

# Little Things Mean A Lot™

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*From Microinequities to Micro-affirmations*

*By Brigid Moynahan*



Preview Only

**Participant Handout  
3-Hour Workshop**



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## Introduction

What do you do when someone you work with is slighted or excluded by others? What if it happens to you? Do you speak up or do you let the behavior slide because you don't want to be seen as making a fuss or being oversensitive?

In his best selling book Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, Richard Carlson warns readers not to worry over the little things in life. Although this advice may apply in many situations, this program demonstrates that just the opposite is true when it comes to relationships at work.

Little Things **do** Mean A Lot when the messages we send cause colleagues to feel left out, overlooked or discounted. Behaviors may seem small - things like leaving people off emails, failing to thank a co-worker or overlooking a colleague in a meeting. But as one leader you'll hear in our DVD says: "Little things can add up and become much bigger things until they impact whole parts of the workforce, or cause whole groups of people to feel discriminated against..." In 1972, MIT Ombudsperson Mary Rowe created a term to describe these behaviors: microinequities.

When microinequities accumulate to block contribution and cause employees to disengage, they transcend the personal and become a major business issue. Organizations today are realizing the gravity and pervasiveness of this problem and seeking guidance. In the past few months our own firm has received requests for consultation on this issue from organizations not only in the U.S., but in Europe, China and the Middle East. This program provides immediately accessible answers to eliminating microinequities.

The DVD program not only will introduce participants to the business case for eliminating microinequities, but demonstrate how to counter them with valuing behaviors we call micro-affirmations. Where microinequities kill off employee commitment and performance, micro-affirmations encourage contribution and unlock innovation, achievement, and high-performance team work.



## Little Things Mean Lot™ Learning Objectives:

The program helps participants understand:

- The impact of micro-messages on individuals and teams in the work place
- The business case for eliminating microinequities and furthering inclusion
- Things you can do individually as a leader and as a team member to eliminate microinequities
- How to use micro-affirmations to value others

When all is said and done, what counts most will be the actions you take as a result of this training. The program includes agendas and training activities that help you apply what you learn to situations you are facing at work both individually and in your teams. It includes simple practical advice on things you can do to stop microinequities and promote inclusion in your daily life both at home and at work.

## How to Use this Program

This DVD-based training program is designed to teach important skills that will have a positive impact on employee engagement, organizational performance, and inclusion. It includes advice for leaders, co-workers and teams. Potential uses for Little Things Mean A Lot™ include training in the areas of:

- Teamwork
- Communication
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Leadership Development

The bonus is that the same valuing behaviors for countering microinequities and practicing micro-affirmations will benefit your life and relationships outside of work.



## **Little Things Mean A Lot™ From Microinequities to Micro-affirmations**

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### **Why Little Things Do Mean A Lot**

**This program addresses the daily messages we send one another at work that cause us to feel**

- Included or excluded
- Engaged or discouraged
- Valued or overlooked

#### **It's a Wake Up Call**

- Because these messages are so often subtle, they've been largely overlooked by corporate organizations. Yet their impact is enormous.

#### **It's an Opportunity**

- The insights you get will improve your relationships at work, at home, and in the community. It will also show you how to make significant breakthroughs in your organization—by learning to engage and value people.



## Workshop Objectives

Recognize that the way we treat each other at work—the little things we do—has a **big impact**.

Start talking about this issue: define micro-messages, microinequities, and micro-affirmations.

Learn to respond effectively to negative messages (microinequities) that can undermine our success.

Equip you with simple tools and strategies you can use to encourage others and make the workplace more inclusive.

