

Diversity Conversation Starters

One of the elements of leading a diverse workforce is learning about each employee. It is also important for employees to learn about one another. One of the easiest methods of learning about each other as a group is to use existing forums for discussion, e.g, staff meetings or brown-bag lunch discussions. If your group is not experiencing an obvious problem around diversity or working together, you may find it hard to think of conversation starters. The following list of conversation starters provides some ideas:

- I feel included at work when...
- I feel excluded at work when...
- I feel valued at work when...
- I do not feel valued at work when...
- The UMHS core value that is closest to my heart is...
- What I like most about our department is...
- What I like least about our department is...

The key in using these conversation starters is to allow everyone to complete the statement without others making judgments. A recommended process is to:

- Have each person in the group complete the statement that they chose without any qualifiers or explanations.
- Indicate that you want to know what people think/feel without having a need to justify comments.
- After each person has shared, open the floor for anyone who would like to discuss further.

This approach is a good way for team members to learn about each other. However, you will need to set a foundation of openness and honesty. At the beginning of this process, your team should establish discussions ground rules. The conversation works best when people feel "safe".

For further reading:

- Bolton, R. & Bolton, D. G. (1984). *Social Style/Management Style*. New York, NY: AMACOM.
- Bolton, R. & Bolton, D. G. (199d). *People Styles at Work: Making Bad Relationships Good and Good Relationships Better*. New York, NY: AMACOM.