



HUMAN RESOURCES AND LABOR RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

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To: County Staff

From: Andrew S. McKinnon, Director
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Date: September 24, 2021

Re: The Dignity Campaign – Open Conversations

No two people are the same. Each person is shaped by their communities, religions, ethnicities, generations, families and a myriad of other experiences. Even two people brought up in the same environment and surrounded by the same influences (e.g. siblings who are complete opposites) can be very different. It's why we're called "individuals." It keeps things interesting, that's for sure, but it also has its challenges, particularly when we are asked to achieve a common goal with a team of people who are different from us, as often happens in the workplace.

In an effort to better understand the people we work with, so we can accomplish those goals, we may label our coworkers, consciously or subconsciously. For example, we may label a coworker as "quiet" or "shy" when they choose not to participate in small talk or offer input at department meetings, while others who speak up more may be deemed "loud" or "overbearing." It's important to acknowledge that by labeling people, we "box" them in. We assign characteristics and qualities to them that may or may not fit. It leads to making assumptions about how people will act and why they will act that way, when in reality, we are largely unaware of the entirety of the experiences that shaped them. This can result in misunderstandings.

There is a way to avoid these misunderstandings - by practicing dignity. In situations where we seek to better understand someone, we practice dignity by engaging in positive, open communication. It is well established that open communication in the workplace has many benefits. A study done by Wright State University shows that open communication in the workplace significantly and positively correlates to motivation, trust, and increased exchange of ideas and information amongst coworkers. On the other hand, when communication is constrained, it becomes more likely for employees to experience isolation, conflict, or bullying (2010). By approaching differences or misunderstandings with honest curiosity instead of judgment, we can gain knowledge and insight into the things that make our coworkers who they are, such as their preferences, rituals, points of pride, or insecurities.

Open communication is essential to creating a dignified work environment. As part of the Dignity Campaign, all Macomb County employees have been enrolled in an optional two-part online training series titled "Open Conversations." These courses are now available to you on the My Courses page of your NEOGOV Learn account. This material is intended to equip employees with the tools necessary to initiate and participate in conversations where similarities and differences are openly discussed and celebrated in an effort to generate a more dignified workplace.

Click [HERE](#) to access these courses in NEOGOV Learn.

Thank you for your time.