



# Microaggressions

## What They Are and What To Do About Them

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### Julie Dower:

Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to our webinar. First, I just wanted to thank you for taking the time to join us today. My name is Julie Dower. I am the Marketing Communications Manager here at Vensure Employer Services and I will be your host over the next hour. We will be spending the next little bit of time together, diving into microaggressions, understanding what they are and what to do about them. We'll be covering these relevant topics and close with a panelist Q&A and we'll do our best to answer all questions. But we might not get to everybody, so we will respond on an individual basis after the session. Just a reminder that this webinar is being recorded and that we will share that recording with registrants after the session concludes. This session and the PowerPoint will be available for download also on the Vensure website. This webinar is brought to you by Vensure Employer Services and all of our partners across the country. Vensure Employer Services is the leader of 20 plus PEO partners. Our clients are in all 50 states and generate most of the questions that we'll be answering for you today. Our agenda for today's session includes the definition of microaggressions, examples of microaggressions, why microaggressions are harmful, why people use microaggression, what people can do about microaggressions, and then that Q&A at the end. So we are thrilled to have Robin Paggi joining us as our panelist today. Robin is a seasoned human resources practitioner specializing in training on topics such as harassment prevention, communication, team building and supervisory skills. OK, Robin, over to you.

### Robin Paggi:

We know that aggression is behavior that intends to harm another person, either physically or mentally. We know aggressive behavior can range from murder to assault to name calling. And remember the saying that sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me. I've no idea who came up with that, but they were wrong. Of course,

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words can hurt and are used to hurt people at times. So that's aggression. What is a microaggression? The term was coined by psychiatrist and Harvard University professor Chester Pearce in 1970 and he came up with this word to describe the insults and the dismissals which he regularly witnessed nonblacks doing against black people. So by the early twenty first century, the term had expanded just from describing what often happens to black people to the casual degradation of any minority group, including LGBTQ people, people living in poverty, people who are disabled. So a microaggression can be verbal, non-verbal, and environmental. And I'll give you examples of those in just a moment. Basically, they're slights, they're snubs, they're insults. They're just little picking at people to a certain degree, but it's very casual. Sometimes they're intentional, but a lot of times they're not intentional. What they communicate is hostility. They're derogatory, they're negative messages. And again, it's mostly targeting people based on a marginalized group membership. So people who are in a smaller group as opposed to the dominant group. But what they try to do is to communicate to people that they are inferior. And that's the main problem with them, is that these little slights and snubs just make people feel like I'm not part of the group. And what is a problem with not being part of the group? Well, we are social creatures. We need to be a part of the group. If we're not, we die. Now when we are all running around in tribes, that was especially evident is that if you are not part of the group, you are likely to get eaten by something captured by somebody. Something bad is probably going to happen to you. And so that's one of the reasons that we are so inclined to be a part of the group. Now, can being outside of the group hurt us now, even kill us now? Absolutely. If we are not connected to people, it affects our physical, psychological, and emotional health. And people who are disconnected are going to die earlier. It's one of the things about this pandemic of people not being connected to people. Mental health, that is suffering tremendously. I gave a webinar about that some months ago and we've got it recorded in case you'd like to listen to it. But people's mental health is definitely taking a hit during this time, mostly because of the isolation that most of us are experiencing. I'm going to the grocery store today after this just so I can get out of the house and be around people. So that's how bad it is. Now, let's go to some examples of microaggressions.

So, again, microaggressions typically targeted minority groups, and so here are some examples of racial microaggressions. An Asian-American born and raised in the United States is complimented for speaking good English. So the hidden message is you're not really an American. You are a perpetual foreigner in your own country. And that's an example of a verbal microaggression. A white woman clutches her purse as a black or Latino man approaches or passes by and the hidden message is you and your group are criminals, and that's an example of non-verbal microaggression. A black couple is seated at a table in the restaurant next to the kitchen, despite there being other empty and more desirable tables located in other parts of the restaurant and the hidden message is you are a second class citizen and undeserving of first class treatment, and that's an example of environmental microaggression. Gender. This one is a cliché at this point, but it's still true according to research. An assertive female manager is called a bitch while her male counterpart is described as a strong leader and message is women should be passive and allow men to be the decision makers. A female physician wearing a stethoscope is mistaken as a nurse, hidden message is women should occupy nurturing and not decision-making roles. Women are less capable than men. Whistles or catcalls are heard from men as a woman walks down the street hidden message is your body and appearance is for the enjoyment of men. You are a sex object. Sexual orientation example is a person uses the term gay to describe a movie they didn't like. "Oh it was so gay." Hidden message is being gay is associated with negative and undesirable characteristics. Two gay men hold hands in public and are told not to flaunt their sexuality. Hidden message, same-sex displays of affection are abnormal and offensive. Keep it private and to yourselves, don't push it in my face. Religion. When bargaining over the price of an item, a store owner tells the customer, "Don't try to Jew me down," that message is Jews are stingy and money grubbing. Or a coworker is describing their religious beliefs and someone says, I don't know how you can believe such things, meaning what you believe is silly or stupid. Age. An older employee is told, "OK, Boomer." Hidden message, you're old and out of it. A younger employee is called "Kid" by older employees. Hidden message, you're too young to know anything. Disability. A person talks very

