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# ALMOST DOING GOOD



DOING THE BEST YOU CAN  
WITH WHAT YOU HAVE SOME OF THE TIME



This is not a model of explicit answers, only questions.



## Case Study Workbook

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**Loren was trying to add oil to his truck.** He asked me to help him by holding the funnel so he could pour a quart from a five-quart container of oil. The funnel was wedged into the space, so I assumed he must've been doing his own oil change once and the funnel had slipped, making a big mess. Maybe it wasn't even him. Maybe he just heard about a case when this happened. Maybe he thought ahead and decided it was a possible outcome, so now he holds the funnel no matter what.

Similarly, I save my documents every time I get interrupted, and every time there's a section break or I stop typing and think for a second or two, I hit Save. While writing about this habit of mine, I've saved twice already. Why? Because back in college, late at night with a due date looming, I lost a paper. Unfindable. No do-overs. No Ctrl + Z redo. Gone.

Things like these typically happen only once before a behavior changes. For the same reason that pilots practice crash landings, we retain the experiences that caught us off guard: to inform our future experiences. We know what action to take next time because we learned from previous experience. Sometimes we sputter with excuses and perfectly logical reasons for why we can't respond differently or mustn't change. This happens to all of us. Yet we can also surprise others and ourselves by diving into something completely different, even unexpected; it all depends on the situation at hand.

Being "Good Enough Now" is about doing the best we can with what we have some of the time because it's better than doing nothing all the time. The key is to recognize that disrupting to do good isn't just about what we know or think, nor even about how we respond to or apply pressure. The most disruptive way to do good is to do something different that builds our own practices and inspires others to do the same slow and intentional process of ongoing work. It's the work of curiously looking for what we don't even know we don't know, becoming less defensive and more comfortable with the unknown itself, and making authentic, informed, and intentional guesses about what to do next, all while generously being transparent of our vulnerable failures.

It takes courage to use the tools we have at our disposal to make better and more authentic connections with others. Maybe you're already

great at this, yet there's always room to make an improvement. Some connections are solid; others are not. We all have work to do. Making choices about how we want to show up balances two elements: risk (cost) and reward (goals). If we work to habitually make real, lasting change in the form of better, authentic connections with generous sharing, vulnerable listening, and genuine curiosity, we have a goal or reward for our efforts. When we're truly being our full selves and allowing others to do the same, there's less of a cost to us all. Perhaps, then, this isn't an act of courage but an act of living.

What's holding you back? There's a time and place for reflection and response, and you must become aware of your comfortable patterns to decide who you are and how you show up in your relationships with others. Doubting ourselves, thinking negatively, fearing failure or success, criticizing others, participating in negative self-talk, procrastinating, people-pleasing ... if these lived experiences and voices in our heads went away, imagine what we could do. With hindsight, we could look back and see why we didn't do something or where we went wrong. We could recognize where we drag our feet, bite off more than we can chew, or allow momentum to be in control. Much like fraud, if we have a personal motive or incentive fueling an internal pressure or have experienced outside pressure, we may do something that's uncharacteristic for us or our organizational culture, even when it's for good. This is disruption.

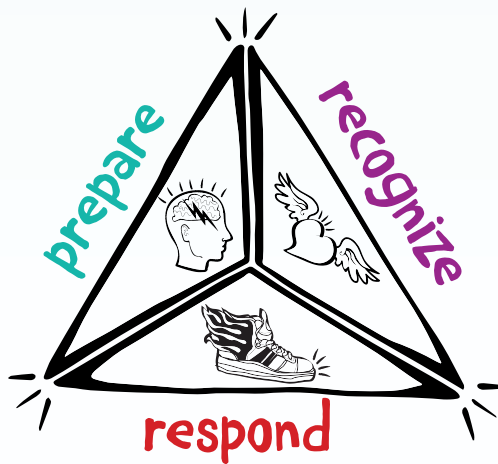
It's true, too, that we could do something outlandishly good with the right motive or incentive. At times we may experience external pressure from current events, trends, personal experiences, or relationships and be compelled to do something. These "doings" don't always go as planned,

**With hindsight, we could look back and see why we didn't do something or where we went wrong. We could recognize where we drag our feet, bite off more than we can chew, or allow momentum to be in control.**

and none thus far have toppled systems of oppression in all forms, yet they can still be the right things to do. As with successes, failures can be defining moments because they help us strive to develop, improve, and get better.

