

Choosing Respectful Workplace Conversations

By [Linda Stokes](#)

So, it is not a matter of IF these conversations are happening – it's a matter of ensuring that they happen respectfully.

People are talking...employees are talking...everybody is talking!

Conversations are being had in the workplace all the time – fueled by local and national events, by the 24/7 news cycles, by national figures – and by the changing culture that leads us to believe we can say anything and everything, anytime - publicly.

And the frequency and intensity is increasing!

It's politics, immigration, climate change, national monuments, race relations, age differences, trans issues and a myriad of other topics that become workplace conversations.



And sometimes it has nothing to do with what's happening on the national scene. People just feel embolden to speak out even if someone moves their stapler or forgets to tell them about a meeting. So, the conversations aren't just confined to the "water cooler" anymore! And what's more, these conversations can turn into bullying or worse.

So here is the dynamic – this is what we are facing. The question is not how to stop the conversations – that isn't going to happen – but how to allow people to pause and consider first if this is really what they want to share at work – with their co-workers - and if the answer is yes, to consider the best way to do it. On the other side – if someone gives an opinion that you can't agree with, how do you own that and yet respond in ways that won't lead to sabotage, decreased engagement, productivity, and quality and increased personal stress?

You heard what?!

So, here are just a few actual examples of what is being discussed in your workplace...and you can believe it is!

- "Hey, is your sister still here living with you? From Mexico, right? And pregnant as I remember? Well, she and her anchor baby will be going back soon enough!"
- "You better show up to vote...we can't let those people win again. I am sure you see it the same way, right?"
- "You say your name is what...Ritvik? I will just call you Rick – that's close enough."
- "Man, I thought everyone had to speak English at work – so get with it and stop that talk that we don't understand."
- "You didn't send me the invite on purpose! You just want to make me look bad. You think that will buy you the promotion, you jerk!"

What if these comments were made to you – or to someone else about you? What would you do? What would your employees do or say?

So, What?

Can we just ignore these conversations and the results, just stand by and hope for the best?

Research after research and journal article upon journal article says – only if your organization wants to experience

- 48% of employees who intentionally decreased their work effort after feeling disrespected
- Or 66% who reported a decline in their performance
- Even 63% who say they lose time at work avoiding the offender
- 25% of those surveyed say they took out their frustration on the customer
- And talk about commitment and engagement: 78% said their commitment to the organization declined and 12% left!



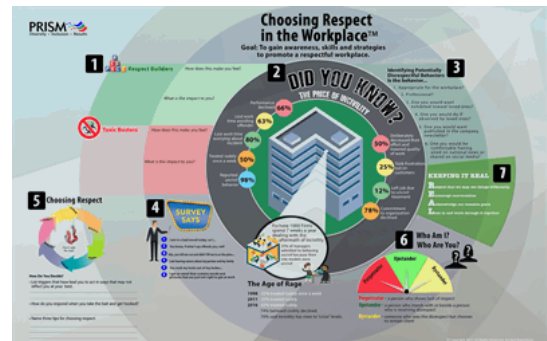
So, you do the math...and this doesn't even consider law suites!

Now What?

While blogs, posts and opinion pieces are important, I wanted to do something that would enable people to gain new insights and tools for sharing their perspectives respectfully, for listening to the opinions of others– and then for knowing how to stand up for yourself and/or alongside others without falling into disrespectful and unproductive traps.

So, I created a training program – [*Choosing Respect in the Workplace™*](#) - to discuss – in a very innovative, fun way – using technology, activities, videos – to do 3 things:

- To help people determine what respect means to them and what it takes to create a respectful working environment
- To discuss the impact of disrespect
- To provide tools and skill building opportunities so that people can try to stay unhooked from disrespectful ways of expressing themselves in the workplace.



What makes *Choosing Respect in the Workplace™* impactful and skill building?

First, the way the session is facilitated. This is NOT death by power point or lecture – at all! It's not legal talk or lists of Do's and Don'ts. It is fast paced, snappy, engaging, fun and it is relevant because it addresses the same kinds of conversations that are being had and that people are being exposed to.

Secondly, the content is contemporary as well – because it is thought provoking and provides tools so that if you are the initiator of a conversation – you can think through the intent and potential impact of expressing your opinion – and if you are involved in a conversation how can you speak up for yourself

and others – respectfully... without taking any intentional or unintentional “bait” and get hooked into unproductive and disrespectful behaviors. The REAL tool is provided which helps the participants keep things real AND respectful and it is practiced with current workplace scenarios.

Why Not?

This is complex – yet doable. Our research and tests reveal that training is needed and in fact, wanted. The topics discussed ARE the topics that are being discussed in the workplace – that the discussions in the class DO help. Participants are glad they had the opportunity to have this brought up and acknowledged... and many want to learn what to say and what to do. Participants seemed almost relieved that the situations were finally acknowledged rather than everyone pretending that they weren't happening and just hoping for the best!



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She is the developer of the new *Choosing Respect in the Workplace™* training program. Linda is the author of numerous journal articles, media contributor on topics of organizational strategic and tactical D&I, and a curriculum developer of over 140 cross cultural and D&I consulting and training programs. She is a recognized leader in the field of D&I and coaches and mentors Executives, CDOs and diversity professionals.

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For more information about PRISM's [Choosing Respect in the Workplace™](#) training program or any of PRISM's other offerings, visit PRISMDiversity.com or email info@PRISMDiversity.com or call 888.997.7476.



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