

Building Belonging from the Elements of Dignity

“Everyone wants to be treated as if they matter” ~ Donna Hicks.

I hope by now you have heard the word belonging as part of our ethos and understand that we desire to co-create a culture in which everyone feels that they belong. Honoring dignity is at the core of this belonging. Dignity is our unconditional and inherent value and vulnerability as human beings. It is the desire to be seen, heard, listened to, and treated fairly; to be recognized, understood and to feel safe in the world. We don't all experience the same harm to dignity that others do, but we can understand it. We can choose to honor or violate dignity with every action we take or word we speak.

Donna Hicks believes that dignity consciousness requires “connection, connection, connection.” Connection to the dignity of self, connection to the dignity of others, and connection to the dignity of something greater than ourselves, something that contributes to the greater good. Our mission to #begreat, and our vision to ensure we are #changinglives both require that we connect and honor dignity by being the guardians of that dignity. Donna Hicks identified the following ten elements of dignity, which represent what each of us wants from one another and can provide to someone else, as well as what it means to lead, teach, and generally interact with dignity:

- 1. Acceptance of Identity** - Treat others as neither inferior nor superior; with the freedom to express their authentic selves without judgment; accept that characteristics such as race, religion, gender, etc. are at the core of their identities.
- 2. Recognition** - Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas, and experiences.
- 3. Acknowledgment** - Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating, and responding to their concerns and what they have been through.
- 4. Inclusion** - Make others feel that they belong, at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, and nation).
- 5. Safety** - Put people at ease physically, free from the possibility of bodily harm, and psychologically, free from being shamed or humiliated; free to speak without fear of retribution.
- 6. Fairness** - Treat people justly, with equity.
- 7. Independence** - Encourage people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility.
- 8. Understanding** - Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives and express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them.
- 9. Benefit of the Doubt** - Treat people as if they are trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.
- 10. Accountability** - Take responsibility for your actions; apologize if you have violated another person's dignity; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors

These elements live within an interconnected framework in which our capacity for empathy, patience, openness and listening impact the experience of people when dignity is honored, leaving them feeling appreciated, validated, accepted and treated fairly. Finally, the standards for dignity require that we build partnerships and community, repair harm and restore relationships, affirm differences and uniqueness and presume competence and positive intent. Together the framework looks like this. How can you honor dignity today?