## Training Agenda

### Introduction

- Overview
- DVD opening: Little Things Mean A Lot
- Course Objectives
- Preview of Training Activities
- Participant Introductions
- Discussion Guidelines

### Why Sweat the Small Stuff: Business Case

- DVD screening - Chapter 1: Little Things Mean A Lot™  
Employees Discuss Examples and Impact of Microinequities
- Sharing in pairs: Microinequities Experiences/Reactions
- Lecture/Discussion  
Microinequities: A Diversity Challenge

### From Microinequities to Micro-affirmations

- DVD Chapter 2 - Part 1: A Team Is Derailed By Microinequities  
Dramatization: Microinequities Undermine Team Performance
- Exercise: Coaching the Characters



## Training Agenda (2)

### From Microinequities to Micro-affirmations (continued)

- DVD Screening - Chapter 2 - Part 2: The Team Gets Back On Track Using Micro-affirmations
  - Impact of Microinequities on Teamwork and Engagement
  - Solutions: Dramatization The Team Gets Back on Track
- De-briefing: What did character do right this time?

### Take home strategies

- DVD screening: Do's and Don'ts
- Action Planning
- Commitments

### Program Evaluation

## Introductions

Briefly interview a partner:

Name:

Where's the person from (job, location):

One small thing that makes your partner feel valued at work is:



## How We'll Treat One Another Here

### Confidentiality:

- “What goes on in here stays in here”
- During the program -  
feel free to share your own experiences with one another  
if you draw upon other people’s examples, do not use names
- After the program -  
feel free to share what you’ve learned, but not the personal stories  
you’ve heard.

### Respect:

- Turn off cell phones
- Return from breaks on time
- Other ground rules?

## Defining the “Small Stuff”

- **Micro-messages:** Signals we send to one another through our behavior. They are called “micro” because the behaviors are small, although their impact can be enormous.
- **Microinequities:** Micro-messages we send other people that cause them to feel devalued, slighted, discouraged, or excluded.
- **Micro-affirmations:** Micro-messages that cause people to feel valued, included, or encouraged.



## Discussion in Pairs

1. Share an example of a microinequity you've experienced that bothered you (it may or may not have been mentioned on the DVD).
2. What did you do in response to the microinequity (i.e., did you speak about it directly to the person, stay silent, complain to others....)?
3. Next, take turns discussing an example from the DVD that surprised you or gave you new insight.

## What Are Microinequities?

**Subtle messages that build up and have a big impact. Microinequities break connection**

- Tiny, pervasive, cumulative, discouraging
- Often semi-conscious
- Lurking just below the surface
- Built into an organization's culture
- Lead to damaged self-esteem, withdrawal
- Discourage creativity and risk-taking