loudly to a person who is blind, hidden message. A person with a disability is defined as lesser in all aspects of their physical functioning. So those are just some examples of the different kind of slights and snubs and offhand casual remarks that are so hurtful.

And find out why microaggressions are so harmful. Now, a number of scholars and social commentators have poooh poohed the concept of microaggressions, probably because they haven't been on the receiving end of it. And as a matter of fact, I asked my husband yesterday if he knew what a microaggression is. He said, yes, it's little things that people are overly sensitive about. So I reminded him of how being on the receiving end of microaggressions have hurt me. You might have noticed from my picture at the beginning of the slides here that I have different colored eyes and if you didn't notice it, pay closer attention next time. My right eye is mostly brown and my left one is blue. And over the years so many people have made unflattering comments when they've met me, like your eyes are so weird, that I've become a bit sensitive about it, and I braced myself to be embarrassed when I meet people and they notice my eyes for the first time. I happened to mention this to a client and when I arrived at her facility to train a group of employees for the first time, she said to me on the way to the training room, "I know how sensitive you are about your eyes. So I told everyone not to say anything about them." Well, thank you and you could have gone without saying that to me. Now I know that she did not mean to offend me. Actually, she was trying to be very helpful. But it was just one more little incident that made me feel outside of the larger group. And that's what microaggression friends do. They make people feel inferior, isolated, disconnected with the majority. Now, a good friend of mine tells me I'm too sensitive and I should just make a joke when people say things that hurt. And I told my friend that a lifetime of being told you look weird takes a toll on a person. Fortunately for me, having different colored eyes has not affected my standard of living, health care, education or employment, not to my knowledge anyway, but that's why microaggressions are so harmful. Research indicates that microaggressions not only have a powerful impact on the psychological well-being of marginalized groups making people feel inferior, etc., they affect their standard of living by creating inequities in health care, education and employment. And I'm going to give you some examples now. Health care. People who experience racial microaggressions, according to a study, were more likely than those who would not to report mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and poor behavioral control. So their health deteriorated as a result of receiving microaggressions. But when they went into a health care facility, their treatment there was unequal to that of the majority group. For example, white providers tend to speak faster, dominate conversations, and have shorter visits with people of color than they do with white patients. These providers don't bother to establish rapport, which affects patient satisfaction with the provider, which then makes them not want to go see the health care provider, which means they put off taking care of health issues, which affects their health and education. Lots of examples. And in education, for example, failing to learn to pronounce or continuing to mispronounce the names of students after they have corrected the teacher. Now, I used to teach speech at college at the college level, and I remember the first day of class, one time going through everybody's names, trying to call roll and mispronouncing people's names. And I remember mispronouncing a young woman's name and she corrected me and she said, "It's Eurydice." And I said, "Oh, that sounds hard. Why don't I call you Yurie?" And she said, "Why don't you call me Eurydice?" I learned how to say her name in one second. And so that's the thing. If we really want to learn how to pronounce people's names, we will. Other things in education. Teachers scheduling test and project due dates on religious or cultural holidays. Got to show up at school in order to turn it in. When it's a religious holiday, you might be doing other things. Calling on, engaging, and validating one gender, class, or race to students while ignoring other students during class. Expecting students of any particular group to represent the perspectives of everybody else of their race, gender, etc., in discussions or debates. Excluding students from accessing student activities due to high financial cost. You can't participate because you can't afford it. And ignoring student to student microaggressions even when the interaction is not course-related. Ironically, in this morning's paper in my hometown, there was an article about accusing the high school district of doing exactly that. Little bit more than that, ignoring sexual harassment that students commit against other students. Now, the school district,

