

Speaking Change

Shaping a Stigma-Free Workplace

Linea Johnson | @TheThriveShift



Lesson Learned:

Language evolves—
preference is key



What is inclusive language?

Question for the group:



"Inclusion is
about enabling
trust..."

Lily Zheng, Author of *DEI Deconstructed*



Inclusive language is:

The *words* and *phrases* you use that **avoid** biases, slang, and expressions that **discriminate** against groups of people based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability.



**Have you ever felt the
need to hide part of
yourself at work?**

Question for the group



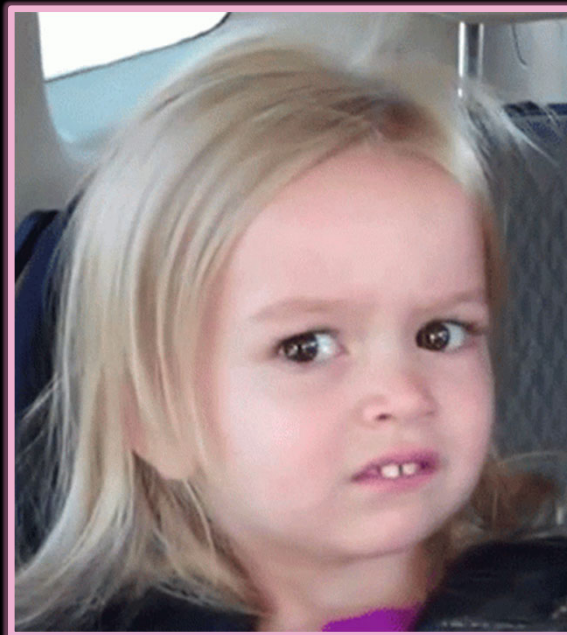
**Was there a specific
action, event, conversation,
or moment that made
you feel more guarded?**

Follow-up



“Associative Activation”

Or The Visceral Negative Reaction To Stigmatizing Language



Benefits Of Inclusive Language

01

Builds trust

02

Creates feelings of value and belonging

03

Minimizes confusion (and saves time)

04

Retains employees

05

Increases innovation

06

Strengthens community



Stigma And Mental Health

- 50%** One out of every two people in the world will develop a mental health disorder in their lifetime
- 5.5%** Adults experiencing serious mental illness
- 65%** US Workers state mental health challenges interfere with their ability to work



A PERSON'S MENTAL ILLNESS IS NOT YOUR ADJECTIVE.

STOP SAYING
OCD WHEN YOU
MEAN
ORGANIZED.

STOP SAYING
DEPRESSED WHEN
YOU MEAN SAD.

STOP SAYING
ANOREXIC WHEN
YOU MEAN
SKINNY.

STOP SAYING
BIPOLAR WHEN
YOU MEAN
MOODY.

STOP SAYING
PSYCHOTIC WHEN
YOU MEAN
IRRATIONAL.

STOP SAYING
PHOBIC WHEN
YOU MEAN
UNCOMFORTABLE.

STOP SAYING
SOCIOPATH
WHEN YOU MEAN
CRUEL.

STOP SAYING
ADHD WHEN YOU
MEAN EASILY
DISTRACTED.

STOP SAYING
SCHIZOPHRENIC
WHEN
YOU MEAN
UNPREDICTABLE.

@meltalksfeelings



Practical strategies for implementation



Inclusive Language Starter Pack

For mental health
and disability

Understand person first and identity first

Use plain language

Practice digital accessibility

Question relevance of mentioning a disability

Check your terminology

Honor personal preference

Learn from mistakes, apologize, move forward



Personal Strategies

Be curious—
keep learning

Be kind to
yourself and
others

Listen more
than talk

Be
courageously
vulnerable

Sit with
discomfort

Build
a community of
growth



Kind Reminders

To challenge language and say what needs to be said, there must be trust and psychological safety.

Don't expect those with lived experience to teach us how to change. Be active listeners and continuous learners.

