

# ACTION GUIDE

## 21 Tools & Tips for Taking Interpersonal Action for Social Change

### FOR BUSINESSES

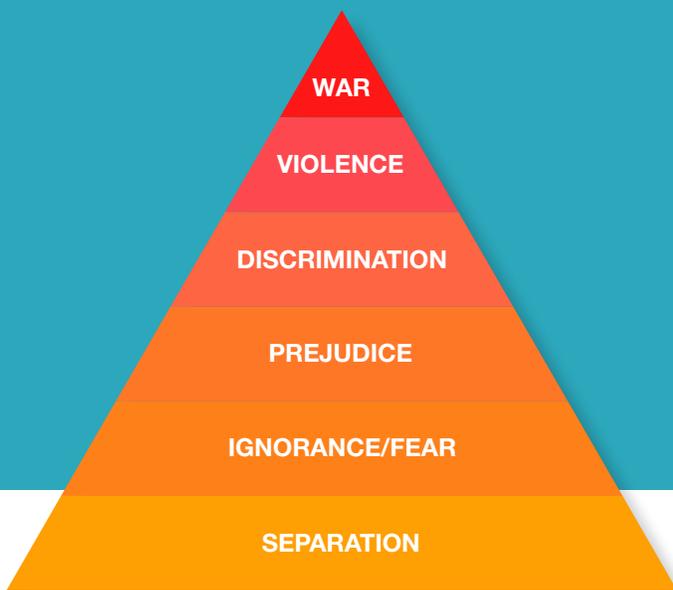


**The Mosaic Project** teaches people — from kindergartners to corporate executives — the skills they need to build the inclusive, equitable, and just communities they envision.

Since 2000, Mosaic has provided over 70,000 individuals with immersive, experiential education programs in equity, empathy, and effective communication across differences.

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Separation is the foundation of violence.



Connection is the foundation of peace.

## 1. Dismantle the Pyramid of Separation and Build the Pyramid of Connection

The tools, tips, and guiding questions that follow will empower you and your team to navigate interpersonal interactions to work toward a more inclusive and equitable workplace. They will help you to dismantle the Pyramid of Separation and build the Pyramid of Connection. We frame our tools and tips in the context of these pyramids because our individual interactions do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are influenced by the societal systems in which we live, and they also have the power to shift these systems.

The systems that are set up to make us feel that we are separate from each other are very powerful. Our children continue to grow up segregated with limited exposure to those different from themselves. As the Pyramid of Violence shows, this is dangerous. Separation can easily lead to ignorance, fear, prejudice, discrimination, violence, and more separation.

Simply bringing people together from different backgrounds, however, is not enough to break this cycle. Diversity without authentic connection is still segregation. Research in Contact Theory demonstrates that to overcome prejudice and create true community, people need prolonged contact with one another, common goals, equitable treatment, a diverse team of role models, and effective communication and conflict resolution tools. Critically, issues of prejudice and systemic inequality must be directly addressed.

This is exactly what we do at The Mosaic Project. We work toward a peaceful future by uniting people of diverse backgrounds, providing them with essential community-building skills, and empowering them to become peacemakers. We dismantle the Pyramid of Separation and build the Pyramid of Connection.

We are delighted to share some of the core Mosaic lessons with you, and we are grateful to have you by our side on the path toward social change. While the main focus of this

Action Guide is on interpersonal action, we will cover all three of the “I”s: internal, interpersonal, and institutional action. We include ideas and links to resources for internal exploration as well as an invitation at the conclusion to take institutional action.

Our actions—internal, interpersonal, and institutional—have been shaped by history and also have the power to shape our future. We hope that these tools and tips will support you and your colleagues as you work to build a more just, peaceful future where everyone can thrive!

How do we build authentic connections on our work teams? Where is the place for one-on-one conversations vs. group conversations about systemic oppression?