of course, is denying it, saying that's not the truth. But there is a whole lot of social media postings describing otherwise. And certainly inequality in employment because of microaggressions. Now I mentioned some previously, but here's just a couple more in employment. A microaggression is having a Christmas party instead of a holiday party. Now, I have been asked by clients, is having a Christmas party against the law? No, it is not against the law. What employers may do is whatever religion they are, they may promote their religion in the workplace if they want to. And if they are somebody who celebrates Christmas, they can have a Christmas tree, they can have a Christmas party, they can have Christmas carols, they can do whatever they want. When it becomes illegal, is when they force employees to participate and penalize them when they do not. So having a Christmas party and calling it that is not against the law. Now, why do HR professionals such as myself encourage employers to have holiday parties? So it won't be exclusive, so everyone will feel included because it's a microaggression. If you don't celebrate Christmas, something's wrong with you is what the message is, whether that's intentional or not. Another example in employment of a microaggression is having people who need to pray during the day, pray in the closet. You really don't have a private place for them other than that, so they can go in there. So those are just some examples of microaggression.

Why do people use microaggressions? Well, they're often unintentional, and perhaps when I was listing some microaggressions, you were guilty of using them yourself. And so that's one of the things about them is often people don't mean to put people down or make them feel inferior. They're based on unconscious bias. And again, I gave a webinar on unconscious bias. And if you'd like to see it, then you can watch the video of it. But unconscious bias is the beliefs that we have about people that we're really not even aware of and these beliefs become apparent when something happens. For example, I gave a racial microaggression as a white woman clutching her purse when a black or Latino man passes by and this woman might think that she is not biased whatsoever, as most of us think we are not. But then that little action reveals that bias. And so we all are biased and lots of us know what our biases are, but we all have unconscious bias to beliefs that lie under the system that come out when a situation arises. Also, people make assumptions about other people because they don't know them very well. And also stereotypes. And again, these things are a result of when we do not interact with a lot of people who are not like us and we just don't know people. And we base our beliefs on what people tell us, what we see on television and the movies and social media and all of those types of things. But sometimes microaggressions are done intentionally to put people in their place. We just celebrated Labor Day and you might be aware of a little fashion rule, which is that you're not supposed to wear white after Labor Day. Oh, where did that little rule come from? Well, according to the director of the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, and I definitely need to go see that place, this director said that wealthy women created this little rule to find out who was really wealthy and who wasn't. So the old money elites came up with this little rule among themselves and spread the news to other, old-money friends, don't wear white after Labor Day. And then when people would show up wearing white, it was obvious they were not part of the group. And so that was a long time ago before people could post such messages on social media and such. So it was word of mouth, but it was a very intentional thing to know who's who and most importantly, who's in and who's out. So sometimes it's intentional to let people know where their place is and when they're stepping out of it.

There are various things that people can do about microaggressions, and it depends upon if you are on the receiving end of them or if you're in a position where you should be doing something about microaggressions. So the first thing that people can do is increase awareness. Now, I am a trainer, and so of course I promote training. Not as the answer to everything, but just letting people know through a concerted effort about microaggressions. And we all need this training, including myself. Now, here's an example. I live in Bakersfield, California. It is in the Central Valley and I used to work with a Hispanic male from a town called Delanoe, and Delanoe is little north of Bakersfield, and it is mostly a Hispanic town. And there are a lot of people who work out in the fields in agriculture who live in that town. Now, at work, we needed a Spanish interpreter. And so I turned to my Hispanic coworker who I knew was from Delanoe and asked him if he spoke Spanish. He