## Microinequities: A Diversity Challenge

### A Diversity Challenge

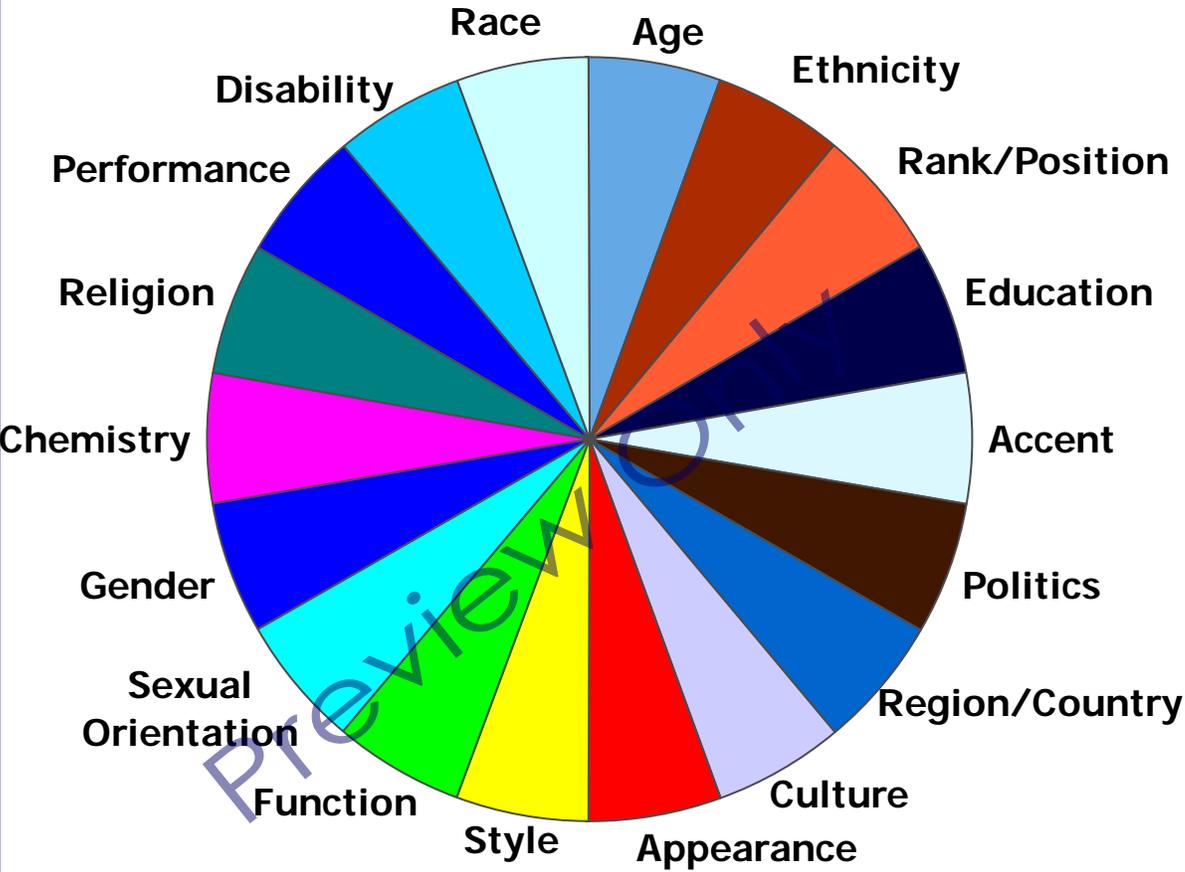
**We tend to value what is similar and reject what is different.**

- This is a pervasive, human tendency
- Recent research finds that it's "hard wired"
- It's even reflected in the English language: "like" means appreciate but also means "similar"

**As we create policies, procedures, and initiatives to encourage diversity and inclusion, people continue to use daily microinequities to wall out differences.**