### **The Color of Law**

The Mosaic Project with Richard Rothstein, Author of **The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America**

**M**utual Respect

**O**pen-Mindedness

**S**elf Respect

**A**ttitude

**I**ndividuality

**C**ommunity

## 2. Create Community Agreements

When building an inclusive, equitable, and just community, it is important to have agreements about how we will work, learn, and live together. If everyone has a hand in creating these agreements, they are more likely to endure. You can use our MOSAIC agreements as a starting point:

**M**utual Respect

**O**pen Mindedness

**S**elf Respect

**A**ttitude (an awesome one!)

**I**ndividuality

**C**ommunity

We also ask that everyone does their best to use the [Three Keys to Connection \[#12\]](#), assume good intentions, and give each other the benefit of the doubt. Most of us do not intend to hurt other people. When we acknowledge that and take the discussion about intention off the table, we can focus on the impact and make sure any harm gets addressed.

What do each of the MOSAIC agreements mean to you? What other agreements would you like to have in your workplace?



**Conversation Ground Rules**

from Catalyst



### 3. Enter the Stretch Zone

Exploring issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion can be uncomfortable, which is often a good thing; it means we are entering our Stretch Zone and learning and growing!

There are multiple states of being. The first is our “Comfort Zone”: it feels like a warm bed, or hanging out with the people you know best. It’s easy and effortless and we can navigate it without much thought. It is important to have spaces of comfort, but if we never leave these spaces then we never grow. Remember — the fish only grows as big as the fish bowl.

If we venture all the way out into our Rip Zone, we’ve stretched too far and shut down to learning.

The Stretch Zone is our Learning Zone. It can be a messy, complicated zone, but when we figure out how to navigate it, it can be exhilarating. The more time we spend in our Stretch Zone, the more comfortable we will become there, and our Comfort Zone will in fact expand to include experiences that were previously in our Stretch Zone. What was

once awkward becomes familiar as we learn new ways of being. We are then ready to take on more challenges.

We encourage you to enter your Stretch Zone as you try out the tools described in these pages.

## When have you challenged yourself to enter your Stretch Zone and what did you learn?



**5 Tips for Talking about Race and Difference** from The Mosaic Project

It's you and me against  
the problem.



## 4. Work Together Towards Equity

Mosaic's core principle of conflict resolution is: **"It's not you and me against each other, but the two of us against the problem."**

This is essential to keep in mind as we work together to create more inclusive, equitable, and just workplaces. Each of us has a different history with, perspective on, and connection to the problem of systemic oppression. It takes all of us working together to create a better future.

In what ways can you bring your unique knowledge and experience to work together with others to create more equity?



**Diverse Teams Feel Less Comfortable — and That's Why They Perform Better** by David Rock, Heidi Grant, and Jacqui Grey

We are all  
interconnected.



## 5. Honor Our Interconnectedness

Not only do we have the power to change the future, we will change it, because we are all interconnected. **Our actions do affect the world around us. And so does our inaction.**

Our feeling peaceful, happy, and healthy is tied to everyone else feeling peaceful, happy, and healthy. Therefore, we all benefit from a more inclusive, equitable, and just world.

## How have your actions – and inactions – affected your colleagues?



TED Talk by Heather McGhee:  
**Racism has a cost for everyone.**

We see what we expect to see,  
and we don't see what we  
don't expect to see.



## 6. Acknowledge That We See What We Expect to See

This is an amazing characteristic of the human brain. It helps us quickly make sense of the world around us. It helps us to read quickly without having to process every letter and every word. It's why you were able to read and understand that last sentence even though it had missing and misplaced words and letters. This characteristic becomes a liability, however, when proofreading our own writing. It becomes a major liability when we take these mental shortcuts with other people and see them for who we expect them to be rather than for who they really are.

This is especially dangerous when we live in a segregated society and don't have personal connections with people different from us. Then we rely on the stereotypes around us in the media and in what others say to inform us about what people of other skin colors, genders, and backgrounds are supposed to be like. We end up seeing stereotypes rather than true, complex individuals.