Let's review some examples of moments, choices, and plans to do good and with hindsight identify where these clients could've been more successful. In some, we'll review which particular element(s) of the Do-Good Triangle was present and see whether we can identify where we would've used our gas pedal differently. Remember, almost-ing is easy, yet it's not fruitful unless we stay curious, are generous, and allow our authentic selves to be vulnerable about our failures and lived experiences.

Let's get to work.



In some case studies, we'll review which particular element(s) of the Do-Good Triangle was present and see whether we can identify where we would've used our gas pedal differently.

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## American Red Cross

The rise of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s led to the 1982 requirement that blood donors complete a questionnaire prior to donating their blood. Until 2019, gay men who engaged in anal sex weren't allowed to donate blood under any circumstances, even if they were HIV negative. As of 2022, the overall ban has been lifted, but now anyone who has engaged in anal sex with a new partner within three months of the scheduled blood draw, regardless of either's gender or sex, must wait. All donations are screened for HIV regardless of the donors' answers on the questionnaire.

Almost. If all donations are screened for HIV (and other sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis and hepatitis), then the original policy perpetuates homophobia and the stereotypes that gay men are more susceptible to HIV. The 2022 policy is a more equitable one that with changed attitudes about high-risk sex led to a waiting period rather than a complete ban. Removing only one group of people who may or may not engage in anal sex is a form of irrational discrimination. Even if well-intentioned, this long-standing policy significantly limited the amount of blood donations across the country and beyond, even if it seemingly made sense at the time.



# Defeating Anti-Gay Marriage

Arizona's 2006 Proposition 107 was the first anti-gay marriage bill defeated in the United States. This defeat was successful largely because it centered around the impacts of its passage on Tucson's domestic partner provisions that guaranteed benefits for those in a domestic partnership even if they weren't legally married. Specifically, this successful campaign focused on an elderly heterosexual couple who would lose veteran-related benefits if they were to marry. The measure was narrowly defeated, 52 to 48 percent.

Almost. In politics, some argue that a win is a win. I like to use this example to show how our intention to do good can still lead to harm. Utilizing the details of personal and family benefits, along with the complicated lack of clarity around corporate benefit packages, the loss of such protections or coverage certainly got heterosexual voters' attention. The fact that Tucson already had a local ordinance protecting all domestic partnerships and that passage of this new bill would take away a right for residents of the state even attracted folks from outside Tucson. The visual use of an elderly straight couple in marketing pieces and television ads heightened fears to such a level that the measure failed in a state that had already passed bills that didn't recognize out-of-state gay marriages.

Utilizing this confluence was a strong political chess move, as two years later Arizona's attitude toward gay rights swung to a more progressive one. However, it's important to mention the local community harm that occurred between those "trying to win" and those in the queer community watching their actual rights and access to benefits be overshadowed by a chess game that centered on straight people's fears.





# Accessibility

A large metropolitan city's commissioner passed a wide-sweeping ordinance to change bathroom signage to read "All Users" for any renovation or new builds across the city. Allowing for any single occupancy restrooms for any renovation projects or new builds addressed the need for gender-neutral bathrooms, but it also affected caretakers and children who needed privacy but had to be in the space at the same time. However, no educational plan was connected to the ordinance, let alone an accountability structure. Consequently, these extra duties fell to the volunteer LGBTQ+ employee resource group (ERG) to develop, evaluate, and implement.

This same LGBTQ+ ERG hosted a panel called "Beyond the Binary" in the one classroom building without any all-gender bathroom options. This program was particularly designed for students, faculty, staff, and community members who identified as outside a gender binary, and it was about discussing ways the institution was working toward inclusion of all community members regardless of gender identity or expression. Yet participants had to pick either a women's or a men's restroom while attending the event.

