How to handle being the only one in the room

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for Women with Disabilities
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Meeting agenda approx 90 mins

Member updates 15 mins

Watch video 8 mins

Icebreaker 10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Describe the Only experience 15 mins
- Activity 2: Affirm your accomplishments 20 mins
- Activity 3: Identify your network 15 mins

One Action 3 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 5 mins on member updates
- Skip the icebreaker
**Getting started**

**Member updates**

| 2 mins or less per member | 15-20 mins depending on group size |

Go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It’s OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

**Watch video**  8 mins

**Icebreaker**  10 mins

Being the only woman with disabilities in a room can be an especially difficult experience. Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Then, go around the room and share your answers (1 minute each).

- How does it feel when you’re not the only person of your identity at your workplace?
- What would your ideal workplace look like?
As we’ve just heard, Onlys are more likely to have challenging experiences at work. For “double Onlys”—for example, for someone who is the only person with disabilities and the only woman in the room—the experience can be even worse. In the following activity, the moderator will read a list of experiences that are common when you’re the only woman with disabilities in the room at work. Each time you hear something that you’ve experienced, raise your hand:

- You felt under pressure to perform
- You felt on guard
- You felt left out
- You felt closely watched
- You felt that your actions would reflect on people like you
- You experienced microaggressions, such as having your competence questioned or being mistaken for someone more junior

Have everyone share a brief reflection on their experience (1 minute or less per person).
Activity 2: Affirm your accomplishments  

Taking care of yourself on challenging days is crucial. One way to do this is to create a folder highlighting your accomplishments, both big and small. Your folder may include examples of your best work, positive feedback from your colleagues, or even your own reflections on your achievements.

Take the next 15 minutes to reflect on your accomplishments at work and document them in your achievements folder. You can use any format that works for you, such as a PDF document, the Notes app on your phone, or even a physical notebook. The goal is to create an accessible document that you can refer to on challenging days to remind yourself of your capabilities and successes!

To get yourself started, follow the prompts below and write down:

- The biggest challenges you’ve faced and overcome at work
- Your educational attainments, languages, technical skills, and professional expertise that you worked hard to acquire
- Times when you negotiated for something and received it
- The biggest projects you’ve finished at work over your career
- Any positive feedback you’ve received in the past year

Then, go around the Circle and have each person share one item from their list that they’re proud of (up to 1 minute per person). Applaud each person for their achievement.
Activity 3: Identify your network  
15 mins

As we heard in today’s video, talking with another person of your identity about the challenges you both experience at work can be helpful and cathartic.

- Take 5 minutes to brainstorm a list of people you know who share your identity as a woman with disabilities and work in your field.
- You may want to focus on people whose type of disability is close to yours. Your experience at work can vary a lot depending on whether your disability is visible or invisible, or whether it’s physical, neurological, or relates to your mental health.
- The people on your list can be friends, family members, someone in your network, or even members of your Lean In Circle. You can also add organizations and online groups for people of your identity in your field or in the workplace more broadly to this list.

Then, go around the Circle and have each person share what they are looking for in a connection and who they have on their list. After each person shares, leave space for the group to offer suggestions on additional people or organizations to reach out to.

“I’ve experienced being the only person of my identity both at work and from a very early age. As a young child, I was in a regular classroom from kindergarten on. People made me feel like an outsider as a person with a physical disability. My mom and dad always encouraged me to consider the source of the negative or insensitive comments. My mom would say, ‘Is this someone who really understands you and knows you as a person?’ And if not, then shake the dust off your feet and move on. Especially if I've taken the time to educate them and they're still not recognizing me as a person that has something to contribute.”

Nadia Mossburg, senior manager, public sector, Florida, USA (she/her)
This week, take a few minutes to identify one person from Activity 3 to reach out to.

- Circle or highlight their name on your list.
- Commit to reaching out to them to set up a one-on-one coffee chat, lunch date, or other activity where you can talk about your experiences at work.

Congratulations on a great meeting!