



***5 WAYS  
YOU CAN  
MANAGE  
INDIVIDUAL  
DIFFERENCES***



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# 5 WAYS YOU CAN MANAGE INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Just consider for a moment all the ways you are different and diverse from everyone else around you. Your gender, age, culture, education, peer group, appearance, religion, experiences, personality, parents, siblings, mental toughness, resilience, knowledge, confidence, interests, hobbies, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, mental health, physical health, fixed or growth mindset, values.....etc etc. I could go on and fill a dozen pages with all the ways we are different from each other.

But I could also fill pages with all the ways we are similar (or even the same) to each other as well. We all have fears, challenges, desires, have a need to "fit in", want friends, want be listened to, get emotional, doubt ourselves, strive to find meaning and purpose for our lives, want to find love, want to feel secure, fear rejection, want to be happy..... etc etc etc.

**Yes we have differences, but we are basically the same in so many ways.** So why is it so hard for us to get along with each other and manage our differences? Conflict is normal, essential and very manageable. There are even significant benefits to conflict and disagreement. Differences are inevitable, but I think we also have an opportunity to recognise what we want and how we can achieve this without us making a judgement that we are right and "they" are wrong. **You never know how similar your emotions, goals, needs etc. actually are to another.**

So... how do we manage these individual differences and allow our relationships to thrive?

## 1.

### Consider your Positive Intention

Ask yourself, "What is my positive intent in interacting and having a conversation with this person. Be clear and focused. If you enter a conversation with a negative intent, "They need to know what a negative impact they have on others"- to belittle, tell them they are wrong, be negative, criticise etc, then you are likely to get a very poor result to your interaction. But if you determine your Positive Intent, for example "My positive intention is to give them feedback to allow them to build positive relationships with peers", then you are much more likely to enter a conversation with the potential for a positive outcome which strengthens the relationship, not breaks it down.

### Find any common ground

Often it is easy to see all the ways someone is different to you, but ask yourself, "How is this person's goals the same as mine?" Are you both looking for acceptance, to just have someone to listen, do you both have a fear of losing control or a desire for security. If you can find some commonality to your relationship, interaction or problem, then there is a much greater opportunity for success and strengthening of a relationship.

## 2.

## 3.

### What can I learn?

Our diversity is our strength. Have you ever been stuck on a project and taken it to a colleague to let them look at it, only to be struck by an "Aha" moment when they point out the obvious thing you've been missing? We all see things through different eyes and everybody's lens is a very valuable commodity. So before you jump to conclusions... listen, seek to understand. It just may provide you with valuable insights you had never considered before.



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## 4. **Understand your own behaviour and its impact on others.**

So often we look to other people to see what they are doing “wrong”, why they don’t “get it”, and ask “what is their problem?” But how often do we turn that magnifying glass on ourselves. After all, the first two cornerstones of Emotional Intelligence are Self-Awareness and Self-Management. So ask yourself... “What is my behaviour and how does it impact others?”

## **Embrace the difference.**

Individual differences are actually such a huge strength in a family, community, organisation or country. Our diversity allows us to consider different points of view, be innovative, achieve greater levels of success, have greater choices and have a growth mindset.

## 5.

So the next time you are challenged with individual differences, create yourself some space to listen, put your assumptions on hold, look for options, recognise your own impact and ask questions with a positive intent.

**Think of the possibilities.....**

## MICHELLE BAKJAC



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