Almost. These kinds of events involve a lot of details, planning, and foresight. Emphasizing particular aspects of inclusion that are often then overlooked due to planning details, limited options, and lack of experience is particularly ironic. Needing sign language interpreters, closed captioning, accessible ramps, wide aisles, translators, safe changing rooms and bathrooms, and parking, as well as honoring everyone's pronouns, is just the beginning of accessibility issues when planning such events. Understanding these commonly overlooked needs is essential to supporting an inclusive mission to do the right thing.

Typically, these oversights are blamed on a lack of need or knowledge about accommodations or an inadequate budget. Yet it *is* possible to state upfront what accommodations will and will not be included at the event, and budgeting in advance for accessibility can also mitigate deficiencies. Many accommodations are also free or nearly so. Clarity is kindness.



# Water Tracing

While I was working at the University of Arizona, the geocaching club was working alongside the coroner's office to identify where deceased immigrants were located in the surrounding Tucson area deserts. The students organized water stations and drop-off and refill trips in areas that connected these spots on the map, assuming this was a pathway others would be following. But upper administration specifically ordered that this club's activities cease because of "potential danger" the students could be facing. As the advisor at the time, I believed that the biggest concern was negative press associated with anti-immigration that could hurt admissions if the word got out to potential students or new hires.

Almost. Almost two decades later, I admit that this case study still really bothers me. I think it's an excellent example of doing good with the resources someone already has because it combines all elements of the Do-Good Triangle. Yet it was canceled due to two facts and one belief: 1) The institution was located close to a politicized southern border in a desert, 2) Immigrants crossed this desert on foot under extreme conditions that often resulted in death by dehydration, and 3) This danger would sufficiently deter others from coming. This is beyond an incongruency with the beliefs and values of the institution who instead refused aid to the weakest who needed the most assistance.



# Bring Your Whole Self to Work

A large global technology company leads by instilling a handful of tenets that set the tone and expectations for their employee and customer culture. One phrase the company uses quite frequently (and not in a mocking manner) is, “Bring your whole self to work.” After a recent hateful post was shared, this tenet was reviewed internally and found to be unclear, inequitably understood, and derived from the founders’ secular and progressive agendas. The leadership team had assumed that the meaning was clear and consistent to all. These are two different assumptions. After I conducted over one hundred listening sessions, it became clear to me that the phrase had created wildly different experiences for each employee, team, department, region, country, and time zone. Some heard “Bring your *whole* self to work,” while others heard “Bring your whole self to *work*.”

Almost. The company’s value statements were consistent with the beliefs and values that the founders had brought to their new venture. And though they’re proud of their global growth over the last few years, this tiny team of original leaders still leads the organization as if it were small. At the time of the negative posting, they were “off grid” at a leadership retreat and 23 hours behind the employee who posted it. Even if they’d been at their desks, the founders had outsourced internal communications and would still have had to be told about the post.

Furthermore, no one in leadership globally identified with the political party that supported the ideology behind the post, and they may have missed the connection between the internal post and an internal group. The listening sessions revealed that some employees took the stand that their “whole self” was welcomed and that this could foster conversation among their peers. The leadership team eventually identified that an employee’s whole self is welcomed *if* it aligns with the leaders’ secular and progressive stance; otherwise, the emphasis should be on work. What an example of do-gooding gone astray.



## Crowdsourcing

When tasked with renaming a campus building of a prominent law school, why not ask the public for suggestions? The timing was just after the school had been named after a supreme court justice's passing, and the crowdsourcing was to assist with proposing names of historical, progressive leaders and then putting finalists up for a community vote.

No one expected this opportunity to spread so quickly nor that it would be picked up by "right-wing bots," as evidenced by the thousands of hateful contributions that flooded in within the first 24 hours of the poll's opening. Initially the upper administration supported the intention and process behind the crowdsourcing naming idea, but they completely shut it down by the end of day two. More than a decade later, the student affairs building is still named "Student Union Building 1," or "SUB 1," and there's no inclination to rename it without a donor stepping in to purchase naming rights. There will likely never be another public crowdsourcing initiative on this campus.

