

WSFD Race Conversation Module *Taking Race & Conflict Head On*

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INTRODUCTION

From the community of Winston-Salem and within its ranks, race, racism and conflict resolution is at the heart of many perceptions and allegations against the WSFD. To address these issues, employees of the WSFD must be willing to take race and racism, and the conflicts they cause, head on. Staff must be willing to communicate with one another and to hold one another accountable.

If a WSFD employee feels that he or she is a victim of racism or discrimination, that they are slighted racially, or that a fellow employee has said something that may be perceived as racist while at the work place (or otherwise), does something that has racial implications, or that racial accusations are being made, staff members need to feel they can talk about it and can hold one another accountable. Staff should also understand that this means that they agree to be held accountable themselves as well.

Staff need to know that attacking, shaming or blaming has no place in the WSFD's work or staff's dealings with each other. If a staff member feels that a fellow employee has done something that is racially insensitive or racially offensive, then they should be able to address that in a straightforward way. Staff members should work to gain tools that will help them in their work internally and in Winston-Salem to have the tough conversation about race.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- How does race place into WSFD's work dynamics when staff discusses work issues?
- When is questioning and criticism about race constructive and when is it destructive?

- Do staff members need commitments surrounding race, racism, discrimination, conversation and accountability as WFSD moves forward?

According to Merriam-Webster, Inc, conflict is “a mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes or external or internal demands.” Conflict is around us all the time. A good example would be every time we turn on the evening news, we are faced with conflict somewhere in our world. These incidents have some type of effect on our lives. Personally, we may face conflict in our relationships, on the job, at school, at church, in our neighborhood, at the movies, the mall, or even at living spaces for fire fighters.

Conflict is a natural part of human behavior. It is as much a part of our lives as waking up, eating, sleeping, relating with others, learning, teaching, traveling etc. Think back to the last book you read, or the last movie you saw. Remember the last sermon you heard or the last ballgame you went to see (of course before COVID-19). Without knowing what that something was, we can be 100% sure that it involved some type of conflict. Whether it is the triumph of the good guy versus the bad guy in an epic saga, or the competition with both teams striving to win, conflict is present, and it is a normal part of our daily lives.

Conflict can be physical and external or emotional and internal. How we choose to deal with conflict often reflects our life experiences or the experiences of our loved ones, or the way we were taught at an early age by our parents and teachers. We can choose to manage conflict, or we can let conflict manage us. The choice is ours.

As indicated earlier, there are many causes of conflict to include different points of view, having multiple or conflicting priorities, personalities, culture, lack of understanding, adapting to change and not properly knowing how to communicate

frustration, and yes race. Conflict may also be caused by questions that may be perceived to have racial overtones or implications, or where one staff member might make racial accusations against one or more of their coworkers based on a perception of racism.

INTENT VS. IMPACT

Conflict may also be caused by one person's intent and the impact it has on another person. This is especially important when dealing with the issue of race or with "ism.". For instance, in a staff situation at WSFD , a White staff person might make a statement or ask a question about the reality of "Black on Black crime" to get a point across; however, the impact of the statement/question on a Black staff member hearing it may be just the opposite of what the speaker intended.

It is also possible that the impact of a coworker's statement may be due to that member's implicit (unconscious) bias and they may not understand why or know what they have just said is taken as racist, or sexist or homophobic by their coworkers. Either way, this could be the beginning of a conflict and if left unchecked will cause much harm to the WSFD and its employees over time. If this happens, employees have an opportunity to manage the conflict, or end up allowing the conflict to manage and subsequently damage the department.

WHAT TO DO

Sometimes, all you need to address actions or statements that may be perceived to have racial implications, or to address racial accusations, is an opportunity to share your feelings, acknowledge mistakes and find solutions. If you find yourself in conflict about race with a coworker, the following steps might prove to be helpful:

Relax and Breathe – Take a moment to step away and breathe slowly and deeply for a few minutes- check your emotions.

Have the Conversation – Be courageous enough to have the tough conversation about race with the person whose statements or questions caused you concern – very often we will talk to everyone in our circle about an issue we have with a coworker, but not the person we have the problem with. Hold one another accountable.

Check In – Check in with the person you need to have the conversation with to make sure they are ready to receive your concerns – try an “I” statement: *“I feel upset or concerned about what you just said or asked and would like to talk with you about it. Can we talk?”*

Think – Think about what you hope to achieve by stating your interests, needs and wants - be intentional about being constructive and avoid negative feedback/behavior.

Listen and Share – State how you feel by making “I” statements and ask the other person to share their feelings. Listen to what they say before responding. Ask about their intent and share the impact on you.

Don’t Pass Blame – Acknowledge and apologize when necessary. Passing blame and making accusations will only further the conflict.

Talk and Prevent – Focus on a solution and/or agreement. Talk with the other person about what can be done in the future to prevent the conflict from reoccurring – don’t be afraid to hold one another accountable.

PROPOSED CONVERSATION GUIDELINES / GROUP NORMS FOR WSFD EMPLOYEES

- Agree to address race and the conflicts it causes head on
- Be respectful and honest with one another
- Agree to hold one another accountable
- Agree to be held accountable
- Speak your feelings and thoughts by making "I" statements
- Use "both/and" thinking, "rather than either/or"
- Listen for understanding rather than judgment
- Be open to thoughts and feelings different from your own
- Build on what each other has said in the conversation
- Remember that it's OK to disagree but NOT to attack, shame or blame
- Finish with a mutually agreed resolution



WSFD AS COMMUNITY