Be responsible for building lines of communication and trust to know if change is necessary.

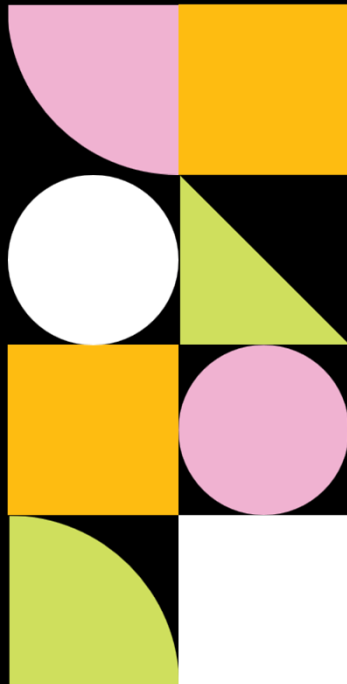
Remember power dynamics. Not everyone feels safe having these conversations. Sometimes, it has nothing to do with you as a person but everything to do with one's position within the company.



Inclusive language is about respect, care, and compassion.

It demonstrates that you value others and are willing to grow.





Stay In Touch



linea@lineajohnson.com



www.lineajohnson.com



@TheThriveShift | @Linea.Johnson



Favorite resources

Inclusive Language

- [Disability Language Style Guide | National Center On Disability And Journalism](#)
- [Communicating About People With Disabilities | National Disability Rights Network](#)
- [Choosing Words When Talking About People with Disabilities | American Psychological Association](#)
- [Inclusive Language Guide \(ILG\) | American Psychological Association](#)

Digital Accessibility Tools and Best Practices

- [Plain Language Checklist](#)
- [Inclusive Language Tools](#)
- [How To Enable Word Inclusive Language Checker](#)
- [Best Practices For Writing For The Accessible Web](#)

Disability, DEI, and Intersectionality

- [The Urgency Of Intersectionality | Kimberlé Crenshaw](#)
- [I'm Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much | Stella Young](#)
- [The Surgeon General's Framework For Workplace Mental Health And Well-being](#)



Terms to Avoid	Suggested Alternative
mentally ill crazy insane mental defect suffers from or is afflicted with [condition]	person living with a mental illness person with a preexisting mental health disorder person with a preexisting behavioral health disorder person with a diagnosis of a mental illness/mental health disorder/behavioral health disorder
asylum	psychiatric hospital/facility
drug user/abuser addict	person who uses drugs person who injects drugs person with substance use disorder
alcoholic alcohol abuser	person with alcohol use disorder person in recovery from substance use/alcohol disorder
defective nuts crazy	person with a mental disorder person with a mental illness person living with a mental illness
special needs differently abled multiabled physically challenged mentally challenged mentally retarded handi-capable handicapped suffering with... [disability or condition]	person with a disability person who has a disability disabled person people with intellectual disabilities child with a congenital disability child with a birth impairment physically disabled person person with a physical disability
brain damaged	person with a traumatic brain injury (TBI)



Terms to Avoid	Suggested Alternative	
stand up for	support champion	Ableist terms and phrases are pervasive in everyday language. Although the use of these ableist terms may be unintentional, be thoughtful about how to avoid language that denigrates disabilities.
turn a blind eye to	ignore refuse to notice	
be myopic or shortsighted	ignore miss	
have a blind spot for	show unconscious bias	
blind review blind coding	anonymous review masked review masked coding	
color blind	deuteranomaly, achromatopsia (or other type of color-vision deficiency) color-vision deficiency	
fall on deaf ears	be willfully ignorant deliberately ignore	
tone deaf	insensitive out of context	
midget	little person person of small stature dwarf having dwarfism (Little People of America, 2021)	
lame	boring mundane uncool	
lend your voice	support	
everyone should have a voice [in this matter]	everyone should have input	
make your voice heard	express your perspective/opinion	
able-bodied	nondisabled	

