

Beginner's guide to

Tough Conversations at Work

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Meet Inclusiv



INTRODUCTION

Why it matters

If recent events have taught us anything, it's that silence can no longer sustain us. (And if you really think about it, did silence ever work?) Building truly inclusive workplaces requires us to be outspoken, and to come together for conversations that matter. Shifting culture requires opening the door for all voices to be heard, not just the squeaky wheels.

We've all seen it on our journeys to create inclusive, diverse and sustainable cultures at work:



The one-time town hall where only a few individuals are brave enough to speak up.



The company training that seemed great in the moment but didn't result in behavior change.



The team dialogues with good intentions that went off the rails.

Too much time is spent shouting, arguing and debating rather than listening and truly understanding each other.

How do we hear everyone, rather than just those with the loudest voices?

How do we ensure that people listen, instead of argue?

And why does it matter?

THE BOTTOM LINE

These are the facts



Out of top 5 skills managers can improve, cultivating a positive and inclusive team culture is #4.¹



Companies that champion diversity have a 25% higher chance of financially outperforming those that don't.²

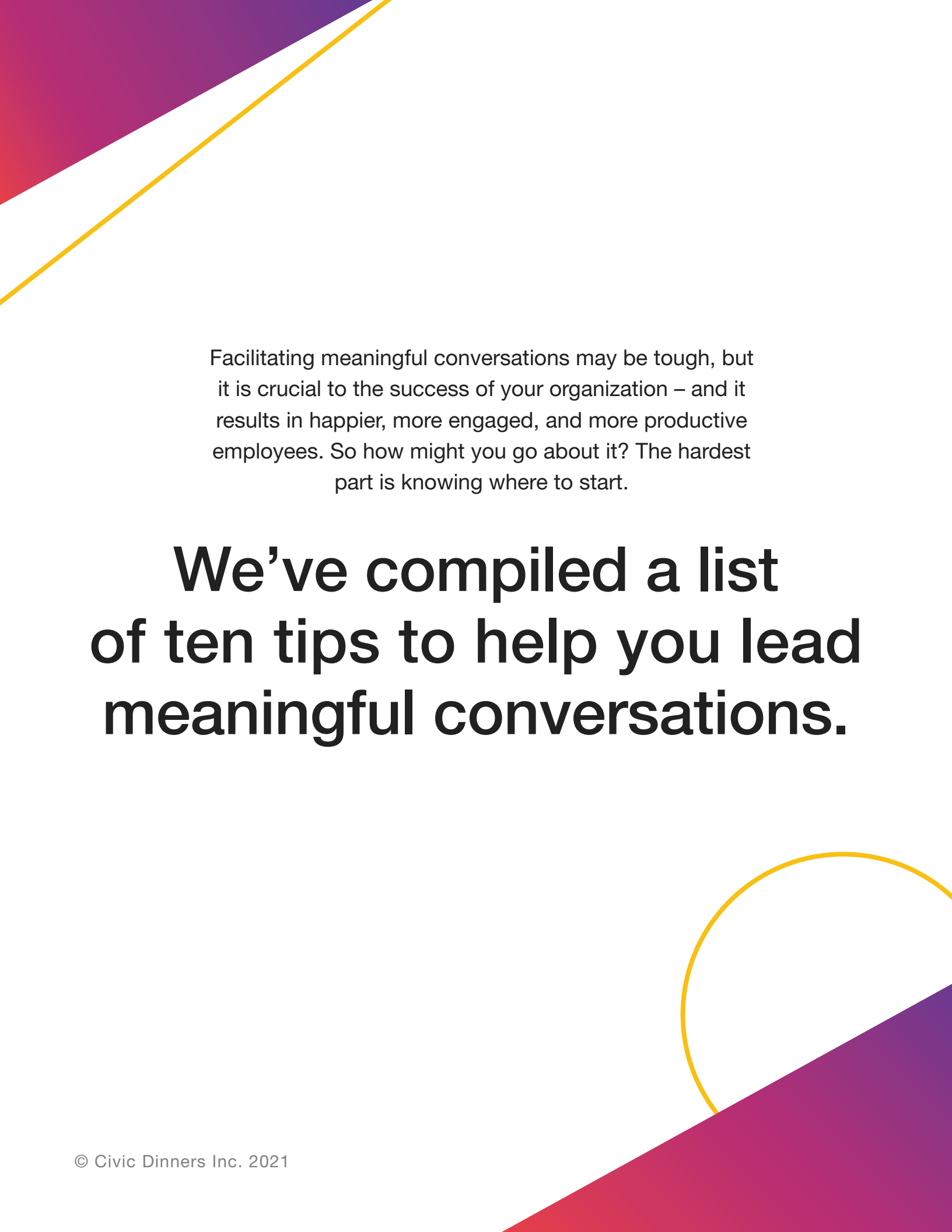


61% of employees have negative sentiments about how inclusive their companies are.²