Almost. This reminds me of the people who squash what seem like new ideas because "Back in 1972, something like this was tried and it failed." With that line of thinking, a great idea that could be developed differently or managed better goes awry and is never tried again.

There's a fine line between micromanaging an open forum and creating an unmonitored space for feedback. It's also hard to stay on top of weblinks and the like because they can "go viral" in a second with today's technology. I'm not sure I'd even have a thought about ruthless "spambots" mucking up the process to the point that the effort of polling for a new name would be squashed. When combined, motive, incentive, outside pressure, and personal attitudes and rationalizations are not enough to do good. This is, however, an excellent example of trying that can be a lesson encouraging us to try again.





# ERGs

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are often created to support initiatives in the corporate environment. They're intended to motivate and support underrepresented employees in an effort to both build community and offer internal programming that addresses a specific issue, as well as to educate allies. Multiple ERGs may exist and may have conflicting meeting times, forcing an employee to pick an identity instead of being their whole self. These groups are often led by volunteers with little or no connection to top leadership, and they're woefully underfunded, if at all.

Almost. Having a "safe space" for marginalized or underrepresented employees develops communities of support that have a direct connection to retention and even make an impact on recruitment efforts. However, leaders who implement them often have to support themselves and end up doing the heavy lifting of educating coworkers. Many of these coworkers rarely support an ERG's programming because they think it's a space for "others." This also imposes upon these same others the role of providing free education on top of their job responsibilities. ERG leadership and programming can be seen as a distraction from an employee's responsibilities and reflect negatively on job performance. In the end, those burdened by structures of social injustice become sometimes doubly burdened by these initiatives.



# Women's ERG

A large global tech firm I worked with was having a lot of race-related issues among their staff. One of the most powerful instigators was the leadership team of the women's ERG, which was made up of three White women who took their roles very seriously. Outside the ERG, the women were middle managers from three different countries, but together, they focused on the lack of women in the tech industry globally. Among topics central to their agenda were increasing the recruitment and retention of women in the workplace, establishing pay equity, and including pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, IVF, maternity leave, and breastfeeding stations in their benefits packages. This agenda critically overlooked women of color, who were being significantly underpaid compared to their White counterparts and even less represented than White women. Nonbinary and trans employees, both White and of color, felt even more silenced by the advocacy of the women's ERG leadership because their focus was representative only of cisgender women.

Almost. This is an excellent example of how motive or personal incentive can be crystal clear and still miss the mark. ERGs are often problematic to begin with because they're often underfunded, underutilized, and run by overworked volunteers. Among other issues, these volunteers often have negative performance reviews, not to mention having to choose an identity when becoming involved in one ERG over another. And yet they attempt good work. The three White women were personally incentivized to have their concerns addressed because they were trying to solve problems for other women just like them. Meanwhile, their actions alienated other members or potential members, leading them to ultimately shut down their collaborative efforts to improve the workplace for all on a global level.



# Menstrual Supplies

Wanting to be more inclusive, a health clinic began to put menstrual supplies in all bathrooms for patients and staff to use or take with them. Over time, the supplies were stocked only in restrooms identified as “Women.” This practice didn’t acknowledge that anyone, regardless of declared gender, may have need for the supplies. Nonbinary and transmasculine visitors, for example, might still menstruate or know someone who may need supplies. Moreover, in the same bathrooms, the urine collection instructions were still gendered as men’s and women’s instructions even though they were in gender-neutral bathrooms.

Almost. The motivation to have all-inclusive and gender-neutral spaces in all settings, not just healthcare clinics, is rooted in good intentions. However, we rarely think outside of gender when making gender-neutral accommodations. The incentive to make all patients and their guests feel welcome gets replaced with typical binary-gendered habits. The result is that the initiative falls flat for the very people it intended to benefit.

To offer menstruation supplies is to offer them to whoever needs or wants them regardless of a person’s gender identity or expression. By defaulting to typical habits, the most vulnerable visitor, someone who’s not perceived as a person who may menstruate, would have to out themselves to gain access to free supplies. The people most impacted by these oversights are the very people who don’t fit into a binary system, and they’re likely the only people who’d notice the hypocrisy.



