



How Asian women can respond to microaggressions

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide

The
Women
at Work
Collection

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Meeting agenda

approx 90 mins

Member updates

15 mins

Watch video

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Reviewing strategies
- Activity 2: Workshopping responses
- Activity 3: Mitigating the impact

15 mins

15 mins

15 mins

One Action

10 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
- Spend 10 mins on activity 1 and activity 3

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

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Read aloud to the group: I'm going to read a list of some common microaggressions faced by Asian women in non-Asian workplaces. Raise your hand if this has happened to you:

- Someone questioned your abilities or judged you as less than capable at your job
- You were ignored or spoken over in a meeting
- You were treated like a child or mistaken for a more junior employee
- You were left out of social events or meetings due to your race or ethnicity
- Someone talked negatively about people who share your background
- Someone else got credit for your idea or work
- Someone asked you, "Where are you really from?"
- You felt judged for your accent or manner of speaking
- Someone mistook you for another person of your same race or ethnicity
- You were told you're not leadership material or passed over for a promotion to a leadership position
- Your achievements at work were ignored or glossed over

Continue activity on next page

Icebreaker (continued)

10 mins

- You were automatically assigned more “submissive” roles like taking notes or office housework

Discuss icebreaker

- What did you learn from seeing other people’s responses?
- Did anything surprise you?
- How did you feel about the experiences your fellow Circle members shared?
- Have you experienced any kinds of disrespect at work that aren’t on the list?



“‘Where are you from?’ is a very common question. ‘Where are you really from?’ versus asking me about my heritage. How I respond depends on my relationship with the individual. It depends on whether they're genuinely curious, or they’re being flippant and making me feel like a perpetual foreigner.

Sue-Ann Hong, president and CEO, non-profit, Georgia, USA
(she/her)

Activity 1: Reviewing strategies

15 mins

Read aloud to the group: The kinds of disrespect we just talked about can be a common experience for many Asian women in non-Asian workplaces. Your experiences will vary depending on whether you have East, Southeast, or South Asian ancestry, but there are some themes and stereotypes that come up time and again.

Before we dive into this activity, know that it's always okay to **not** respond to a microaggression. The burden shouldn't always be on Asian women to advocate for change. It's fine to just focus on staying safe and taking good care of yourself. But if you do want to respond, research shows it can make you feel more empowered and in control.

Here are the main research-based strategies for responding:

- **State the facts** (e.g., tell someone your job title or qualifications in a simple, direct way and then move the conversation on)
- **Ask a question** that encourages the person to question their assumptions (e.g., researchers recommend asking, "What makes you say that?")
- **Follow up privately** with the person later, so that you have a chance to prepare.

Discuss as a group:

- Which of these responses have you used in real life?
- How effective were they?
- Are there any other types of response to workplace disrespect that you would recommend?
- Which responses do you think would be most helpful to use in the future?

Activity 2: Workshopping responses

15 mins

- Discuss as a group: How has the experience of workplace microaggressions impacted you?
- Go around the room and have everyone share with the group what happened and what they wish they'd done differently.
 - Then, if you feel comfortable, ask other group members for their advice—what would they say in that situation?



“As an Asian American, I do experience microaggressions at work. I once sat down with a new group of colleagues and I said, ‘Hello,’ to my neighbor and she says, ‘Sarah, I just met you. You work in finance.’ What had just happened is she confused me with another Asian woman. And so I want to say to other non-Asians, take the time to get to know us. If you need to spend a bit more time so you can tell us apart, that would be much appreciated.”

Jolene Jang, Asian inclusivity speaker, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, USA (she/her)

Activity 3: Mitigating the impact

15 mins

- Discuss as a group: How has the experience of workplace microaggressions impacted you?
 - Have your physical and mental health been affected?
- What strategies have helped mitigate the impact (e.g., talking to others, reminding yourself of your worth, basic self-care)?
 - What does self-care in your professional life look like? What does it look like in your personal life?
- Consider setting up a group chat with others in this group to share stories, advice, empathy, and validation (e.g., a Slack channel or WhatsApp group).
 - Research shows there are tremendous mental health benefits in talking to others who share important aspects of your identity about any disrespect you face at work.
- The “model minority myth” is the idea that Asian Americans are universally hard-working and successful, and is sometimes used to pit us against other racial or ethnic groups. Does this ring true for you? How has the model minority myth shown up in your professional life?
 - As a result, Asian American women may feel it’s more difficult to acknowledge or talk about the bias or disrespect they experience. Is this something you struggle with? What has helped you with that struggle?

One Action

10 mins

- Think about one strategy you could use to mitigate the impact of workplace microaggressions in your own life (e.g., self-care or setting up a group chat to share stories).
- Commit to implementing this strategy the next time you experience workplace bias or disrespect.
- Share your commitment with your Circle (spending 1 minute or less per member).
- When you meet next time, you can check in and discuss how well the strategy worked.

Congratulations on a great meeting!

Notes

Notes