

Amber Cabral : 3 steps to better connect with your fellow humans

OK, so my name is Amber Cabral, and I teach people how to be good humans.

What that essentially comes down to is I work with a lot of well-recognized brands

on something that is a pretty consistent challenge day-to-day. And what that really

comes down to is: how do we help people who are different from one another

experience a sense of belonging and support in the workplace? Now we've all had that

moment. We've been at work and we're like, "Ah, I just don't feel like I fit here." And so I

help organizations kind of start to figure out how to make the connections necessary

for that to work.

Now support sounds easy. Like we think we can just do that, because we do it all the

time. We support people we love and care about. We support people that we think we

understand, even if we don't know them. But when it comes to people that we, like,

don't know at all or we don't have that connection with, well, then we kind of get a little

weird about it. And what we really need to do is pay attention to those differences,

because there's magic in those differences, there's something in there that we actually

have an opportunity to learn and grow from. But we've kind of been taught to politely

ignore when we're different from one another. We don't actually pay attention to it.

And here's the thing: differences are inevitable. Look around this room.

Think about your travel into this room today. You encountered all kinds of differences.

We have different backgrounds, different ideas, different perspectives. We have

different identities, we have different abilities, all of it. And it's going to continue to be

that way forever. But we still have this moment where we want to pull back when differences happen. And what I want to encourage you to do is instead of pull back, maybe take a moment and notice those differences. And not so that it's awkward or weird. You know we try to do that thing where we see a thing, but we try to act like we don't see the thing. Like, don't do that! But definitely please, let's be aware of the differences, because the magic that's in those will help us move forward. And I'm going to give you some techniques based on just my own study and my own learnings that I think will help you be able to bridge some of those connections as we move forward, alright?

So the first step ... The first step -- there are three. Let me warn you because sometimes we need to know that. Alright. The first step is to acknowledge that we all have some privilege. Now that word might have landed on some of you, like, ich. Right? But really. And I want to demonstrate it for you for just a moment. Did you wake up this morning with hot, clean running water? Did you think about it? Did you wonder if your shower was going to be your ideal temperature, or if you'd have clean water for your morning coffee or tea? Likely the answer is no. For most of us in this room. But I think we can all agree that access to water is indeed a privilege. In fact, a little more than a quarter of the world's population does not have access to safely managed drinking water at home. So while it might be our norm, it is indeed a privilege.

And this is how privilege shows up. We don't see it. It's regular to us. It's a part of who we are. We don't even think about it. But if we take a moment and we actually pay attention, what being aware of our privilege does for us is it helps us to see where we

have access. It helps us see where we have ease. And access and ease give us power. Something as simple as being able to speak the language of our communities gives us privilege, and that privilege gives us power. So you may be wondering: how do I figure out my privileges if they're regular? They're everywhere. OK, let me give you a simple question you can ask yourself. What about me or my experience might someone look at and consider to be typical? It could be my upbringing. It could be the language I speak. It could be the way my body works. It could be my style of dress. It could be any of those elements. But it's hidden in the things that we think of as every day and regular. That's where we're going to find our privilege. So that leads me to the second step.

The second step is we need to be willing to recognize the differences in folks and want to get to know them across those differences. Let me learn about your experiences so that I can develop empathy for you. That learning about the experiences part, it's not just so that we can be curious. We love stories, alright? That's great. Keep loving the stories. But also getting to know about folks' experience gives us a bit of perspective that we might not otherwise have. And so what we want to think about is, you know, considering the impact that having those kinds of connections can show for us. Even as a simple example, I mentioned we struggle to connect across differences. But think about this: a couple days ago, maybe a month ago, I saw online where Snoop Dogg, yes, the rapper Snoop Dogg, posted on his LinkedIn -- which why he's on LinkedIn, I have no idea -- That he really valued his relationship with Martha Stewart. Now most of us have seen that relationship, and if we're being honest, we kind

of notice that there's some differences between them that make that connection kind of unlikely, right?

OK. But you know what? He pointed out specifically, "I learn so much from this friendship. I get so much value out of this relationship." And it was the willingness of being able to connect across differences that most of us would kind of politely ignore, or would assume were not available to us. So learning about the experiences of others is about hearing the stories. Yes, but it's also about having empathy and connection, and being able to broaden our view. Now I have another example where this happens, and this is the workplace, because I care a lot about how this shows up in the workplace, because we all, you know, at least for now, until the AI gets us, have to go into the workplace. OK, so when we're thinking about the workplace, one of the things that always happens is interviews. I've had this conversation with a lot of my clients because clients are always thinking about how are we attracting and retaining talent. They're always thinking about specifically Black folks, brown folks, young folks. And we want to make sure that we're bridging those connections. But we know that our workplaces aren't always inviting to those diverse identities.