# Single-Use Restrooms

A division chair was reflecting on a situation when it had become clear that there were no safe restrooms for nonbinary people on campus. As part of the solution, the chairperson began discussions with administration and facilities people about what was needed and suggested changing the sign on the single-use restrooms to reflect that usage was not restricted by gender. These particular single-use restrooms, long designated as “Faculty Women” and “Faculty Men,” were accessible only with a key. Faculty pushed back on the updated signage, saying, “Where will *our* restrooms be?” In the end, the signage on those single-use restrooms was successfully changed despite faculty objections. However, these restrooms always remained locked! Anyone wanting a private restroom had to go to the division office and ask for a key.

Almost. The division chair learned to be specific and explain fully when advocating for change. The power dynamic between faculty and students needed to be accounted for in this conversation, and it may have become a cultural entitlement they were used to. Was there another option for faculty to privately use a restroom on campus or in the building? Was there a rational reason for these restrooms to remain locked throughout the day or during the times when the building was being used? Could cisgender faculty, nonbinary faculty, and students all have used this space? If the bathroom doors of genderless, single occupancy bathrooms could lock from the inside, couldn't they have remained open unless in use?





# Talking Stick

A facilitator of a large group was looking for a meaningful and simple way to wrap up a five-day intensive training for sexuality educators. She put the 50 participants in a large circle and decided to use the “whip method” by asking each participant to reflect briefly on the entire training experience. Recently, a dear friend had given her a foot-long stick that was beautifully carved into a phallus. To continue with the theme of the training, the facilitator decided to use the phallus as a “talking stick,” passing it along to each participant in the circle to signify the holder as the “talker” to be honored for their moment of sharing.

Handing it around to the first few people went fine, despite the chuckles. Then it was placed into the hands of a Native American participant who said as she began to cry, “I’m sorry. I cannot do this. This is not a ‘talking stick.’” The facilitator stopped the process, dispensed with the prop, and the group completed the exercise. Afterward, as people dispersed from the closing circle and the training, the facilitator apologized to the participant for her ignorance and presumption.

Almost. This facilitator shared with me, “I’ve never fully recovered and feel very humbled in my cultural ineptness. I’ve long been very interested in Native cultures and practices, but my fascination isn’t enough to ensure I don’t appropriate them for my shallow purposes.” In hindsight, she could identify both her motive and mistake. Some could also argue that a co-facilitator should’ve checked this assumption before the closing activity started or plan the closing activity in advance and in a more thoughtful manner.

I challenge us all to take a moment to sit with this. Both the motive and the impact of such a mistake are real. Being clear on her intentions and taking responsibility instead of being defensive makes this a crucible moment in the facilitator’s life. This doesn’t mean that she’ll never misappropriate a culture again, but it does mean that this experience has shaped how she questions herself and her plans moving forward.



## Introvert Hire

A small youth service organization specifically recruited an introverted professional to serve its introverted young members better. The overly extroverted staff and organizational leadership did nothing to change the culture or staff engagement expectations to support the new hire. Moreover, coworkers mentioned during a meeting that this candidate had been hired because of their introversion. This happened following the busiest programming season, during which other workers had been fired for not being outgoing enough.

Almost. Recognizing that current services are inadequate for some users and then specifically doing outreach to recruit a staff member to work on this programmatic weakness is certainly doing good. Not informing the new recruit that their introversion is what attracted the hiring committee to them due to this heightened awareness of service needs is a missed opportunity for communication. Expecting this new hire to then fit into an office culture that knowingly focuses on more extroverted kinds of engagement is contradictory at best. The positive intentions of inclusion and the employment performance rationale don't align and don't support efforts to increase services and improve the organizational culture for all.



# Cannabis

The legalization of cannabis in California was a highly motivated act with financial and medical incentives. Here in my local community of Humboldt County, California, since the legalization of cannabis I've noticed an increase in housing availability and a decrease in rent inflation, as legal growers are able to grow out in the open. Knowledgeable dispensaries opened, and the resulting huge influx of innovation opened doors to many new small businesses.