was offended by that, and he said, “You think because I’m Hispanic and I’m from Delano that I speak Spanish?” Well, yes, that is exactly what I thought. While doing research for today’s presentation, I saw this example repeatedly. That asking somebody who is Hispanic if they speak Spanish is a microaggression. And honestly, I still don’t know why it’s offensive, but it doesn’t matter if I know why it’s offensive or not. I won’t do it again. Somebody let me know and I increased my awareness that it is offensive for whatever reason I will not understand, because that is not my world. But that’s OK. Now that I know I won’t repeat the offense. One of the things that we need to do is when we become aware that people are committing microaggressions against each other and they have been made aware that they shouldn’t do that and they continue to do it anyway, we need to hold them accountable for it just like anything else. Now, we’ll talk a little bit about harassment a little bit later on. But one of the things that is perfectly fine to do is to have policies saying that people need to not annoy their coworkers. And if people repeatedly make microaggressions when they have been asked not to, then it is perfectly fine to hold them accountable through disciplinary action or what have you. Now, if somebody said something to you that you perceived as a slight, you’ve got some options. You might let it go like I did when the client told me, “I told people how sensitive you are,” I just let that go. There is no point in having training at that point with her. And I know she did not mean to hurt my feelings, I know she was meaning to protect me. So I don’t need to do anything with that. But one of the things you can do is respond immediately. Now, if you’re going to respond immediately because the moment is right, then it’s important to address the microaggression, not the microaggressor. For example, calling someone racist or homophobic will only make the situation worse. And so make it clear you have an issue with what the person said or did, not with the person themselves. And that’s one of the things that people in this country really need to learn how to do, is to address situations without calling names, because that’s one of the things that I have noticed that people are very quick to do. If they disagree with somebody about something, it reverts to name-calling very quickly. And all that does is fuel the fire. So what we really need to do is to address the situation, the words, the behavior, and not call the person who’s engaging in them, names. You might use humor, as my friend suggested that I do. For example, if a coworker talks over you in a meeting instead of saying, “don’t interrupt!” You can be a bit light hearted and say something like, “I totally get that you’re excited to share your idea. I’d like to finish sharing mine first.” Now, be careful not to be condescending or sarcastic when you’re joking. And so for some of us, maybe we’re not going to joke at all because we can’t not sound sarcastic when we do it. Maybe you’re going to respond later. And that’s usually the best thing to do for a lot of people, is that after you walk away and you’ve thought about it for a while, maybe to send an email, maybe to schedule a meeting with that person to let that person know how the words or the actions affected you. So having some time responding later, a lot of times is in our best interest because we get to choose the words and the tone and all of that very carefully. And that’s what we always need to do in communication. And this is the sermon that I always give, is that when we communicate, it’s to give a desired response from our audience. Every time we send a message, we want a specific response back. And if we’re very careful about the words, we choose our tone of voice, our facial expression, when and where we deliver the message, then we’re more likely going to get the response back that we want. If we just shoot from the hip, chances are we’re going to blow it. So responding later is usually the better thing to do. Now, any time we are responding, one of the things that we need to do is have empathy for the person that slighted us. And that sounds counterintuitive. No, I need to have empathy for myself. Well, the thing is, again, most people are unintentional with their microaggressions. And so consider the person’s background, age, culture, education level, all of those things consider them and have empathy for the fact that they just don’t know that they are being offensive to you. Now, this doesn’t excuse their behavior, but it does make it easier for you to understand them. And when we understand people, the more understanding we can be. Now, when somebody tells you that you have committed a microaggression don’t get defensive. Listen to the person’s concerns. Do your best to understand the impact that what you said or did had on them. Don’t say, “I was just joking,” because that then thinks that their sensitivity is frivolous. Acknowledge that their feelings are valid. Now, don’t say, “I know exactly how you feel,” because we don’t. We don’t know how other people feel. But do emphasize it was not your intent to be hurtful and that you do now understand how your remarks created a negative impact. Apologize. Now, I like, “I’m sorry

as opposed to, “I apologize.” To me, it’s more genuine, but that’s just my preference. But please don’t say, “I’m sorry that you’re so sensitive,” when somebody brings your behavior to your attention. That’s exactly the response that I got once. I had a male supervisor once upon a time who liked to tease me. And when I brought it to his attention, that something he said was hurtful, He said, “I’m sorry, you are so sensitive.” Yeah, that just made it worse. And try to let it go and move on. These things happen. It’s important to remember we’re human. We make mistakes. Don’t beat yourself up too much if you said something that hurt someone else’s feelings. So that’s the information that I have for you. Do you have some questions for me?

**Julie Dower:**

So we did have a couple of questions that were submitted, Robin. So I’m going to go ahead and just launch those at you right now. So our first one. Can white males experience microaggressions also?

**Robin Paggi:**

Yes, and that’s one of the things the person who came up with the term-- the Harvard University professor-- came up with the term to describe the slights and insults that he saw whites making against blacks. And then again, it morphed into marginalized groups, which I don’t particularly care for that term. But that is the term that smaller groups, other groups such as LGBTQ members, people in poverty, etc., that it included them. But now in 2020, just like in harassment, white males can be subjected to microaggressions, too. So that’s one of the things. I mentioned harassment very briefly earlier. Harassment is directed at someone or about someone because of being in a protected class. And it was first made illegal with the Civil Rights Act. And at that time there were five protected classes race, color, religion, national origin, and sex. And when it came to harassment and race, it was only the people who were protected were in minority group. Will court cases changed that. And so now race includes every race, including whites. Well, microaggressions are the same way as well are slights. They’re are insults. And even though white males make up the majority in the workforce. They can be in the minority at times as well, and saying things like using a term like mansplaining, “don’t mansplain to me,” is something that could be a microaggression. It is a derogatory remark saying that men over-explain things to people that they already know. That’s what the term mansplaining is, in case you don’t know. And so that term in itself is a microaggression. And telling someone not to mansplaining is a microaggression. So, yes, microaggression can be against everyone or anyone. And again, it’s just little slights that are designed or end up making the person feel inferior.