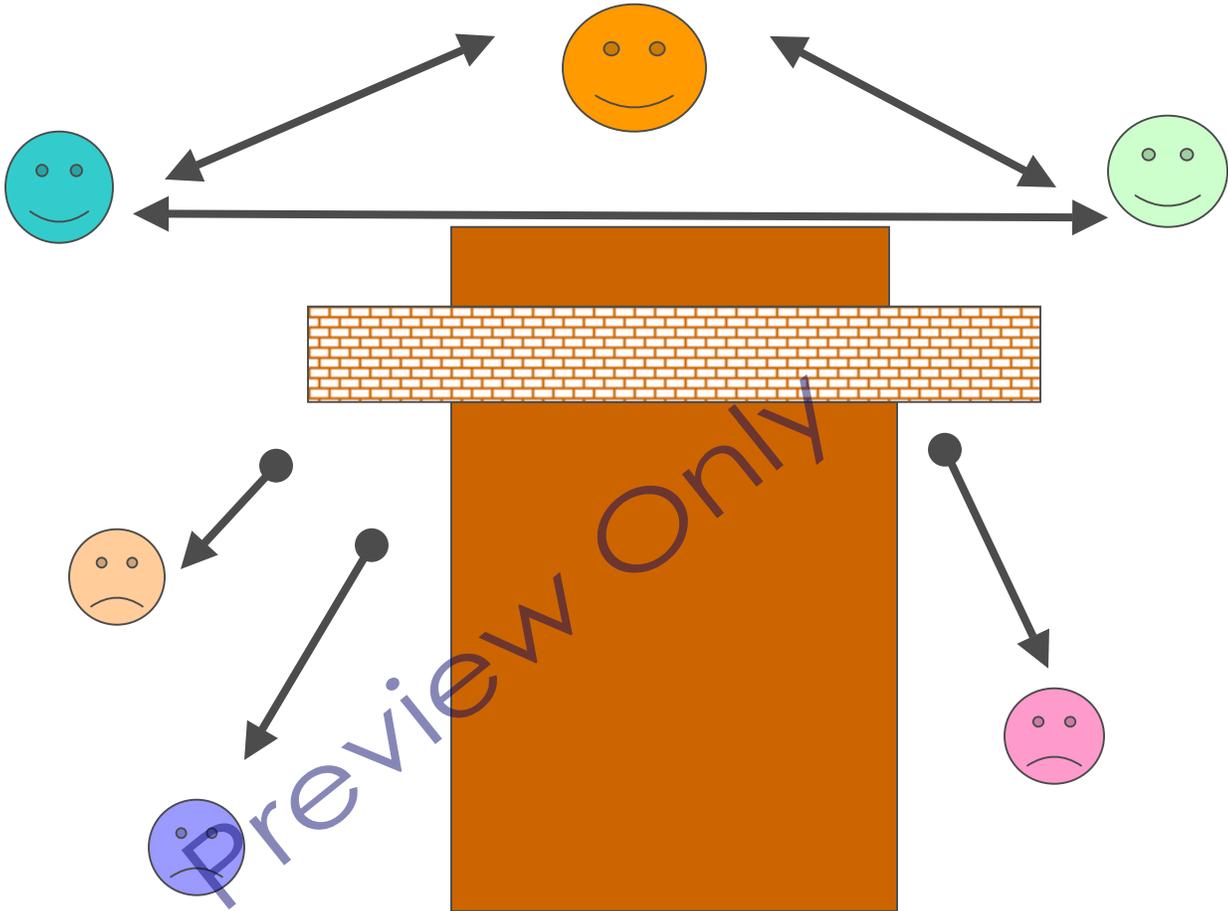


# People Use Microinequities to Exclude All Kinds of Differences





# Microinequities: Bricks in the Wall





# Team Meeting Characters

CHARLIE  
(Team Leader)

SALLY

BOB

MARGARET

ANDRE

SCOTT



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## A Team Meeting

- **Observe microinequities**
- **Notice impact on performance**
- **Prepare to coach the characters**

## Coaching the Characters: Small Group Exercise

I. What could each of these characters do before, during, or after this meeting to avoid microinequities or better manage them when they occur?

Suggestions for Margaret:

Suggestions for Scott:

Suggestions for Andre:

## Coaching the Characters: Small Group Exercise

II. What changes can Charlie undertake to be a more inclusive and engaging leader of the team?

Charlie can stop...

Charlie can start...



## Action Planning

What is something we can *stop doing* that causes people to feel excluded or overlooked in our organization?

What is something we can *start doing* to make people feel respected and valued in our organization?

## Promoting An Inclusive Climate

- Notice your reactions...
  - When am I listening and when am I shutting people out?
  - Who am I including and excluding?
  - Who am I encouraging and praising?
  - Whose contributions am I taking for granted?
  - Who do I consistently overlook?

## Promoting An Inclusive Climate

- Ask your colleagues and clients...
  - Do you feel...included...respected...valued?
  - What behaviors wall people out?
  - What behaviors encourage contribution?
  - What can I do differently?
  - What can the team do differently?



## Taking It Home: Personal Commitments

Please review the CARD “Avoiding Microinequities.”

### Identify

- One thing you will start
- One thing you will stop

Next, review the “Weaving a Web of Inclusion” CARD and select one question you will ask yourself and one thing you will ask others.

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## Course Evaluation

### Little Things Mean a Lot™: From Microinequities to Micro-affirmations

Session Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Session Facilitator(s) \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please rate this program overall with 1 being lowest rating and five being highest.

