

The ACTION model was developed by Dr. Tasha Souza<sup>1</sup> to provide a framework for conversations when witnessing a micro-aggression. Although it was originally developed for use by teachers in the classroom, it is equally useful for leaders and allies in tackling verbal MIs. ACTION stands for:

**A**sk questions

**C**arefully listen

**T**ell others what you've observed

**I**mpact exploration

**O**wn your thoughts and feelings around the impact

**N**ext steps

Consider how the model could be used with the statement below, which was made at a meeting:

'We'll ask Wei to take care of the finances for the project – she was born for that role!'

**A**sk questions: Avoiding judgement and taking a curious approach, explore what was said to check understanding:

'Can I check my understanding? Were you saying because Wei is Chinese, she is the best person to look after the finances?'

**C**arefully listen to the response:

Engage active listening skills and be open to others' responses. If they agree with your paraphrasing, explore their intent behind the comment. If they disagree and present a different explanation, you may end the conversation there. Souza points out that there is also the option here to make a clear statement about the initial comment, if appropriate, to encourage learning: "I'm glad I misunderstood

---

<sup>1</sup> Souza, T.J. (2016). *Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: Concrete Strategies for Cooling Down Tension*. In *Faculty Focus Special Report: Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom*. Magna Publication.

because, as you know, such comments are based on stereotypes about ability and culture.'

**T**ell others what you've observed:

'I noticed a few people in the room looked quite uncomfortable when you made that statement. It implies that Wei is best placed because she is Chinese.'

**I**mpact exploration: ask for (and, if necessary, state) the potential impact:

'What do you think Wei's response would be to that comment?'

'What impact do you think that comment would have on others who were keen to take on the finance element of the project?'

**O**wn your thoughts and feelings around the impact:

'Many people might take that comment to mean you're assuming that Wei would be good at finance because she is Chinese...'

'In my experience, that comment can perpetuate stereotypes and assumptions about Chinese people. I would like to think that was not your intent.'

'Comments like that can have a real impact. Even if they appear small and complimentary, they are still based on stereotypes and can be damaging. I wouldn't want to be judged on a stereotype; I want to be judged fairly and on my ability.'

**N**ext steps:

Request that appropriate action be taken:

'Please don't make comments about someone's ability based on their background.'

'Let's focus our conversations about people's ability on their track record and their competency, not their background.'

I would also add here that in a business setting it would be good practice to engage the individual in this conversation throughout, so it is a collaborative exploration of the issue, rather than a 'telling off'.

A coaching approach can help the individual to take charge and drive the next steps:

'What do you think about this? What do you want to do next?'

This approach aligns with the research around inquisitive dialogue (Boysen 2012) which indicates that when people recognise – or when they are made aware of – their negative micro-behaviours, the most effective way to address the situation is to foster an inquisitive dialogue that allows the behaviour's intent, meaning and impact to be explored.

Creating space for someone who has made a remark to focus on clarifying their thoughts also allows for wider perspectives to be shared, to aid understanding and impact.



Difference inspires business

	Latimer House Langford Business Park Kidlington OX5 1GG
	<a href="mailto:info@pearnkandola.com">info@pearnkandola.com</a>
	<a href="http://Pearnkandola.com">Pearnkandola.com</a>
	+44 (0) 1865 399060