However, the permitting process to legally grow is bureaucratic and understaffed due to an underestimated amount of interest. While waiting for permits to be approved, illegal grows still occur; many are so large that the small businesses can't compete. In addition, working conditions for illegal and permitted grows in Humboldt County, for both small- and large-scale cannabis indoor and outdoor farms, still aren't being monitored. Grow farms have no HR departments, and the environmental impact of grows has no checks and balances for sustainability initiatives or state-level requirements. Moreover, most folks in state prison for cannabis-related crimes are people of color, while primarily White people are now profiting off the newly legal activities. Whether individuals are incarcerated or not, the cannabis industry hasn't been decriminalized. Therefore, criminal records, tax evasion, trafficking, and other illegal activities still occur inside the now legal industry.

Almost. It seems to me that the sales tax, permitting fees, and state-level profits were strong incentives to permit farms, but the rest of the plan wasn't really thought out thoroughly. Where housing rental rates are decreasing, small businesses are now being pushed out of limited commercial spaces to make room for more profitable cannabis dispensary businesses wanting tourist-heavy locations, which is impacting all local businesses. As of the end of 2022, Idaho, Wyoming, Kansas, and South Carolina are the only states without some level of cannabis decriminalization or legalization.



# Office Furniture Hierarchy

A university client had recently changed their administrative offices to an open floor plan to encourage collaboration and teamwork and to align with a less hierarchical organizational structure. The large office space had three walls of floor-to-ceiling windows; the fourth was all windows to the internal hallway with a main set of double entrance doors. As students and staff entered the office, they could see bright colors, gathering spaces, and a colorful mural that noticeably stated, “Welcome all and all welcome.” The space was a collection of stand-up desks, docking stations, desktop computer stations, high tables, conference tables with wheeled chairs, clusters of half-walled cubicles, and meeting spaces with doors and half-windows along the perimeter.

Upon closer examination, a hierarchy was present based on how much privacy was allotted to each office space, regardless of the level of confidentiality involved in the employee’s role. The most tenured folks had private offices, stand-up desks with both desktop and docking stations, flexible furniture arrangements, and internal access to private meeting spaces. The middle managers, however, were clustered together in a half-wall cubicle “farm” with wheeled chairs, and they were surrounded by the newest entry-level employees who stood at desks or sat at tables with open docking stations. The office had a number of student employees and interns who used whichever spaces were open during their shifts and then packed everything up at the end of the day.

Almost. Open spaces and flat organizational charts allow for transparency and clear lines of communication by decentralizing power concentrations. Perhaps unintentionally, furniture was selected by tenure and projected a sense of permanence or lack thereof. Those with the lowest job status had the least stable workspaces, other than being tethered to a landline here and there when they were sitting in the unwheeled chairs. The incentive for permanence and privacy was unconsciously immortalized in the very space where the stated intention was just the opposite.





# Hair

“Ooooo, your hair looks cute!” said a White woman senior leader in the organization to a newly installed Black woman president while reaching out to touch the top of her head. The two women had gotten along well since the president’s start on campus. The senior leader assumed that their friendly, playful, and silly communication style had made it possible to be this comfortable with the new president, and she’d forgotten to think about the racial and power dynamics between them. The president immediately returned a serious look and called the senior leader into her office a few days later to discuss the situation.

As she came out from around her desk, the president invited the senior leader to sit as well. She explained, “I am telling you this because I truly believe you are not aware of what you did. You never, ever, ever touch a Black woman’s hair, especially when she’s your campus president.” The senior leader apologized as clearly and simply as she could, offering no excuse.

Almost. So much attitude and rationalization to unpack here! There’s a pattern in which many think to themselves, *We’re friends; therefore, our identities don’t matter*. This thinking is as harmful as it is casual. A person’s lived experiences never “do not matter.” A White woman touching a Black woman’s head can reverse the power dynamic of a president and a subordinate.

The president calling her employee into her office is also something to think about. Few people get called into this office, so when the new president came from around her desk to sit next to a long-standing employee for some “feedback or advice,” the dynamic shifted again. The senior leader who shared this example with me was still grateful years later that the president spoke to her “alone, non-threateningly, and clearly” because the president recognized that the senior leader just didn’t understand the impact of the mistake.

