

Interrupting Bias: The PALS Approach

PALS is a methodology to use when you hear someone say something that may be problematic or hurtful to a specific group of people or yourself. The major objective of this approach is to introduce a new perspective in a way that others can hear. PALS can be used as part of an intergroup dialogue or as a skill applied in your daily life.

P

Pause

Pause/Halt/Stop/Slow the Conversation.

Things you can say:

- “Wait a Second,”
- “Excuse me,”
- “Um, hold on a second...”

Interrupt the flow of the conversation to let the speaker know that you are interested in learning more about something they just said. Use your own instinct and language to pause the conversation when you hear something that you think might need to be addressed further.

A

Acknowledge/Ask

Acknowledge what the person is saying.

This sends the message that you are trying to make meaning out of what the person said, even if it is at odds with your own ideas. It shows respect and dignity in collaboration/dialogue. Also acknowledge how different messages reflect differences in groups social power/position and history. Practice affirmative inquiry which asks all participants to share in the learning experience.

- “What I hear you saying is...”
- Or: “I appreciate your thinking on this...”

Ask for clarification.

Get curious, make sure you understand what the person said.

- “That sounds important, can you say more?”

Let them know what you think you heard them say.

Maybe you misunderstood the person. Keep your voice calm. Sometimes that is all you need to do.

- “I think you said that gender defines who makes a good leader.”

L

Listen

Listen to what the person said.

Treat them with dignity.
What really matters to the person?

Generous listening conveys genuine curiosity, openness, and suspension of your own inner voice. Try to truly understand where the other person is coming from and listen harder when you disagree. Try to imagine the other person’s perspective.

S

Speak Your Truth/Share Stories

Speak your truth.

Be clear. Describe your objection.

Share your learning. Speak calmly.

There is something powerful in storytelling. While sharing factual data may be helpful, we know

that people are moved to open up and take other perspectives when they hear stories. You may share your own story, or share the story about someone you know.

- “I used to think that way too, but I have learned this is a stereotype and a person can be a good leader regardless of gender.”