When have you seen others for who you expected them to be rather than for who they really are?



See how The Mosaic Project breaks down these concepts for kids in [MOTV \(Mosaic TV\) Episode 6](#). Share it with your family, and know that it's helpful for adults too!

Break through bias.  
Stop stereotyping.  
Prevent prejudice.  
Demolish discrimination.

## 7. Understand Bias, Stereotypes, Prejudice, Discrimination, and the Isms

Understanding the following terms helps us recognize them in our communities and in our own interactions. This is the first step to helping stop them.

**Bias:** a mental shortcut we take when making decisions. When we are aware of [common biases](#), we can mitigate them.

**Stereotype:** a label; a generalization about a whole group of people applied to one person, without regard for individuality. When we stereotype others, we dehumanize them and this makes it impossible to empathize with them.

**Prejudice:** a judgment made about someone without knowing the person.

**Discrimination:** an action based on stereotypes and prejudice.

**Ism:** discrimination + institutional power.

**Sexism:** discrimination based on sex or gender + institutional power.

**Ableism:** discrimination based on ability + institutional power.

**Racism:** discrimination based on race + institutional power.

Given this definition of racism, “**reverse racism**” does not exist.

When was a time you witnessed or experienced an act of discrimination?  
When was a time you discriminated against someone else?



**Comedian Aamer Rahman** provides a detailed explanation of why there is no such thing as reverse racism.

Re-spect.  
Look Again.



## 8. Re-spect

What can we do to break through our biases when we find ourselves stereotyping others and prejudging them? We can re-spect.

Re = again. Spect = look. We can look again.

We can work to overcome our tendency to see what we expect to see and not see what we don't expect to see.

If we are truly respecting others, we are constantly looking again and doing our best to see beneath the surface through to the depth of who they really are.

Think about times when you prejudged others. How have people surprised you when you re-spected them, or looked again, and saw them for who they really are?



TED Talk by Vernā Myers:  
**How to overcome our biases?  
Walk boldly toward them!**

ACTS OF EXCLUSION send messages that:

<i>You don't belong.</i>	<i>You're invisible.</i>
<i>You're a threat.</i>	<i>You're not an individual.</i>
<i>You're inadequate.</i>	<i>You're a curiosity.</i>
<i>You're not normal.</i>	<i>You're a burden.</i>



## 9. Recognize Acts of Exclusion

Acts of exclusion, also known as microaggressions, are sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, sometimes conscious, and sometimes unconscious. They can look like this:

- You don't belong.  
*Inviting only men to a crucial leadership meeting.*
- You're invisible.  
*Addressing only the colleague of someone who is visually impaired, rather than talking to the visually impaired person directly.*
- You're not an individual.  
*Mistaking the only two people of the same ethnicity in a group for one another and calling them by the wrong name.*
- You're not normal.  
*Calling out the one LGBTQ+ person in the meeting to represent and explain all LGBTQ+ people.*
- You're a burden.  
*Rolling eyes when someone asks a question.*

Beware of “gaslighting.” Gaslighting negates the thoughts, feelings and experiences of others — for example, telling someone who just experienced an act of exclusion based on race that the incident had nothing to do with their skin color.

Describe an act of exclusion or microaggression that you have witnessed, experienced, or even committed. How would you address these moments in the workplace?



### Leveraging the Interpersonal for Social Change

The Mosaic Project with Dr. Michael Baran, Co-author of **Subtle Acts of Exclusion**

INTENTIONAL ACTS OF INCLUSION  
send messages that you  
belong, you are valued, and  
your contributions matter!

## 10. Perform Intentional Acts of Inclusion

Intentional acts of inclusion can look like:

- Saying hello to everyone when we arrive and in the hallways, and saying goodbye when we leave.
- Acknowledging and appreciating people's contributions.
- Making sure everyone gets a chance to speak up in meetings if they want to.
- Giving the opportunity for people to share ideas through different means (written, spoken, one-on-one, groups, etc.).
- Using the [Three Keys to Connection \[#12\]](#)!