It’s imperative to mention here that hair itself is policed and subjected to policies. In 2019, for example, the Creating a Respectful and Open

World for Natural Hair, or CROWN Act, was created to ensure protection against discrimination based on hairstyles (primarily racialized hairstyles) by extending statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles such as braids, locks, twists, and knots in the workplace and public schools. CROWN should not have to exist, yet it does, nor has it been passed on a federal level as of this writing. Clearly, racism and the belief that only either straight or curly hair, not kinky hair textures, are clean and professional are concerns in many workplaces.

Hygiene and professional standards are rooted in white supremacy; otherwise, there wouldn't need to be a law protecting the way hair naturally grows on or out of the human body. As a White woman with often atypical hair colors, I'm amazed by the number of people who touch my head or ask question after question about how I get my hair the color it is. (I typically respond, "I have a checkbook.") I know that I have a degree of fascination with differently textured hair than mine, styles my hair can't or won't do, and the flexibility of wigs and extensions with which I have no experience. But my ignorance about hair does not give me permission to ask invasive questions or touch someone's head.

Making policies that deem what's clean or professional based on what we're used to isn't even a nice try. We can do better. And by "we" I mean those who, like me, benefit by position or other privileged identities. As of 2023, 23 states and more than 40 municipalities have passed the CROWN Act.

# Membership Demographics

I've worked with two different groups that are primarily for lawyers, fiduciaries, and law firm partners and found an interesting pattern showing up regarding membership demographics. Associations with paying members typically have applications for joining the organization and renewing dues. On these applications, demographic information—including age, race, sexuality, gender, tenure, ability-related accommodations, locations, and education—can be gathered as either required or optional questions. This information is typically used to set recruitment, retention, nomination, and leadership pipeline goals as well as internal measures for programming or volunteer recruitment. These questions are often even used by human resources to ensure that issues such as benefits, furniture, and dress codes align with a new employees' needs. In both cases, in these organizations made up of legal professionals, I had to explain that these were not illegal questions to ask and that they were the foundation of any strategic plan they were following.

Almost. These organizations (and probably many more) felt external pressure to have a strategic plan that increased the diversity of membership by X percent, but they didn't have baseline data regarding four issues: 1) the current diversity of membership, 2) a working definition of what diversity meant regarding their membership, 3) how they were going to increase numbers from an unknown, and 4) by when, let alone why. At first, not having a plan was worse than having a bad plan, so it was time to fix a bad plan. However, the leaders didn't want to "make" anyone participate even though they'd stressed that the plan was important to their organization and not just lip service.



## No Surprises

Two tech companies hired me through their equity committees or a similar initiative run through their human resources departments. In both cases, these select groups of employees wanted to roll out DEI-related programming and solicited my assistance to both facilitate the training and design an internal program. There was one caveat: no surprises.

Before the two companies could pick which workshops they wanted and in what order, I test-piloted or “auditioned” each of my webinar offerings to multiple groups and one-person audiences, both in person and virtually. I explained the order that worked best, and I was overruled. Then I offered listening sessions to gather pain points of employees and offered an assessment tool to quantify the learning needs of staff. These options were controversial because I couldn’t provide transcripts of the listening sessions before they were offered, nor could I present assessment results prior to giving the assessment. The leaders also recommended that I develop PowerPoint decks and submit them for approval before any town hall meetings, open discussions, drop-ins, or facilitated conversations.

Almost: First, no diversity consultant was harmed in either of these instances, and I have a therapist! Second, this is a great example of the external pressures—usually from top leadership—to produce results, fix problems, and be omnipotent even with new issues or dilemmas that have never been faced before. The elevated need to know is typically indicative of past initiatives’ failures, and leaders tightly control future work to avoid past problems. This is internal almost-ing using external tools and resources. It should come as no surprise that requesting scripts and practice rounds, as well as approving artifacts such as PowerPoints for facilitated conversations, isn’t about doing good; it’s about leaders controlling expected outcomes due to performance pressure.