¹<https://www.shrm.org/about-shrm/press-room/press-releases/pages/survey-84-percent-of-us-workers-blame-bad-managers-for-creating-unnecessary-stress.aspx>

²<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>



Facilitating meaningful conversations may be tough, but it is crucial to the success of your organization – and it results in happier, more engaged, and more productive employees. So how might you go about it? The hardest part is knowing where to start.

We've compiled a list of ten tips to help you lead meaningful conversations.

Define what success looks like

It is much easier to measure results when you have clearly-defined goals and a pre-established way to track outcomes. Work with your team to identify which issues you want to use conversations to address, and establish measurement specifications to track progress.

Here are questions to help you think about what success looks like:

- **Impact — What one thing do you want to see as a result of these conversations?**

For example, it might be:

- Increase in employee engagement scores
- Increase in positive sentiment
- Increase in sense of community
- Increase in confidence & morale

The key is to pick one main metric and design a way to track it.

- **Preparation — How will you prepare moderators or facilitators?**

- What trainings, if any, will you provide?
- Will moderators have a host guide or script to follow?

- **Participation — How will we measure participation?**

- Is leadership attending?
- What percentage of those invited attend?
- And does that percentage grow over time?

- **Feedback — What do you do with the feedback you receive?**

- How will you capture qualitative feedback & ideas?
- Where will you document the ideas shared?

- **Transparency — How will you reflect key insights learned?**

- Will leadership be informed of key insights learned?
- Who will be accountable for following up?

Identify your stakeholders

It is crucial to know who your stakeholders are so that you can best tailor the discussions to meet their specific needs. In some cases, you might have different groups of stakeholders that you plan to bring together for different conversations. Here are some questions to think about:



What identities are represented in your organization?



Who will participate in these conversations?



Who will reap the benefits of these conversations?

Once you know who you want to bring, you can think about how to communicate what's in it for them by engaging them in the process:

What topics are most interesting to them?
What would they like to see come out of these conversations?

Common intentions from Inclusiv conversations include things like:

- Creating a stronger sense of belonging among colleagues
- Creating a safe space to hear different perspectives
- Learning new insights and sharing lived experiences
- Getting to know colleagues on a much deeper level
- Walking away with a better understanding of the issue
- Feeling empowered to take action personally and professionally

Create a brave space by implementing ground rules

Clearly stating ground rules before the discussion ensures that all guests participate in the conversation with the same baseline of respectful engagement. Here are the ground rules we believe are fundamental to open and honest conversation:



Be curious.

Be willing to be uncomfortable as you listen to others.



Be vulnerable.

Acknowledge the courage it takes to share one's story.



Be authentic.

Speak from lived experience and suspend judgment.



NUMBER 4

Use impartial language

When organizing a conversation on a potentially divisive topic, it is crucial that you do not isolate potential guests by using biased or offensive language. Make sure that all wording related to the event – from invitations to questions asked – is unbiased. There is power in bringing people together with a common goal of understanding, not necessarily agreement.




NUMBER 5

Kick off with relevant ice-breakers

There's an old saying that goes: "You haven't arrived until you have spoken." Icebreakers (brief verbal exercises meant to relieve inhibitions or other tensions) set the tone for your guests to be vulnerable and open, ultimately allowing them to get the most out of each conversation. Consider opening the conversation by asking guests to quickly introduce themselves and share a personal tidbit that relates to the topic.

NUMBER 6

Prioritize personal narratives



Personal stories are perhaps our greatest asset in the conversation space. When we take the rhetoric and division out of the game, we are left with the lived experiences that make each of us who we are. Encourage your guests to speak from experience, but be careful not to tokenize any one identity. This is what separates a debate from an inclusive conversation, as it's difficult to argue with someone's personal story.



