



Embracing cultural diversity at work

9. Personal story-telling

Ben often tells the story of one of his most embarrassing moments as a leader. He's motivated to help others learn what he feels is an important message:

"When I had first become a leader, I was asked to introduce a new team member to the division. I made a mistake about her cultural background, stating 'facts' about her that weren't accurate. When she attempted to interject, I spoke over her, not wanting to be embarrassed by having any mistake pointed out. I ploughed on with my introduction, oblivious to the fact that I had just reinforced incorrect information and perpetuated misunderstandings for the new employee."

By telling his story, Ben is showing his vulnerability. He is modelling that it is human to make mistakes and how important it is to be able to notice them when they happen, learn from them and do better next time.

He also uses his story to talk about the value of sharing personal experiences that reinforce respect and create an understanding and considerate workplace.

Over time, others in the team feel enough trust to reveal some of their more embarrassing mistakes and give others the opportunity to also learn from their lessons.

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Possible actions

1. As Ben did, you can use your experiences and stories to help others see difference in new ways. One of the biggest challenges to increasing inclusion is what Dr Martin Luther King called the 'appalling silence of good people'.
2. Ask yourself "What can I learn from what just happened?" or "What do I need to know before I do/say...?"
3. Stay open, don't judge, don't jump to action, or a solution.
4. Being aware that there are different perspectives and seeking to find out more about them helps to create a learning organisation.

Key messages

1. Be open to sharing your not-so-great personal stories with others.
2. This can help create a culture of openness and honesty.
3. Learn from your mistakes and encourage others to share and improve on past actions.