**1      2      3      4      5**

Please comment on your rating:

2. Assess your knowledge of microinequities and their effect **before** you attended the program:

**Poor      Average      Good      Very Good      Excellent**

3. Assess your knowledge of microinequities and their effect **after** taking the program.

**Poor      Average      Good      Very Good      Excellent**

### Comments

1. What did you appreciate most about the program?

2. What additional training do you recommend to promote inclusion here?

3. What is a personal commitment you will make as a result of the Little Things Mean a Lot™ program?

## Diversity in the Workplace . . . Go Ahead: Sweat the Small Stuff

by *Brigid Moynahan*

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*Adapted from an article written by Brigid Moynahan for The Conference Board*

**Microinequities may be small, but they pose a major issue for businesses today. Left unchecked, these inequities will accumulate and become a drag on employee productivity, corporate culture, and, ultimately, a company's ability to keep top talent.**

Things small and nearly undetectable may be undermining your corporate culture. On the surface, negative comments and subtle put-downs that create a divisive feeling among co-workers may seem unavoidable and inconsequential. Yet, like water over a rock, these exclusionary behaviors, or microinequities, have the power to slowly and methodically erode a person's motivation and sense of worth. The end result costs companies millions of dollars in low productivity, absenteeism, and poor employee retention.

### **Saturday Golf, Tuesday Lunches—What's the Harm?**

Most of us have probably (and unwittingly) engaged in some form of exclusionary behavior. Do you tend to "lunch" with the same people? Or meet with the same group after work? Have you ever rolled your eyes at one co-worker's "off the wall" comments, then found yourself praising that same idea when offered by someone you trust? Do you share certain information with close colleagues, but delay in telling others at the same level? Do you rely on the same trusted allies to get a tough job done rather than involving a broader, more diverse group to help? Do you golf with colleagues who look and act just like you? Ever deliberately leave someone off the email distribution?

These subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) behaviors we use to wall out differences are all examples of microinequities. What's the harm in always having lunch with Tom? Or "forgetting" to cc: a co-worker? The harm, of course, is felt by those left out - those who have been treated inequitably.

### **Valuing Differences: It's Harder Than You Think**

"We Value Differences" is the diversity mantra in most organizations. The problem is, we typically do not like differences. Behavioral studies show that we tend to bond with others who look and act like we do, and steer away from those who are different. We socialize with people who do what we do, think like we think, even look like we look. It's no coincidence that "like" means to be similar.

"Microinequities exert their influence both by walling out the 'different' person, and by making the person of difference less effective," explains Mary Rowe, Ombudsman and Adjunct Professor of Negotiation and Conflict Management at the MIT Sloan School of Management. Rowe "coined" the term microinequities and for the past three decades has worked to educate individuals on the topic.

Ask a departing employee why they chose to leave their job. You're likely to hear complaints about a devaluing manager or a feeling of "not fitting in" rather than talk of pay and benefits. That sense of exclusion, of being outside the "in crowd," results in employees devaluing their work, their contributions, and their connection to their team and employer. A recent survey of 5,000 U.S. households for The Conference Board conducted by TNSNFO, one of the TNS group of companies, found that only half of all

Americans today say they are satisfied with their jobs, down from nearly 60 percent in 1995. Just 52 percent of workers express satisfaction with their supervisors, down from 56 percent in 1995.

Another research report by The Conference Board (Voices of Experience: Mature Workers in the Future Workforce, Report R-1319) found that a quarter of older workers who said they planned to retire within five years were doing so because they were “not respected” in their current job. The report found that supervisory relationships were a key “derailment” factor for older workers.

And finally, a recent Gallup poll of over 1 million employees from a range of companies worldwide asked twelve key questions to determine a company’s success. Most of these questions could be boiled down to just one: Do employees feel valued at work by their teammates and supervisors? Companies that received a majority of “yes” answers had high employee morale, retention, productivity, and, consequently, profits.

Microinequities can lead to poor employee performance—when a manager has low expectations, explains Rowe, “employees have a tendency to deliver what is expected of them.”

