4 Activities to Foster Belonging on a Team

1. Learn what's shaped people

Create a safe space to learn about team members' backgrounds and what has been vital in shaping their lives. Doing this as a group allows employees to learn new things about each other that otherwise might not come up, and the act of being open, honest and vulnerable is a great way to form bonds, increase empathy and improve relationships.

- Ask everyone to think about the three most defining moments in their lives and write them down on separate post-its (remote teams can try a virtual whiteboard like miro).
- Have each employee present these moments to the team, and share their story to whatever degree they feel comfortable.
- Thank everyone for sharing and ask the team to share what their takeaways are from the exercise.

2. Find out how people feel

People's lives and experiences outside of the office inform the way they show up to work. Simply recognizing that and encouraging people to feel comfortable sharing builds inclusion because it makes it okay for everyone to be themselves. Try one of the following prompts to kick off a small group meeting to set the tone for openness and vulnerability.

- **"If you really knew me, you'd know that…"** This can be something as simple as "I missed the bus this morning so I feel a bit stressed," or something a bit more revealing such as "I have a family member who is not well and I'm having trouble focusing."
- **"The rose (best part) and thorn (worst part) of the last week were…"** This gives everyone the opportunity to bring up both accomplishments and challenges, big or small, professional or personal.

3. Confront stereotypes head-on

This particular inclusion activity is a great way to break down misconceptions and stereotypes by giving people a chance to self-identify, while also addressing the stereotypes that can accompany these identifying factors.

Here are the steps for "I Am, But I am Not"

- Each participant folds a piece of paper in half to create two separate columns.
- In the first column, they write "I Am".
- In the second column, they write "I Am Not".
- In between these two columns, write the word "But".
- The final phrase will read "I am _____, but I am not _____."
- Participants fill in the first blank with some kind of common identifier, such as their gender, race, religion, or age, and the second with a common stereotype about that group which is not true of them (whether the stereotype is positive or negative).
- Make sure there are no questions and have everyone write at least 5 statements.
- Allow participants to share their statements with the team and have an open and respectful discourse on stereotypes.

4. Walk in Someone else's shoes

"Perspective taking" is a great way to mentally walk in someone else's shoes. Lead your team through this activity with the following steps.

1. Have your team share what types of diverse backgrounds are represented on their team (education, sexual orientation, race, etc).
2. Pair each team member with a background that is different from their own.
3. Have everyone write a few lines on the distinct challenges that they believe the background group they've been paired with could face.
4. Share and discuss with the team or in small groups.

This reflection will produce more empathic teams, and according to the Harvard study, will help build positive attitudes and behaviors toward minorities. The study also reveals increased support and "engaging in less mistreatment toward marginalized minorities."