

PRACTICE: CHAPTER 2

Moving Toward Internal Transformation

Inventory

- Is DEAI work embedded in your mission and/or strategic plan?
- Do you have a budget allocated to this work?
- Do you have a diverse talent development and/or cultivation system/structure, for your current staff, as well as internships/fellowships?

Internal Conversations

- **Institutional Legacy.** Do you know your museum's origin story? What are your institutional legacies in relationship to colonialism, to segregation? What is the story you tell everyone vs. the story you tell yourself internally, and why might these be different? Who decides what story is told and what voices are prioritized?
- **Organization Structure.** What is the museum's leadership structure? Does this support/hinder this work? What are the number of layers between entry level staff and the director?
- **Responsibility and Power.** Who is charged with DEAI efforts, and where does it live within the museum's "power structure"? Is there a staff member within the organization who has all of the responsibility and yet none of the power? (Those who have the power and are tasked with the work should overlap.)
- **Upholding Equity.** What is our approach? Have we decentered whiteness? What is the impact of focusing on diversifying existing white spaces? What is the impact of working from the position of centering all voices?
- **Responsiveness.** When events happen that affect our defined community (city, group of people, etc.), what is our policy regarding making public statements in support and solidarity?

Scenario: The Museum Voice

Using the questions above and below as a framework, critique the following scenario from the perspective of the associate and director. This example is based on an actual experience in an art museum in a large multiracial city. The museum has been working to create more inclusive programs and exhibitions. The director is a white woman who has headed the museum for 10+ years. The associate is a woman of color who is new to the museum and who is the only person of color on the professional staff. Although not specifically in her job description, it is often assumed by the all-white leadership of the museum that she is the representative of and liaison to “underserved audiences.”

The museum associate is asked to write a blog post about how communities of color can engage with the museum. After writing a thoughtful piece acknowledging the history of normative and oppressive behaviors within Museums, with insights on how to challenge those norms from a variety of perspectives, the blog is heavily edited – all the context providing a perspective from a non-white, non-affluent person is removed.

When asked why such bulk edits were made, the director responds:

“This blog post you wrote is nice, but it’s not really right. Sure, we want to discuss what is happening in our community, but there is no reason to be critical of the museum. We are a public organization- we steer clear of anything political! Don’t worry, we’ll get you up to speed on the Museum way of doing things.”

The outcome of this interaction was that the edited blog was posted. There was no further discussion of this between the director and the museum associate.

Unpacking the Conflict**Discussion**

1. What do you think is the perspective of the director? Why do you think she edited the post very heavily? What is “the museum way of doing things?” What are the values/drawbacks of having a consistent museum voice? Is this a perspective you can relate to?
2. What is the perspective of the associate? What did she see as her goal in writing the post? What impact did the heavy editing have on her? Is this a perspective you can relate to?
3. Do the respective roles, levels of experience, and races of the two women have an impact on this interaction? In what way? Is this an example of intersectionality? What kind of coding is going on here?
4. The ideas of Awareness, Acceptance, and Action, including Active Listening, are discussed in Chapter 2. How could these ideas be used to create a different outcome for the above interaction?
5. Are the ideas of a consistent institutional voice and respect for differing staff perspectives opposed? Can they be reconciled? What do you suggest?

Moving Forward

- Using the process of Awareness, Acceptance, and Action, regularly evaluate situations, projects, programs and initiatives in order to decenter whiteness and move towards equity and empathy.
- Practice Active Listening, especially in staff meetings and project planning. Consider how the roles of position, power, and privilege affect staff interactions.
- Process the vocabulary found in the Glossary; understand the presence and impact of these terms throughout staff culture and beyond.

Tools & Activities

- ✓ **Measuring Growth.** How are you going to document and measure growth in this work? Choose a racial justice or empathetic framework like Empathetic Museum Maturity Model (see Addenda, pgs 197-200) or Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Organization (see Addenda, pg 201) and reflect on your institution's progress each year.
- ✓ **Gender & Racial Pay Equity.** HR & Leadership analyze staff wages to uncover gender / race pay gap. An analysis of gender pay gaps can be found at GlassDoor.com.
- ✓ **White Privilege and Oppression.** Analyze the characteristics of white privilege and how they might be showing up in your organizational culture. Use resources like:
 - "White Supremacy Culture" from *Dismantling Racism* (see Addenda, pgs 203-207)
 - The conversation guide on Race, White Supremacy, and Whiteness from *The Dreamspace Project*, available at the MASS Action project website www.museumaction.org

Reading Guide

Brown, A. June 25, 2015. "The Confederate Flag Does Not Belong in a Museum", *Slate.com*

Jennings, G and Rizzi, J. 2017. "Museums, White Privilege, and Diversity: A Systemic Perspective", *Dimensions*.

McIntosh, P. 1989 "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"