

**From Bystander to Bridge Builder:
Being bold and courageous when you or another is not being heard -
strategies for active listening and supporting other views**

General Pointers

- Know yourself: Do you tend to freeze? Get too angry too fast? What holds you back from taking action? Take time to reflect on what you need in order to act.
- Doing something is almost always better than doing nothing. “Mistakes” are part of the learning process. *Intervening constructively takes practice!*
- Decide whether you want simply to stop the escalation or also to educate. Educating might work best later, in a private setting.
- Keep your voice non-judgmental and non-confrontational when addressing the person making offending comments. Also reach out to offer solidarity with those who were targeted.
- Enlist others who are witnessing. When two or three people speak up instead of just one, even just to say, “I agree,” the action is often far more effective.
- Seek institutional resources. Talk to an advisor, someone from HR... Consider whether new policies are needed.

Possible Tactics

(1) Make your discomfort known

- Find a short phrase you can readily use in lots of situations.
- Examples: “Ouch.” “I’m not comfortable with that.” “What do you mean by that?”

(2) Actively Listen by reflecting what you heard

- **Paraphrase** what they said. It clarifies it for you and for them.
- **Empathize**. Listen for the feelings and needs behind the statement.

(3) Ask questions

- **Ask for clarification**. When people explain themselves they may realize they’re off-base.
- **Ask for additional info**. Try to genuinely understand why people hold those views.

(4) Build a bridge

- **Be personal**. Share ways that you used to have blinders.
- **Be affirming**. Acknowledge that they may not have meant to be offensive or hurtful. Tell them they are too good a person to say something like that.

(5) Challenge

- **Express your feelings**: Explain why you’re offended or uncomfortable.
- **Humanize**: Ask how they’d feel if someone said a similar comment to someone close to them.
- **Reveal**: Share your own experience or perspective.
- **Claim authority**: Name policies or laws that prohibit such conduct.

Source: Goodman, Diane J. (2011). *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups*, Routledge.



And then listen. Really listen.

Source: <http://www.jacquilewis.com/blog/table-talk>

Do's & Don'ts

for conversations across political differences

What can you learn from people who think and experience the world differently than you? Except in rare occasions, having a particular set of beliefs should not impact your role and standing at work, home or elsewhere. In order to make sure that's true, civility and caution should be a priority. Think of people with different views as a resource rather than roadblock.

Do	Don't
Ask what value(s) led them to that belief	Tell them they are wrong
Ask when that belief first started for them	Ask how they could ever believe such a thing
Give a moment to make sure they're done	Interrupt people
Try "Huh, interesting, tell me more..."	Instead of "yeah, but, what about..."
Ask about their goals and hopes	Assume you know their motives
Explain your frustration and take responsibility for it	Blame them for your anger or frustration

Source: Essential Partners | 186 Alewife Brook Parkway, Suite 212, Cambridge, MA 02138 | info@whatisessential.org | 617-923-1216
 From a 10 page pdf: <http://www.whatisessential.org/resource/conversation-guide-red-blue-divide>