### Starting Team Dialogue

**Having a dialogue with your team about behaviors that include or exclude people is one way to get people talking about how to build teamwork and eliminate microinequities. Here are some questions to get the dialogue started:**

- Do you feel ...included ...respected ...valued?
- What behaviors wall people out?
- What behaviors encourage contribution?
- What can we start, stop, do more of?
- What can I do differently?
- What can the team do differently?
- What can senior management do differently?

### Think About Your Behavior

Each of us sees the world from our own unique lens. We look for what is expected, and when we get something different, our first reaction is often to reject those differences using exclusionary behavior. The response may not be overly dramatic: You may fail to respond to the person’s point, or forget to include *him* in a meeting, or interrupt and change the subject when *she* is speaking.

“Microinequities can predispose a manager to even worse behavior,” adds Rowe. “We begin to see ‘through’ people and not recognize their contributions because they are different. It also may lead to overlooking someone who might be best qualified for promotion.”

Often, the approach we take at work is to tackle issues in the easiest, most efficient way possible. But, of course, that approach does not always deliver the best outcome - either for employees or the company. While it may be easier to get to a solution with five people who think exactly like you do than with five people who think differently, it may not be the best solution for your organization.

To prevent microinequities, we must first examine our personal lenses - the ones that may be clouding our judgment when it comes to assessing other people and ideas. For example, if you were raised in a household where talking back was frowned upon, you may dismiss as combative those who thrive on resolving issues through open debate. Or, if your experience tells you the best style of leadership is authoritative, then you may stereotype a co-worker as weak because they lead with a collaborative style. It’s likely you will fail to perceive that person’s leadership contributions. And if others in your company think like you do, the organization will probably end up limiting itself to one rigid style of leadership, creating a bias against differences that stops the advancement of diverse candidates.

## Changing Behaviors, Changing Business

Oftentimes it takes a serious threat (like a million dollar judgment) for businesses to take steps to eradicate a problem. Before there was a name for sexual harassment, people often thought they had to just “put up with it.” But once the behavior was given a name and legal definition, corporations began to sit up and take notice. Today, companies invest billions of dollars in sexual harassment training. Do a Google search for the term “sexual harassment” and you receive more than 4 million “hits.” Search the term “microinequities”, and only 500 hits appear. Awareness within corporations is just beginning to increase as a result of inclusion training as well as other initiatives.

Progressive companies like HSBC, JPMorgan Chase, The Chubb Corporation, Shell Oil, and Johnson & Johnson, are making microinequities training part of their global diversity efforts. These companies understand that microinequities are indiscriminate—that they occur in all cultures, between both sexes and within every age group. The good news/bad news is that because the behaviors are so common and widespread, everyone can relate. Unlike sexual harassment training, which tends to place the workforce majority (white males) in a defensive mode, microinequity training is more inclusive since, at some point, it is likely that you have been on both the giving and receiving end of exclusionary behavior.

## Feeling Like an Outsider? Take Action

To ensure people value and include you, it is important to get comfortable with a range of assertion strategies. When someone interrupts you, set a limit by simply telling the person you are not finished speaking. Left off a distribution list? Instead of allowing the action to erode your self-esteem, go to the person sending the message and ask to be included next time. Don't overreact. It is best to allow the person to “save face” by assuming the microinequity was unintentional. A small act of exclusion might not warrant a long and deep discussion. Often, it is simply enough to ask for a change in behavior. If the behavior was unintentional, the person will probably stop. On the other hand, if the person continues excluding you, more serious intervention may be required. You may want to take the person aside to iron out the issues in your professional relationship. If this doesn't work, you may need to seek outside support from a supervisor or HR manager.

## It's Time to Sweat

Microinequities may be small, but they pose a major issue for businesses today. Left unchecked, the inequities will continue to accumulate and become a drag on employee productivity, corporate culture, and, ultimately, a company's ability to keep top talent. And when that occurs, you'll be sweating big time.

# For more information...

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