# Leadership Forum

An international organization made up of first responders (police, EMT, fire) built out a leadership pipeline program through which more seasoned leaders could mentor up-and-coming staff from around the world. This program was also set up to allow the new leadership to work on global projects to create new and innovative systems, protocols, and procedures while learning best practices from around the world. The program would be four years long, culminating in an annual conference where all participants would come together to create and innovate as well as learn from a consistent leadership curriculum.

The certification board supported the initiative but asked that it be self-funded at exactly the same yearly level regardless of participants or current events. The curriculum would also need minor updates in case internal policies changed, but the program was expected to give the exact same experience to each mentee or program participant to meet the leadership expectations of lobbyists, legislators, and global first responders.

Almost. What? A single curriculum was to be designed, monitored, adjusted, edited, and implemented year after year in the exact same manner? And with first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year participants, groups of mentors, and presenters to a global audience to inspire creative and innovative ideas but with no funding?

It's important to monitor and adjust programs as living and breathing experiences instead of prioritizing a "one size fits all" program that splits the middle and hopes for the best outcome. Please stop doing this.





# Gift Cards

A university's response as COVID-19 hit was to quarantine students in empty residence hall rooms when they tested positive. These students couldn't leave their rooms for meals, so they were given gift cards to purchase groceries out in the community. Eventually, a single staff member was selected to take orders, shop, and deliver these groceries because the quarantined students were often too ill to shop for themselves and there was worry of endangering the public.

Almost. Instead of worrying about the community catching COVID, the university should've worried about the nutrition of the students in their care and the health and the non-excess use of the employee's workload. We often worry about protecting the least weak variable. This staff member was given no additional funding, resources, time off, or even PPE supplies. Now three years later, she's still the "go-to" solution for these kinds of situations, and her full-time position seems to rationalize these responsibilities as "other duties assigned." Perhaps the initial thought was that the gift cards could be given to other students to make the purchases for the ailing students, but there was a mandatory shelter in place protocol. Meanwhile, ill students were isolated and given a gift card for comfort.



# Fast Fashion

As consumers, we rarely think about the value chain that goes into the life cycle of an article of clothing. We—and I mean me—make quick, impulsive purchases and often wear clothes once, or never. “Fast fashion” generally isn’t good for employees and laborers making the article of clothing, the environment sourcing the materials, or even the location where the article of clothing may end up on the planet. I could write a story about the good I’m doing by supporting businesses and then donating clothes to those in need. These donations may land locally in the hands of someone in need, but then how long will they last? If they aren’t taken up locally, then these items could be recycled or repurposed and end up in the hands of someone selling them from giant piles on corners of economically disadvantaged communities or in resale shops where clothes are sold by weight.

Almost. I know, I know. It’s hard to think all the time. The good news is that once we practice something, it becomes a habit. What does it really mean to buy something? Own something? Get rid of something? Perhaps supporting harmful systems isn’t our goal, but it happens because we forget what our original goal was. If there weren’t a market for disposable items, they wouldn’t be made. The image of starving and homeless children running around streets begging for change or food scraps in fraternity bash shirts is hard to forget, and if I’m being honest, hard to always remember.



# Hikshari' Trail

Though named locally by tribal leaders, the Hikshari' Trail is often referred to as the Eureka Waterfront Trail in my hometown. The trail is a long bike path that was installed along the bayfront for recreational use. Before it was installed, several hundred people lived in tent cities they'd formed several years prior. These houseless women, men, children, pets, and belongings were removed with a week's notice. The area was then cleaned and landscaped, and the pathway was installed with benches, bike repair stations, doggie bag stations, public bathrooms, and water fountains. This land is also protected by the Environmental Protection Act.

Almost. This experience was particularly hard to watch unfold, and it's an excellent example of a complicated opportunity. Watching from my patio window while the tent city was removed, and at times witnessing "boobytraps" that lit the tents on fire rather than someone taking them away, was a moment of privileged reflection that I will never stop thinking about. My family is excited to use the Hikshari' Trail for dog walks and bike rides, as well as for gaining bay access for kayaking. It's middle- and upper-class folks like us who are being catered to and encouraged to enjoy nature while judging those who are using the space to survive and disregarding the environmental impact of their presence in the space, regardless of intention.



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