

# Real Change Can Start Right Now, One Micro-Moment at a Time

By Heidi Brooks, PhD

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Every day, formal and informal leaders do ordinary things that have an impact on others—simple human acts such as listening, perspective-taking, kindness, curiosity, and decision-making.

I call this everyday leadership.

We all have a profound capacity to act like healthy people, ones who take responsibility for our impact on the world. In particular, I focus on the “micro-moments” of impact: Moments of choice every day that accumulate into reputation and create the lived experience of organizational culture.

Few are skilled or nuanced at paying attention to culture, but organizational culture impacts the joy and effectiveness of our work (whether that’s in person or by video). How we enact our organizational culture—“*the way we do things around here*”—plays a central part in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Let’s talk about a few arenas where you can make a difference today in your everyday leadership.

**Attend to your impact in micro-moments.**

Every day, you communicate signals that have impact, even when you’re not aware of it. An ill-timed sigh in a meeting can kill a sense of psychological safety.

Instead, have an attentive gaze as someone speaks. Or comment, to indicate that you “get” them. When you don’t get what someone is saying, ask! Build the radical skill of inquiry to “get” others.

To be sure, communication is a two-way street, and both parties have responsibility—so build an environment where people will positively interpret ambiguous signals.

We are even less aware of impact across

difference, so consider building awareness about your impact in micro-moments across demographics.

**Reduce defensive tendencies and reacting from self-protection.** It’s very human to have triggers—issues to which you have a knee-jerk, self-protective reaction.

Related to your personal and group history, these triggers include feeling not in control, under-valued, misunderstood, overly exposed, not belonging, or not being appreciated, among others.

When triggered, people respond defensively to protect themselves. The problem is that the threat may not be as dangerous as the emotion suggests, and these reactions are generally ineffective leadership strategies.

Of course, race in the United States is a trigger-heavy topic. Heads-up: You cannot lead effectively from a defensive position set up to protect yourself.

Learning to recognize a triggered moment, react less, and respond more is essential *intrapersonal* leadership work. Respond with a grounded, values-based presence, and your impact will be more credible, compelling, and containing.

This is important when everyone is dealing with discomfort, ambiguity, and vulnerability from COVID-19 as well as facing the reality of racial injustice. Aim to emerge from this time stronger and wiser.

Effective everyday leadership can make a huge difference in our collective capacity to learn, connect, and act with wisdom during this time.

**Listen to the experiences of others, including and especially those different from you.**



People love to be listened to. Ask genuine, curious, connecting questions, and then listen actively to the answers, perhaps reflecting what you’ve heard or asking a follow-up question that lets you know you are getting where they are coming from.

We have a trained social tendency to search for common experience and then comment on that. So, if someone tells you about their weekend, it is common to respond with similarity by saying, “Oh, yes, I’ve been there too.” This tendency reinforces the preference to spend time with people who have similar life experiences.

If you build a way of listening that is honestly *not about you*, then you have more choice in the people with whom you might connect.

So, when someone tells you about their weekend, rather than referring to your own experience, you might say, “How often is your weekend like that?” Or “That sounds nice/ interesting/ calming/ scary/ powerful to me—what was that like for you?”

My wish: Use these everyday leadership practices to make a difference every day to different groups in the workplace. ■