Now what my clients hear is a pipeline problem. But what I hear is an empathy problem. I'll give an example of what that looks like. Candidates go into an interview. One of the questions is, "I'd like you to tell me about how you navigate ambiguity." Most of the candidates tell a story about working in a previous position, having to solve a problem, not having a lot of resources or information, making some educated

guesses and ultimately solving said problem amazingly. Alright? Creating a fantastic new product. We've heard this story. We work with those people. OK, great.

But there's one candidate, and when that question hits them, what they do is they tell a story about a 1989 Honda Accord. It's a car that their father gave them before they went away to college. And it ran great. But the gas gauge didn't work. So they talk about -- feels real, right? Y'all know this person, too. So the gas gauge didn't work.

So they had to develop a process to make sure that they were able to track their miles so that they would know when they needed to fill up again. Right? They had to navigate the ambiguity of having no idea what was in their gas tank and make sure that they didn't run out of gas, and they managed to do that. "I track my miles so that I know exactly when I need to fill up, so that I don't have to worry about running out of gas."

How often would we hear a story like that in the workplace and discount that person?

How often would we dismiss or not even consider the candidate because they didn't give us a business example, or we didn't hear it as a culture fit. When if we're really

honest with ourselves, the candidate with the Honda Accord not only navigated the ambiguity of not having any gas in the car, they also did something in their day-to-day life. It wasn't just for work. This is one of the things I had to figure out how to do to survive. It's innate. It's in my body. Think about if we considered it that way.

Think about if we considered getting to know folks' stories and having empathy for them as a part of the way that we evaluate where they have an opportunity to thrive and grow, instead of just listening for the things that we always listen for. That leads me to the third step. OK?

The third step is extending your privilege to others. So I have another story.

I was on a call the other day with a client. She is the head of HR for a pretty big company. It was she and I and one of her colleagues on the call. And as we were having the discussion, about 10 minutes in, she chimes in and says, "Wait, I'm going to hop off for a moment. I need to go change my top. I'll be back." A few minutes pass by. She returns to the call, and she's in a plain black shirt. She's taken her earrings off, makeup's gone. So I ask, like, "Why'd you change clothes?" She says, "Oh, I'm getting my home appraised today. So I'm actually going to pretend to be the cleaning lady, and my neighbor across the street is going to come over and pretend to be me. She's white. I'm nodding my head because I know what's going on. The colleague on the call says, "Wait, what do you mean? I don't understand." So my client proceeds to explain about the stories about Black folks' homes being appraised for less when there's evidence that the homeowners are Black. The colleague on the call is, like, almost outraged. Like, "What? Is that a real thing? I can't believe this is happening." Meanwhile, I am feeling grateful to the neighbor for being able to identify her privilege, for being able to empathize with my client, and for being willing to extend the privilege of her race in that situation. The three steps that I just covered with you are what most of us want when we think about support. I want someone to identify their privilege. I want somebody to actually hear my circumstances and experience, and empathize with me. And then I want you to extend your privilege respectfully and impactfully in the ways that you're able to in that relationship.

Now I have a little secret. A confession, if you will. There is a word I've been avoiding in this conversation. So I mentioned at the top of this, you know, dialogue that I work with lots of well-recognized brands. And what I didn't tell you is that the work I do is DEI,

or diversity, equity and inclusion. And the word that I've been avoiding is "allyship."

The three steps that we just talked through is what allyship looks like in action.

Now I'll be honest, I avoided it because I just wanted you to hear my talk. I know right

now the media is all the rage. DEI is dying, right? And allyship is on its way with it.

But I want us to just for a moment consider that maybe allyship isn't grand historical

gestures or another big program, or huge financial commitments. I mean, we need

those too, but --It doesn't have to just be that. It doesn't have to just be those really

big, visible things. It can be the small things, the things that we see and encounter

every day. Allyship is understanding that the system is such that the way your neighbor

is experiencing a home appraisal and the way you might be could be different,

and being willing to step in and interrupt that impact. It could also be recognizing that

access to job opportunities isn't necessarily fair just because you got in. It's left-handed

scissors. It's considering food allergies. It's being willing to accept correction when you

mispronounce someone's name or misgender them. It's all of those things that you

encounter every single day. And I think when we think of it as just the big things,

we miss an opportunity to step into what we independently, individually have the ability

to do to be allies. And I know that word may still not sit well with a lot of you.

But whether you call it support, love, friendship, solidarity, whatever you'd like to call it,

let's start taking the kinds of everyday actions that really bring it to life.

Thank you.