of someone in power

# How to approach developing empathy and inclusivity



- Zero tolerance for mistakes stifles learning, increases anxiety, and fosters disconnect
  - It's OK to make mistakes as an ally
  - Mistakes are how we learn and grow
  - People are resilient
- Depending on the situation
  - Don't make a big deal of it and work on it for next time
  - A simple apology will go a long way in most cases
  - Some cases require longer conversations to make it right

# Questions?



Thank you for attending!

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