The Inclusive Communication Starter Kit

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Preface

The language used by a company holds power in fostering relationships, mutual understanding, and creating an inclusive workplace. Conscious communication challenges biases and stereotypes, requiring a collective effort to rewrite old habits. Change is difficult as language reflects historical biases, making conscious communication a lifelong organizational and individual mindset shift.

We completely understand. That's why in this guide, we're not going to give you a definitive list of all the things you should and shouldn't say when focusing on inclusive communication.

Instead, this section outlines a four-step framework to help you build your own inclusive communication process, regardless of your starting point.

- Step 1: Evaluate your current communication processes, habits.

- Step 2: Create processes and norms that support your inclusive communication goals.

- Step 3: Create opportunities for transparent dialogue and learning.

- Step 4: Equip the right tools to sustain ongoing behavior change.

Step 1: Evaluate your Current Communication Processes and Habits

We strongly believe in the quote "Know Thyself" which means to know oneself. Only by knowing your lackings, you can work on improving yourself.

Caution: Self-Assessment, Not Audit

This process isn't about a full organizational audit or assigning blame. It's designed to give you a snapshot of your current communication practices. Think of it as a chance to identify areas where you can improve and habits you might want to adjust to create a more inclusive environment.

Where to Check?

Internal: Meetings, email, Slack, intranet, employee resource groups (ERGs).

Marketing: Website, social media, blogs, press releases.

Employees: Onboarding, handbook, intranet, learning & development resources.

Hiring: Job postings, candidate interactions, interview guides.

External: Customer interactions, vendor communications, public relations.

What to Check?

For your ease we've made a checklist of 13 questions across 4 different areas:

Area 1: Hiring

☐ Are our candidate rejection emails inclusive and empathetic? (Do they offer feedback and avoid discriminatory language?)

☐ Are our job postings free of jargon, idioms, acronyms, and clichés? (Are they clear and accessible to a diverse audience?)

☐ Do our job postings utilize inclusive language when describing roles and responsibilities? (Do they avoid gendered language or stereotyped expectations?)

What to Check?

For your ease we've made a checklist of 13 questions across 4 different areas:

==Area 2: Company Culture==

☐ Do our company mission and values statements reflect diversity and equity? (Do they go beyond just words and show commitment to action?)

☐ Is our employee onboarding guide age-inclusive for all employees? (Does it consider different learning styles and accessibility needs?)

☐ Do our company events and celebrations represent the diversity of our workforce? (Are there opportunities for everyone to participate and feel included?)

☐ Do we have clear channels for employees to report any bias or discrimination they experience in communication?

What to Check?

For your ease we've made a checklist of 13 questions across 4 different areas:

Area 3: Communication Channels

☐ Are interactions on team channels, project management platforms, and public Slack channels respectful and inclusive? (Do they avoid assumptions about background knowledge or cultural references?)

☐ Do we use respectful and inclusive language in company-wide emails and announcements? (Are they free of humor that could be offensive?)

☐ Do we offer multiple ways for employees to communicate, considering different communication styles and preferences? (e.g., written communication, video conferencing, in-person meetings)

What to Check?

For your ease we've made a checklist of 13 questions across 4 different areas:

Area 4: External Communication

☐ Are our social media posts considerate of different audiences and backgrounds? (Do they avoid stereotypes and cultural insensitivity?)

☐ Is our public communication thoughtful and inclusive? (Do we use plain language and avoid jargon that could be confusing?)

☐ Do our marketing materials (website, brochures, etc.) represent the diversity of our customer base and target audience?

How to Check?

1 Surveys: Assess inclusivity sentiment (representation in materials, language clarity, comfort expressing viewpoints).

2 Focus Groups: Discuss communication challenges and opportunities with diverse employees.

3 Data Analysis: See if communication channels and engagement differ across demographics.

4 Review Materials: Analyze internal communications for inclusive language, diverse representation (in text and images), and accessibility features.

5 Observe Meetings: Pay attention to participation levels and comfort in contributing.

Step 2: Create Processes and Norms that Support your Inclusive Communication Goals

In the first step, you might unearth a lot of interesting things. In this stage, you might easily fall into chaos and try to change a lot of things at once.

To make things easier, we made this 3 faceted sample checklist. You can follow this exact one or you can build yours.

Things you'd Like to Keep

What aspects of your current communication already promote inclusivity?

You can ask this question and list up things that can be helpful to keep. Here are two examples:

1 Designated time for open questions in company meetings.

2 Anonymous suggestion box to gather employee feedback on various topics.

Things you'd Like to Remove

What elements of your current communication might be hindering inclusivity?