**Julie Dower:**

Awesome. OK, are microaggressions, a form of harassment?

**Robin Paggi:**

So, again, harassment is conduct directed at someone or about someone because of being in a protected class. And I said what the first five federal ones and then now we have additional protected classes. In California we have 17 of them. And so harassment can be intentional or unintentional, just like microaggressions. But harassment has to substantially interfere with a person’s ability to do their job, in order to be harassment. And so the law does not prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious. And the Supreme Court even said we can’t make people be nice to each other. OK, we just got too much stuff to do. So microaggressions are a form of harassment when they are so frequent or severe that they substantially interfere with a person’s ability to do their job. Having said that, just because something is not against the law doesn’t mean it should be allowed. So one of the things that I neglected to say is that if you are on the receiving end of microaggressions and you do not feel comfortable talking to the person who was on the sending end of them, then it’s important to tell your supervisor or HR about it so that they can do something about it. So even though most microaggressions would not rise to the definition of harassment, it doesn’t mean that people should

get away with using them. And so if you're on the receiving end and people continuously say things that hurt your feelings, whether it's intentional or not, it's important to talk to somebody who can do something about it and then that person should do something about it. So I hope that answered the question.

**Julie Dower:**

Yes, I think so. All right, shouldn't people just learn to take things less personally?

**Robin Paggi:**

Yes, we should. For our own sanity. We need to learn to take things less personally. And so one of the things about taking things less personally, I mean, first of all, we can't just tell people it's not personal and that means it's OK. That doesn't work. But one of the things I learned a little trick some years ago that has really served me well on not taking things personally. I used to work in a law firm, in the employment group or the Employment Law Group, and we had a female attorney from out of town come into town and she was working with our marketing person, who was a female, and another female attorney, and they were working on something that had nothing to do with me. And around lunchtime, I looked up outside the office and I saw them all gathering their purses together and heading out for lunch. And my feelings were hurt. They didn't invite me to lunch. And so I started to think, "Well, did I do something or are they mad at me? Is there a reason?" And I felt really bad. And by the way, this sounds really petty, but in one study I read, that was one of the instances that women of color cited was a microaggression is that they're not included in the lunch group. They're not included in the baby showers, they're not included and those types of things. And so, again, being excluded from the group is a microaggression. That's exactly what it is. Anyway, back to my story, so I was getting my feelings hurt about not being invited to lunch, and then I thought, "You know what, they're probably continuing their conversation about whatever they're working on during lunch, which has nothing to do with you. And that's probably why they didn't include you." And I went, yeah, that makes sense. And then I felt better. So I learned that little trick is that when your feelings are hurt about something, imagine another reason why that person might have done or said what they did. And if that reason appears to be more logical than the reason that it hurt you, that's the one to choose. So, yes, we all should take things less personally. And so when something happens, ask, am I being overly sensitive? Did this person try to hurt me on purpose? And that's another little trick that I learned to help me forgive and forget when people do something is that I simply ask, "Did they mean to hurt me on purpose?" And if the answer is no, then it's much easier for me to let it go. And finally, what I remind myself when I get my feelings hurt is that I say hurtful things too and I don't mean to. So I need to forgive others of the hurtful things they say, just like I want them to forgive me when I say something hurtful. So those three things can help us take things less personally, but again, don't discount if someone says things especially repeatedly, that makes you feel alienated, isolated outside of the main group. Don't discount that feeling because it is a real powerful feeling and it is very damaging. And if you are subjected to it on a regular basis, it can hurt you psychologically and physically. And so do something about it and talk to the person who has delivered that message or behavior or talk to someone else who can do something about it, because when we just suffer in silence, then that's no good. So awareness is going to help people learn how to not send these messages that most of the time they don't intend to send anyway.

**Julie Dower:**

That's great. OK, so earlier you talked a little bit about different types of microaggressions, so some of it were based on race, gender, sexual orientation. So could a financial status also be considered a microaggression? And the person that submitted this question is specifically talking about statements that would make them an elitist?

