



TALKING ABOUT EQUITY IN ACTION

Highlights & Key Concepts

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Summary Ideas:

Equity-first Framing

- Equity ensures that everyone gets what they need to participate and be included in a given space. This requires individualizing resources.
- Establishing equity requires identifying ways in which people have been discriminated against or marginalized and addressing these gaps so that a cultural shift can happen.
- Equity-first framing is an alternative to centering diversity. By starting with equity rather than diversity, we prioritize the creation of safe and inclusive spaces so that the diverse folks who add such critical value to our work can genuinely be included without a risk of harm.

Kotter's Eight Steps to Transformation

- Step One: Create a Sense of Strategic Urgency – Craft and use a significant opportunity as a means for inspiring people to sign up to create change that prioritized equity.
- Step Two: Build a Guiding Coalition – Assemble a group with the power and energy to lead and support a collaborative change effort.
- Step Three: Form Strategic Vision and Initiative – Shape a vision to help steer the change effort and develop strategic initiatives to achieve that vision.
- Step Four: Enlist Others – Raise a large force of people who are ready, willing, and eager to drive change.
- Step Five: Enable Action by Removing Barriers – Remove obstacles to change by changing systems or structures that pose threats to the achievement of the vision.
- Step Six: Generate Short-Term Wins – Consistently produce, track, evaluate and celebrate volumes of small and large accomplishments to keep people motivated and engaged.
- Step Seven: Sustain Acceleration and Movement – Use increasing credibility to change systems, structures and policies that don't align with the vision.
- Step Eight: Maintain Instituted Change – Articulate the connections between the new behaviors and organizational success. Develop the means to ensure leadership development and succession.

Questions & Responses:

Q1 *Why did you choose the phrase “talking about equity in action” for describing this topic of discussion today?*

A1

I'm sure that many of us have had lots of conversations about equity, diversity and inclusion. I really feel like people are in a space where they want to know what they can do. Often equity is seen as something specific, but it's really about a sincere culture change. We want

to talk about what that looks like. What does sustainability look like? How do we move change forward? What are the next steps for people who are meaningfully invested in change work?

Q2 *What path or key moment led you to your current position?*

A2 I am so interested and intrigued by what role the environment plays, including in my original research and scholarship. I'm a mental health provider, and when working with folks, I saw that so much of the experiences and trauma that people were having was connected to systemic, structural, societal issues: it was connected to the institutions they were working for, it was connected to the places and spaces that they were occupying, and the way they were interacting with other people. In supporting individuals who are coping with and processing this information, I also wanted to be able to do something to change the institutions and change the organizations to stop perpetuating that harm on to people. That's really how I got into this work. This is what I'm passionate about, and what I've been studying and researching for many, many years. It all comes around to the baseline of wellness: of helping people not have to continuously cope with injustices but starting to address the injustices so that they can stop.

Q3 *What is the most common challenge facing putting equity into action?*

A3 I think equity tends to be treated as an additive, as if it's something we can do in a five-point plan. It's not seen as a whole-person, whole-culture shift. Some of the common challenges I see are people becoming discouraged, people becoming fatigued with the process, not acknowledging that these issues are not new issues. Our response to it has to be consistent and diligent. Something that's going to evoke a sense of change is going to make us uncomfortable, because it's not like a two-step process or a one-year plan, it is about really shifting the dynamic. Most people are apprehensive of that type of change.

Q4 *What inspires you to keep up this important work?*

A4 When we talk about inspiration, sometimes it's depicted as something that we can see, like some glimmer in the far distance, but what inspires me is the reality of the urgency of it. I'm inspired by the fact that it has to happen, that it's not optional, that people are being harmed. I feel that urgency in my body each and every day. I also stay inspired because through the work that I have the opportunity to do I see change happening in different ways. A lot of times folks will ask, "Do I think equity is achievable?" I think that equity is something we will continue to strive for; I think that we are seeing achievements in small ways continue. I think that the idea that equity is an ending point is something that we really want to push back against, because as our society changes, as the needs of people change, we will continue to strive towards being even more equitable each and every day. So, yes, I think it's achievable, but I also don't see it as an end goal.

Q5 *How do you measure equity among small populations, especially if there is no data available? This is a very common challenge among Native American tribal communities.*

A5 When there's little or no data available, people say well, that's not really something that we can address. But instead of resignation, let's focus on what's tangible and what we have done. We're going to do what we have the ability to do with the data that we have the ability to have. Equity is about whole-person, whole-system change—that's looking at culture, that's looking at identity, that's looking at healing. It's looking at naming and calling out the different ways that inequities are being perpetuated. It's about naming and calling out the fact that we don't have data on specific populations. And why is that? It's not that people aren't able to talk through what they're experiencing; it's that no one is listening. It's about being willing to lean into what needs to change for people to be heard or seen.

Q6 *How much time and energy should be spent on recruiting influential but hesitant, fragile leaders in an organization to engage in authentic equity work?*

A6 The most common variable that will be in every setting is you. That's why I lead with the idea that the best tool that you have for moving to actionable equity is to know yourself, know what things you're not willing to address, what things you would be willing or comfortable addressing. You need to work on and practice that. What things are continuous barriers to you engaging? What does that look like for you? What is your strategy? Can you continue to hone that strategy so that you can be prepared and willing to step up when inequities happen? I think that a lot of times when it comes to equity, we don't lean into as much of strategy, right? When we're talking about leaders or stakeholders, what is going to be the best strategy to engage someone so that the change can occur? Because that's the priority: that the change can occur. One simple strategy is figuring out ways to pivot and address it on a structural level. Typically, one of the things that I find that motivates people to get on board more than anything else is seeing it happen and seeing the benefit of it. When it comes to engaging authentically in the workspace, the best model is the people who are doing it, who challenge those notions around institutional bias. That's where the culture change starts to happen. In terms of time or energy, if someone is really hesitant or fragile in terms of seeing change, or if it's not an additional strategy that could be utilized to try to engage that person from where what is central to them in the process, I would say that there are some people who will not change in the process. That's unfortunate for them, but we're going to still do the work.

Resources:

- [Talking about Equity in Action webinar recording](#)
- [Racial Equity and Cultural Diversity – a collection of resources curated by the MHTTC Network](#)

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