What intentional act of inclusion can you perform today?



**All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten** by Robert Fulghum

## The Three Connection Blockers

- 🚫 Blame
- 🚫 Guilt
- 🚫 Defensiveness

## 11. Know the Three Connection Blockers

There are three attitudes that block our ability to connect with others to make effective change. These are easy traps to fall into, and they prevent us from making progress.

🚫 **Blame:** to say or think that a person is responsible for something bad that has happened (e.g., “This is all your fault!”). When we blame others, we give our power away by focusing on what they are doing rather than on what we can control. In addition, when we blame, often others can’t hear what we’re saying. They just get defensive.

🚫 **Guilt:** a painful feeling of regret caused by thinking that you have done something bad or wrong, sometimes caused by blame (e.g., “I’m such a poor performer!” or “It’s all my fault!”). While it is sometimes appropriate to feel guilt so you can take responsibility and move on, if we dwell on it, guilt can lead to inaction.

🚫 **Defensiveness:** a high sensitivity to criticism or blame (e.g., “You’re wrong. I didn’t do anything. You’re misunderstanding me.

I’m not being defensive!”). When we jump to defend our actions before listening to others’ perspectives, we are unable to empathize and solve the problem.

Have an honest conversation with yourself... When have you noticed yourself falling into one or multiple connection blocker traps?



TEDx Talk by Daryl Davis: [Why I, as a Black man, attend KKK rallies.](#)

## The Three Keys to Connection

-  Listening
-  Empathy
-  Assertiveness

## 12. Use the Three Keys to Connection

There are Three Keys to Connection:

 **Listening:** When we listen with an open heart, we can help others to feel valued and empowered.

 **Empathy:** When we imagine what it might feel like to be someone else and truly empathize with them, it is very difficult to treat them badly.

 **Assertiveness:** When we are strong without being mean, we stop the spread of hurt so we can connect honestly and authentically with others.

How might you use these three keys in a current situation you are facing?



**Rise Up for Racial Justice: How to Build Inclusive Communities and Support Our Youth**

The Mosaic Project with  
Dr. Crystal Fleming, Author of  
**How to Be Less Stupid About Race**

## LISTENING

Just by listening,  
you can help others  
feel valued.

### 13. The Listening Key

#### Listening Tips:

- Give full attention with your ears, mind, and heart.
- Make not just eye contact, but eye connection.
- Beware of “predatory listening,” or listening for an opening to comment or attack. Instead, listen for understanding. Really try to hear what the other person is saying without making assumptions or reacting.

Think of a time when you shared about something important to you and you could tell that the other person was not listening. How did it feel? Think of a time when someone did listen to you. How did that feel?



NPR's Life Kit Podcast:  
**Want to Listen Better? Turn Down Your  
Thoughts and Tune in to Others**

 **EMPATHY**

If telepathy is mind-reading,  
empathy is heart-reading.

## 14. The Empathy Key

When we empathize, we try to put ourselves in another person's shoes and understand what it might feel like to be them. We'll never know exactly how it feels, but it helps to try.

It is especially important to empathize if you are in a position of power or privilege.

Can you think of a time when you were very angry with someone, but then were able to empathize with them? How did your thoughts and feelings change once you empathized?



[Brené Brown on Empathy](#)

 **ASSERTIVENESS**

Strong without being mean,  
kind without being weak.

## 15. The Assertiveness Key

Assertiveness is being strong without being mean and being kind without being weak. It is a superpower — it can stop the spread of violence in its tracks so that we can spread respect instead.

In order to be assertive, we must also use the first two Keys to Peace — [Listening \[#13\]](#) and [Empathy \[#14\]](#). The first two Keys help us build understanding and trust. From that foundation, assertiveness helps us to stop the spread of hurt so we can authentically connect.

