

Minutes from 6/13/13 Networking Event

Cambridge College, 1000 Mass. Ave, Cambridge, MA
CET and Visions, Inc., presented Shine A Light On It, Part IV
Examining Modern Racism and the Impact on American-Born Black Residents' Utilization of
Services in Cambridge

Notes Taken and Compiled by: Nancy Tauber, Nadia Davila and Jayne Cantor
(These notes are not an “official” record of the Networking Event, nor are they verbatim. They are meant to give the reader a review of key points from the event.)

Introduction by Michelle Godfrey

The presentation explored the issue of racism in terms of Modern “ISMS” and Internalized Oppression Behaviors. ABBOT workers want to understand why American Born Blacks under-utilize services offered in Cambridge. Visions, Inc, Taking Diversity and Inclusion to the Next Level, was started nearly 30 years ago, currently doing consultations in 35 sites in the US, South Africa, and Germany.

Facilitators Emily Schatzow and Rick Pinderhughes

I Guidelines for Effective Cross-Cultural Dialogue

- “Try on” –another person’s perspective
- It’s okay to disagree – this is culturally determined; it’s not always ok to disagree
- It’s not okay to blame, shame, or attack, self or others -- non-verbal gestures, such as eye-rolling, are not acceptable
- Practice “self-focus” – Don’t make assumptions that everyone thinks the same. Use “I”.
- Practice “both/and” thinking. Not either/or, and don’t use the word “but”, replace it with “and”.
- Notice both process and content – Process is how you go about things and content is what you’re doing. Process is as important as content.
- Be aware of intent and impact – be aware of any negative impact. How you say things is important. Stay engaged.
- Confidentiality – To build trust, confidentiality must be assured.

After reviewing the Guidelines, we formed groups of 3 at each table and discussed which of the guidelines came easily and which were challenging for us.

II Levels of Oppression and Change

- Personal – values, beliefs, feelings
- Interpersonal – behavior that demonstrates personal values, beliefs and feelings
- Institutional – rules, policies; the impact on groups
- Cultural—beauty, truth, right; dominant groups decide the standards

We looked at a chart depicting a Working Conceptualization of Historically Excluded and Historically Included Groups including such headings at Racism, Sexism, Classism, Elitism etc. Most of us found ourselves in both the Included and Excluded Groups.

III Modern “ISMS” and Internalized Oppression Behaviors

Modern “ISMS” (the ways people in non-target groups perpetuate discrimination without meaning to) and Internalized Oppression Theory (the ways people in target groups internalize negative messages given by society)

IV Modern Racist “ISM” Behaviors include:

- Dysfunctional rescuing (help that doesn’t help; it’s subtle, it isn’t requested or mutually agreed upon)
- Blaming the victim (Placing full responsibility for negative consequences on the target group)
- Avoidance of contact (Not saying anything about cultural differences for fear of offending or making a “mistake”)
- Denial of cultural differences (Not recognizing that cultural differences DO exist.)
- Denial of the political significance of differences (Minimizing or refuting the everyday impact of oppression on people in target groups).

V Internalized Oppression Behaviors include:

- System beating (not speaking up; not challenging oppression and prejudice)
- Blaming the system (putting the whole responsibility for negative consequences on the non-target group)
- Antagonistic avoidance of contact (developing mistrust of the non-target group; needing to hold on to “selves”)
- Denial of Cultural Differences. (Pressure to act in a certain way; denying own feelings).
- Lack of understanding of the political (social, economic, cultural, historical, psychological) significance of Being Part of a Target Group. (Minimizing or refuting the everyday impact of oppression on people in your own group)

VI Alternative Behaviors for Modern “ISM” and Internalized Oppression Behaviors

Modern “ISM”

- Functional Helping, instead of Rescuing (just ask what Help would look like)
- Problem Solving/Responsibility (instead of blaming)
- Make Mutual Contact (instead of avoiding and protecting yourself)
- Notice Differences (and say them, instead of Denying Differences)
- Learn, Ask about, and Notice the Impact (instead of Denying the Impact. Ask about it. Ask questions in a way that isn’t a criticism)

Internalized Oppression Behaviors

- Confrontation/Standing Up (instead of System Beating)
- Take Responsibility (instead of Blaming; what can I own and do differently?)
- Share Information/Make Contact (instead of Antagonistic Avoiding; get information and feel more comfortable)
- Notice and Share Information about one’s own Differences, Culture (instead of Denying the target group; ask more questions)
- Notice, Ask and Share Information about the impact of the “ism on me and my target group” (instead of Denying the Impact)

VII Case Studies

Each table read prepared case studies together and discussed them.

1. Judith Jamison and Raising CAIN, was about a daycare program, Raising Cain, in Cambridge with a demographically mixed staff. When a new, young white staff member is hired as lead teacher, the other staff are encouraged by the executive director of the program to go to her for the advice and feedback they previously sought from Judith, a long-term black staff member. Despite attempts to discuss this with the executive director of the program, Judith got no satisfaction. He assured her everything was fine, not to worry so much, but Judith felt sidelined and considered seeking another job.

Each table responded to the scenario keeping in mind aspects of Modern Racism/Internalized Racism Behaviors and options for handling the situations differently.

2. Calm Down! It was about different styles at weekly staff meetings. Several African American staff talked simultaneously, with raised voices in excited tones. The white director and assistant director would say things like “calm down”, “we don’t need to fight like this” “don’t get so emotional” etc. The African American staff begin to participate less and less, having felt silenced. The directors became concerned about the lack of participation and said “We want everyone to participate in decision making and if some of you don’t want to say anything, then decision will be made without your input”.

Again, the group at the tables discussed the behavior of the people in the case study in terms of Modern Racism/Internalized Racism behaviors and came up with suggestions for alternative behavior.

VIII Appreciations and Regrets

- Some of the take-aways from the presentation were the following:
- Race is always present;
- We need to learn to accept differences;
- Acknowledge the problem and confront situations in a positive way;
- It’s an on-going conversation; race is everywhere; we are not the same under our skin;
- There is power in coming together, coming to one common place;
- Own our internalized oppressions and try to interpret them in different ways;
- There’s an importance in allies; question whether you are isolating others or are isolated yourself;
- Work on self awareness and yearn to understand different cultures; negotiating cultural differences takes a lot of work.
- There was lots of participation from the group attending the workshop; everyone was engaged in the process, trying to understand how to make the system better.

Visions, Inc. can/will do trainings at individual programs.