Ask yourself this question and list up biased and stereotypical communication materials and practices. Here are three examples:

1 Jargon-filled internal emails that leave some employees confused, especially new hires or those from non-technical backgrounds.

2 Unconscious bias in job descriptions, promotions, or reviews can deter underrepresented groups.

3 Social media posts or marketing materials that primarily use humor that might not resonate with all audiences, or that perpetuate stereotypes.

Things you'd Like to Add

Ask yourself what elements of your current communication can be improved towards inclusiveness rather easily and quickly.
Here's a quick checklist on this –

☐ **Candidate Experience:** Implement a post-interview survey for candidates to get feedback on the inclusivity of your hiring process.

☐ **Regular Review:** Add "Inclusive Communication" as a regular agenda item in your Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) meetings. Use this time to discuss new initiatives and track progress.

Things you'd Like to Add

☐ **Bias Detection Tools:** Utilize tools that scan job postings and social media content for biased language before publishing.

☐ **Pronoun Visibility:** Encourage employees to add their preferred pronouns to their profiles and communication platforms (like Slack).

☐ **Shared Meeting Agendas:** Promote the creation of shared meeting agendas before meetings, fostering accessibility and participation for all attendees.

Bonus tip: While listing things to add, you should co-create with employees from different identity groups and seniority levels. This way everyone will feel like a part of the communication guideline, and they will try to own it.

Step 3: Create Opportunities for Transparent Dialogue and Learning

Now that we know where we're lacking and what actions to take, it's time to move further. True inclusive communication requires an inside-out approach. So, we need to really aim for adopting the concept of communicating inclusively.

Goal: Create a comfortable environment where everyone feels safe to ask questions, share ideas, and give feedback on inclusive communication practices.

P.S. We're ditching rigid training sessions and embracing a growth mindset! This means learning and improving together through open dialogue.

Here's a checklist that you can follow to create that safe space:

Employees Feeling Comfortable Asking Questions:

☐ **"Ask Me Anything" Sessions:** Host regular Q&A sessions with HR or communication teams where employees can ask questions anonymously or openly.

☐ **Inclusive Communication Forum:** Create an online forum for employees to submit questions about inclusive language.

☐ **Encourage Manager Support:** Remind managers to actively invite questions during team meetings and one-on-one discussions.

Here's a checklist that you can follow to create that safe space:

Employees Speaking Up Constructively:

☐ **Leadership Role-Playing:** Organize workshops where leaders demonstrate how to address communication slip-ups in a supportive, learning environment.

☐ **Clear Reporting Channels:** Establish clear and accessible ways (hotline, online form) to report bias or discrimination.

☐ **Peer-to-Peer Communication:** Encourage informal conversations between colleagues to address minor issues.

Collaborative Efforts Among Employees:

☐ **"Open Document" Policy:** Allow collaborative editing on company documents like code of conduct, employee handbook, and even company values.

☐ **Diverse Committees:** Form committees or task forces with people from different backgrounds to review and refine company policies or documents.

☐ **Celebrate Success:** Recognize and reward employees who demonstrate inclusive communication in their daily interactions.

Bonus Tip: While anonymous forums can be a starting point, the goal is to feel comfortable speaking openly. Encourage open dialogue and trust building to eliminate the fear of speaking up.

Step 4: Equip the Right Tools to Sustain Ongoing Behavior Change

As you continue to shape your inclusive communication strategy, you'll need to consider the tools and resources you can provide to your employees to encourage continuous behavior change and cultivate a growth mindset at an organizational level.

Learning is an inherently personal process, so it's important that your employees are able to set their own specific goals with regard to their learning, and learn in a way that's directly meaningful to them.

Research says that the success of training is dependent on how motivated your employees are to apply their learning and adapt it across a range of different scenarios.

Here are some samples of letting employees to equip the right tools -

1 Organizing workshops where employees can brainstorm inclusive communication practices and contribute ideas for improvement.

2 Training on how to give and receive constructive feedback in a respectful and solution-oriented manner.

3 Create a centralized resource hub with articles, training materials, and best practices examples related to inclusive communication.

4 Offer short, engaging training sessions or workshops focused on specific inclusive communication topics (e.g., avoiding unconscious bias in language).

End Note

Remember these are only samples and can be used if employees are open and excited, but for effective training, ensure employees are motivated.

However, it's important to acknowledge that unconscious bias is there and not always training works against unconscious bias. But that cannot stop us from inclusive communication. At the end of the day, trying is what matters the most.

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