

Strategic Engagement

- ❖ **Step 1** – Ask questions. What makes you feel like you do? When did you first start to believe that? Get a sense of that person’s story and perspective. Listen for something that you can relate to, something that generates empathy. It may help to try and uncover emotion underlying the story.
- ❖ **Step 2** – Validate at least something that person says. Relate personally and share a story of your own of when you felt a similar emotion or came to a conclusion about something based on an experience that has some similarity.
- ❖ **Step 3** – Check to see if there is more to that person’s story that impacts how that person experiences the world today.
- ❖ **Step 4** – Offer more of your personal story. Begin to add information that explains why your perspective on the issue is different. Use additive language. Focus on sharing, not convincing.
- ❖ **Step 5** – With humility and self-questioning, pose questions about what it might mean if everyone is basically interpreting the world based on their individual experiences. Note how useful it is to hear other people’s stories and how incomplete our worldview might be when we only consider our own experiences or those whose lives have been like our own. The point is to try and name the value of the “both/and” as well as the value of multiple people’s perspectives on any issue.

Role Play Roles

1. **Agent** ---- You are the driver of this role play. You select a scenario and practice how you’d like to engage the conversation, as yourself.
2. **Focus Person** --- Act like the person the Agent wants to engage with in real life. You just need a few sentences of context, and then you inhabit your role as fully and authentically as you can. *(Avoid acting out a role that requires you to play a person of a different race.)*
3. **Witness** ---- Watch and listen. Pay attention to your feelings. You’ll share your impressions and reactions when the role plays concludes so the Agent can learn from how you reacted emotionally, intellectually, etc.

Sample Prompts

You are speaking with a white person you know fairly well. You mention being dismayed at how people have responded to Black Lives Matter protestors, stating that people who say “All Lives Matter” or “Blue Lives Matter” are missing the point. The person you’re talking with says, “I understand that the point is about police violence. But, I don’t think they need to make it about race. I don’t see them protesting when a Mexican or White kid gets shot. I mean, when you really look at it, it’s being racist to only talk about Black people, as though they’re the only ones who experience violence. I’d be supportive if they were really for all people.”

During a conversation in which national politics are being discussed, you invite a fellow community member to a multi-racial dialogue that will take place the following week. You say that you plan to attend and think it will be an important community-building event. This individual tells you that dialogues focused on race are a waste of time because they push people to see themselves in terms of their differences. This person says what is needed are more celebratory events that bring people together and heal the past.

While talking with a white friend, you share that you have been reading a book about systemic inequities that have faced people of color in the U.S. throughout the country’s history. You lament that the racism that has stifled people of color’s economic success is ongoing and wish we had the political will to address the issue directly. Your friend says that this would be misguided, as there are plenty of people of color of all backgrounds who are able to make it economically. Your friend then begins to talk about a specific person who exemplifies the “individual success story” approach.

Sample Sentence Starters

“Thank you for sharing that. It reminds me of when I experienced something similar...”

“I recall feeling the same way. For me, something changed when I heard this story from one of my friends...”

“Something that really affected me was when...”

“I’m really glad we’re able to talk about this because this subject is a tough one. I know I’ve struggled. One of the things that was really hard for me to hear was...”

“Is there more you’d like to share about that?”

“It seems to me like both of our experiences have truth in them. What do you think?”