

At Connect the Dots Consulting, we are committed to providing practical and timely leadership coaching and development. At a time when leaders are stretched to the limit, we want to share a Toolkit for effectively leading and connecting with your teams.

Challenging, but Critical Conversations about Race

There are several ways for senior leaders in organizations and leaders who lead functions and teams to connect with their teams and engage in these important conversations.



Most of us are having uncomfortable, yet critical conversations with ourselves, friends, family, and colleagues. We are also looking to the leaders in our organizations to create safe, open environments and to begin talking about confronting systemic racism. The following outlines a Town Hall format for leaders to engage with their teams that can also be modified for smaller team discussions. We have included considerations to ensure that the discussions are productive and enable the team members and leaders to create an open environment that will have a positive impact on the organization's culture.

The Town Hall Environment

The purpose of a Town Hall meeting is to provide an environment for an open discussion and exchange about how team members are experiencing the current environment. Leaders typically lead a town hall meeting. Here are talking points for leaders to use to establish an appropriate environment for the Town Hall.

- Share personal reactions to the events and dynamics.
- State the importance of creating an open environment that supports and enables the organization's mission and purpose.
- Clarify that to create the open environment, it is critical to provide the opportunity for dialogue that leads to greater understanding and tolerance of one another. We cannot make assumptions about how others feel or about the expectations we may have regarding what will and will not happen as a result of these emotional and challenging times.
- Reinforce that this Town Hall is meant to start that dialogue and create greater understanding.
- Share your commitment that this is a safe space for each and every participant. We cannot learn from one another if we cannot openly share and respectfully question one another.

Starter Questions

The following open-ended questions can be used as starter questions to surface input from team members.

- "One word" Exercise: Ask team members to share the one word that best describes how they are feeling about the current events and dynamics taking place in the city and country.
- How do you define a safe and accepting work environment?
- What does it feel like when you have not been accepted or respected in a work environment?
- What do you expect from your peers and supervisor to create a safe and comfortable work environment?
- If you could choose one thing that civic leaders could do to help with the healing process, what would that be?

Important Notes to Keep in Mind

- Remember the purpose is to create the environment for discussion and understanding, not for solving challenges.
- Leaders must manage their non-verbals as topics are surfaced that may “push hot buttons.”
- Do not defend or try to “explain” anything. Listen with an open mind.
- These discussions need to be a “safe space” for team members to share without the concern of retribution or judgement.
- It is critical to thank team members for their willingness to share.
- Let team members know that you will be continuing the dialogue and working to determine what changes need to be made in policies, practices, etc.
- Be sure to follow-up and keep the team updated.

Notes for Follow-up:

Implementing changes will require thought and alignment across leadership. Consider the following as you determine follow-up actions.

- Changes may range from changing terms used in employee and recruiting messaging to significant policy and practice changes.
- Be thoughtful about the changes that you commit to, and what is the organization and leadership ready for and likely to be successful with.
- Engage employees in rethinking policy and practice changes.
- Consult with experts to provide guidance and best practices.
- Identify an executive sponsor to work with a group of employees to continue the discussion and gauge progress.

We would appreciate hearing from you about which strategies that are working or not working in our newly-defined and evolving workplaces. Please drop us a note, follow us on LinkedIn and Twitter, or check out our [website](#).