When we are assertive, we advocate for ourselves and communicate our feelings and needs without invalidating those of others. We are respectful of ourselves as well as those around us. **We use our body language, what we say, and how we say it to be calm, cool, collected, confident, and clear.**

Being assertive might not always get us what we want, but it is often our best option to interrupt violence and make our voice heard. We cannot control other people's behavior; we can only control how we respond. It does take a lot of practice to respond assertively.

It isn't always easy to be calm, cool, collected, confident, and clear, especially when we feel angry or scared.

**What makes it  
challenging for you to  
be calm, cool, collected,  
confident, and clear?  
How can you overcome  
these challenges?**



**Assertiveness and Differences**  
from The Mosaic Project

Passive vs.  
Aggressive vs.  
ASSERTIVE

## 16. Understand Passive vs. Aggressive vs. Assertive

Understanding what is *not* assertive can help us understand what *is*. When we are *not* assertive, we can be:

- **Passive:** allowing someone to invade our space and taking flight or freezing, thereby taking in the poison of hurt, hatred, or violence; giving our power away.
- **Aggressive:** invading someone else's space with a fight; throwing the poison of hurt, hatred, or violence at others; trying to have power over others.

Instead of being passive or aggressive, we can choose to be **assertive**: protecting our own space, thereby blocking the spread of negativity; neither taking it in, nor throwing it out at others; asserting our power *with* rather than *over* others; and being strong without being mean and being kind without being weak.

Hurt people hurt other people. That is why aggression spreads and escalates so easily. It takes a lot of strength to stop spreading it and to be assertive.

Can you think of a moment when you were passive or aggressive? How might the outcome have been different if you were assertive instead?



Watch Cardi Peace teach children about assertiveness at Mosaic's Outdoor Project.

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” – *Aboriginal Rights Group, Queensland, Australia*

## 17. Be an Assertive Ally

**Assertive allies** stand for inclusion, equity, and, ultimately, belonging. They stand *with* others (rather than *for* others) so no one has to stand alone.

Assertive allies help those in conflict find a fair way to move forward. An assertive ally does not take sides with individuals, but rather is on the side of peace and justice. They understand that [we are all interconnected \[#5\]](#) and that one’s well-being is interconnected with the well-being of all.

Assertive allies are empowered to take action toward positive change out in the community, at home with their families, and in the workplace.

When was a time you were an assertive ally or felt supported by an assertive ally? When was a time you wished you had stepped up as an assertive ally?



[Netflix Culture: Allyship](#)

Ask ASSERTIVE QUESTIONS with  
curiosity and an open heart.



## 18. Ask Assertive Questions

To work together towards equity and inclusion, we need to **communicate for understanding rather than argue to be right**. As author Stephen Covey said, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

We can seek to understand and empathize, rather than blame, by asking assertive questions with curiosity and an open heart.

### Assertive Questions:

- Please, share more about that. What do you mean by that?
- Where did you hear or learn that?
- Have you ever considered \_\_\_\_ (another perspective)?
- It seems that so-and-so feels hurt/threatened/intimidated/pressured. Was it your intention to hurt/threaten/intimidate/pressure them? Did you mean to do that?
- Could we revisit this conversation?

What might get in the way of your asking assertive questions before sharing your own thoughts and feelings? Why might it be helpful to ask questions first?



**The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People**  
by Stephen Covey

## Effective Messages

What actually happened?

What was the impact?

What do you want to happen now?

## 19. Use Effective Messages

Once we've sought to understand, it's time to share to be understood. With effective messages, instead of blaming, we invite the other person to empathize with us and understand where we're coming from.

**We can use this effective messaging framework to guide our communication:**

- **What actually happened?**  
(observation rather than interpretation)
- **What was the impact?**  
(impact rather than intention)
- **What do you want to happen now?**  
(specific request)

### Example:

- **What actually happened?**  
The panel of experts speaking at the company-wide meeting is comprised of all white men.
- **What was the impact?**  
This sends a message to our employees that contradicts our firm-wide commitment to promoting diverse leadership.