NUMBER 7

Ensure everyone has equal time to speak

Naturally, some guests will be more vocal than others; however, it is crucial to invite introverts and more soft-spoken guests to participate equally in the conversation. Guests reach a new level of psychological safety when they know their voices will be heard, and this ultimately leads to a more productive and constructive discussion. Perhaps run the conversation round-robin style, where each guest has equal time to speak, and encourage guests to call on the next person when they are done speaking.



Create Brave
Spaces



Engage Diverse
Voices



Build Trust &
Community



Co-Create a
Better Future

NUMBER 8

Make sure your conversation is structured

Structured conversations – with one main focus, predetermined questions and delegated facilitators who are trained to lead this type of discussion – ensure that guests stay on track. When the conversation remains aligned with its original purpose, the group has a better chance at identifying productive outcomes. The most effective conversations are the ones that take guests on a journey – when guests are encouraged to share personal stories as well as challenges, idea and strategies for the future. People will walk away feeling hopeful and empowered with the knowledge and empathy needed to take action.

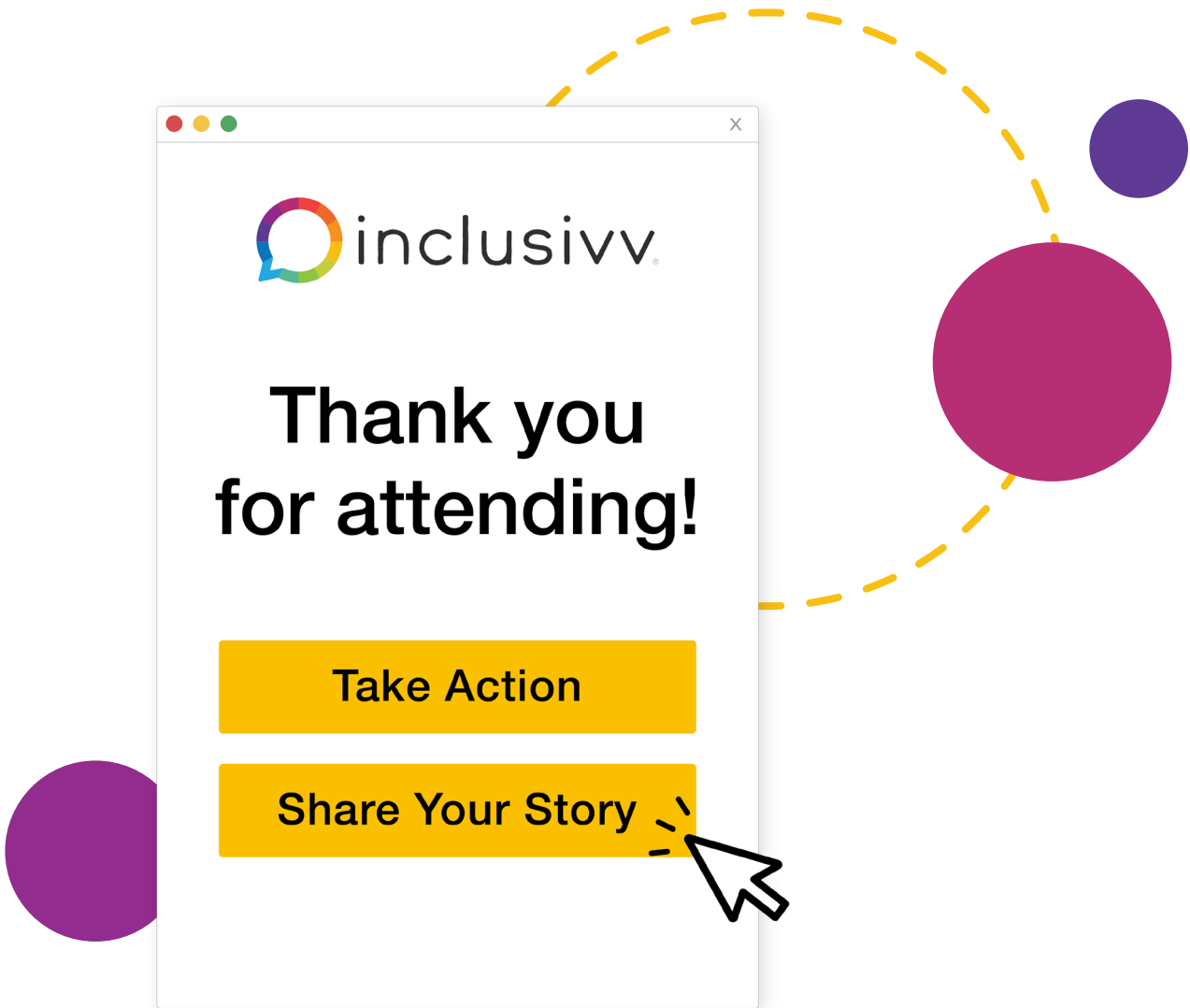
Designing intentional and productive conversations is hard. Check out page 18 to learn more about how we can help!