- **What do you want to happen now?**

Let's add speakers and diversify the panel as well as put new selection criteria in place for the future.

What is far more important than the exact formula or words we use is the spirit behind them. That spirit is one of assertiveness rather than blame — one that invites empathy rather than defensiveness.

## How might you activate the effective messaging framework to invite empathy and connection?



**Respond with Heart not Harm in Tough Conversations** from Catalyst

Situation  
Relationship  
Goals  
Resources



## 20. Consider the Situation, Relationship, Goals, and Resources

When deciding if or how we want to respond to acts of exclusion, or any challenging interpersonal interactions, it can help to consider the following:

- **Situation** – Where am I? Who is nearby? Do I feel safe physically or emotionally?
- **Relationship** – Who are the others involved? Are they strangers or acquaintances? Are they friends or family?
- **Goals** – What do I want to happen? Do I just want to vent and let others to know I am angry or upset? Do I want empathy? Do I want to open them up to learning?
- **Resources** – Do I have the time, energy, and emotional bandwidth to address the situation?

If the situation does not feel safe, the best choice is often to walk away while staying calm, cool, collected, confident, and clear, regardless of the other considerations. Even if we do feel safe, we may still choose to walk away if we

are dealing with strangers or we don't have the time or emotional bandwidth to engage.

On the other hand, if we are invested in the relationship, we may choose to engage even when we don't have much bandwidth. The goals of building understanding and fostering connection may outweigh the costs of the emotional effort.

When dealing with a close friend or family member, it may be necessary to delve deeper into the learning process with them. If they are willing partners, the [Five Tools for Assertive Conflict Resolution \[#21\]](#) can be helpful.

**How might these four considerations impact your response to an interpersonal challenge you currently face?**



**The Four Considerations**  
from The Mosaic Project



## 21. Apply the Five Tools for Assertive Conflict Resolution

 **Stop**, cool off, and take a deep breath. Take a moment, and do whatever you need to do to feel calm, cool, collected, confident, and clear.

 **Listen** to how the other person feels and what they need. Learn about their perspective. We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen at least twice as much as we talk.

 **Talk**. Speak assertively, being strong without being mean and kind without being weak. Use [effective messages \[#19\]](#).

 **Empathize**. Put yourself in the other person's shoes, and try to understand how they feel. Let them know that you are doing your best to understand.

 **Plan**. Brainstorm solutions and work towards a win-win plan — one in which everyone may not get everything they want, but their most important needs get met.

How might you apply these five tools to address a conflict you are currently facing?



[An Introduction to Assertive Conflict Resolution](#) from The Mosaic Project

# Invitation

Once you have put these tools and tips for taking internal and interpersonal action into practice, we invite you to take **institutional action** in your workplace as well. Examples include creating a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Team; honoring Juneteenth company-wide; creating intentional spaces for challenging conversations; and examining and updating company policies through a JEDI lens.

We also invite you to reach out to us and share your ideas and actions with us.

Finally, we invite you to use this Action Guide

and take internal, interpersonal, and institutional action outside of your workplace as well. As [#5](#) says, not only do we have the power to change the future, we will change it, because we are all interconnected. Our actions of all sizes do affect the world around us — whether inside or outside of the workplace.

Thank you for working with us to create a more inclusive, equitable, and just world.

Gratefully,  
The Mosaic Team

**LEARN** about and **DONATE** to The Mosaic Project's work with children.

**LEARN** about our Corporate Trainings. Our dynamic trainings are experiential, involving transformative facilitation strategies and activities, as well as providing concrete tools. As you invest in your employees, you also invest in your community. Net proceeds directly fund The Mosaic Project's programs for children.

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Customize and co-brand this Action Guide for your organization.

**Contact us** for examples and references.