NUMBER 9

End with a clear call to action

If your conversation is successful – and, by using this guide, we are confident it will be! – guests will leave feeling fired up and ready to take action. End the discussion with a clear call to action that empowers guests to take what they have learned in the conversation and apply it in their communities.





NUMBER 10

Follow-up with appreciation

Be sure to send a follow-up with next steps and ways people can continue the conversation, share their feedback with you, or take specific actions. Follow-up can make a big difference in simply acknowledging the bravery that people showed just by showing up. Thank them for having the courage to engage in deep dialogue, and invite them to continue these conversations. These should not feel like one-off events, but rather part of a practice and routine.

But it's not easy

Even with these tips, we understand that facilitating tough conversations is... tough. Your company or organization may not have the bandwidth to run the process from scratch. You may feel under-equipped to do the preliminary legwork: conducting in-depth topic research, formulating productive, unbiased questions, planning and executing group events. Many obstacles may deter you from delving deeper into the conversation space.





M E E T

inclusivv[®]



Our approach

Our approach to meaningful engagement is built with community organizing principles focused on four main pillars:

- **Awareness**

Awareness – of the issues impacting your employees, of the true state of your workplace, etc. – is the non-negotiable preliminary step in creating lasting change. We cannot change what we cannot see. Therefore, our approach meets leaders where they are on their journey, and helps guide stakeholders with educational content, inspiring materials and awakening research that connects the heart and mind to the issue.

- **Understanding**

We believe that true understanding only happens through dialogue, and ideally dialogue with those with different backgrounds and perspectives. Too many people have been only exposed to those with similar experiences and therefore our worldviews can become limited. Our model of structured conversation with diverse voices and equal time to share ensures respectful dialogue where everyone benefits from hearing one another. The result is deeper understanding and a stronger sense of community.

- **Commitment**

Once people feel connected to each other and have a greater understanding of the complexity of the issue, there is a stronger desire for action. But before jumping to action, there has to be a personal commitment to change behavior. Our model embeds personal empowerment into the conversation design and the follow-up, so that everyone can choose how they want to play a role in solving the challenge or building the vision they helped create.

- **Action**

We believe that inclusive conversations create meaningful connection and meaningful connection creates lasting change. All of this to say, conversations are only the first step. We give you the tools you need to act on your commitments, with recommended actions and automatic follow-up so that participants can implement the changes needed to transform your organization, their communities, and the world.

**Our four-point approach manifests
in our award-winning conversation structure:**



Conversation
Host



Small Group
Gathering



Structured
Conversation



Equal Time
to Share



Shared
Experiences

In case you were wondering,

this is what we're all about.

Inclusivv works with DEI leaders at top organizations to drive deeper connections and ignite change through structured conversations. Creating inclusive cultures is hard, and we provide the tools you need to navigate challenging and important topics with confidence, helping you create real connection and understanding.

We're proud to partner with brands, universities and communities as they work to move the needle on diversity, equity and inclusion with internal and external audiences.

FACEBOOK



VANDERBILT
Owen Graduate School of Management



THE *Coca-Cola* CO.
USA

It's time to be Inclusivv.

Want to learn more? [Schedule time](#) with one of our strategic account executives today!





Conclusion

Conversations don't have to be argumentative, tense, and divisive. Structured conversations create connection and bring more voices to the table, engaging more people and leading to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and stronger communities who trust their local leaders.

We believe including every voice helps create a more inclusive, just, and sustainable world. **The secret to igniting real change is simply starting the conversation.**