**Robin Paggi:**

Yes, and so that's one of the things is that we have different classes in America, as a matter of fact, we have a caste system and I have promoted this book before, and I'm probably going to promote it every time you hear me. It's called Caste (C-A-S-T-E) the Origins of Our Discontents. It's written by Isabel Wilkerson and it explains the caste system that we have in the United States. And it's mostly talking about race in that case. But race and poverty often go hand in hand. But, yeah, definitely people with money or a higher social status want to maintain that social status and can say things or do things that make people who have less money feel inferior. Just saying making a remark like, "That dress is so trashy," trash is associated with poverty and so saying somebody looks trashy is another way of saying they look poor. And so certainly financial status is making comments about somebody's financial status can be a microaggression and we should refrain from that.

**Julie Dower:**

Very good. So is it appropriate to correct someone more senior than you and maybe do you have some suggestions on how you could go about starting that conversation with an employer-type person?

**Robin Paggi:**

Yeah, and that's always risky, unfortunately. And again, I tried to explain to a supervisor once how his teasing negatively affected me and his response was, I'm sorry you're so sensitive. So but I will tell you in his defense, that was his initial response. And after he cooled down a little bit, he did genuinely apologize, but then he never teased me after that, which was a good thing and a bad thing. The good thing was that I didn't get my feelings hurt. The bad thing was that he was afraid to interact with me. So that's one of the things that we have to be careful about as well. So first of all, how do you talk to somebody who was senior to you? Well, one of the things that I have learned is, first of all, don't just barge into their office and demand to talk to them at that moment, which is my style of doing things. So sending an email, making an appointment when it is convenient for the person and telling them what you want to talk to them about. I just want to talk to you about a comment that you made in the meeting that was bothering me or is bothering me so that we can come to some resolution. So they have an opportunity to get prepared for the message. And so when you talk to them at the time, that is convenient for them, again, making sure that you are not calling them names. It was racist of you to say this or it was sexist of you or things like that. But just to say, when you interrupted me three times in the meeting today, it made me feel as if what I had to say was not important, and I'm hoping that next time you'll let me finish my thoughts. So any time that you are talking to somebody about anything, you have to deliver a message they're not going to want to hear. There is four parts to it. And the first part is you give them a heads up about what you want to talk about, and that's called a door opener statement. And so that could be the email. The email is the door opener statement. I want to talk to you about something that is bothering me so that allows them to get ready for the message. The second part is to send the message and you want the message to be direct enough so they know what you're talking about, but you don't want it to be so direct that they get defensive. You want to express it using I messages. Not you were so rude when you interrupted, but you want to say I felt, I perceived, my perception of the situation, so that you are owning it. These are your feelings, your perception, not a general truth that everybody could see. The second thing is to tell what you want, try to make some kind of action plan. So I'm hoping next time you won't interrupt me and then give the person a chance to talk and to respond and apologize. In that case, one of the things to something that I learned how to do is when we make a statement like that and we don't get the response that we want immediately, one of the things we might do is to say that was not the response I was hoping for. And I learned how to do that, too, when I was talking to that male supervisor about hurting my feelings. And he was upset and saying that it's all his fault, I said, wow, this was not the response I was hoping for. And I did it very genuinely, not condescending. And he said, what was the response you were hoping for? And I said, I was just really hoping that we could come to some kind of agreement on how to move forward. And then he gave me the response. So

that's one of the things that you might do, and the other thing is realize that when people get defensive and that's not the response you want, but after a while, they might calm down and they might see that, yeah, I can see how what I said might have hurt your feelings. And so never mind. So that's when you're talking to anybody, not just a senior person. I hope that answered the question.

**Julie Dower:**

Yes, I think so. So this is a good one and something that I've encountered more frequently than I would prefer to have. So how would you handle a situation where someone has said something that is a microaggression but you are not necessarily the recipient of the statement?

**Robin Paggi:**

Well. That's one of the things that, again, we don't want to just stand by and watch other people be harassed or discriminated against or microaggressed against. That's a term. And so I think the first thing to do is to consider what does the recipient want? Now, I am someone who goes barging into a fight, whether it's my fight or not. And sometimes people who were on the receiving end of a slight just did not want me to fight that fight for them. And so first I would check to see. Are you going to do something about it? Do you want something done about it? Would you like me to say something about it and see what they want? Because, again, sometimes we help people who don't want to be helped. But on the other end, if you have somebody who is expressing these microaggressions and they're oblivious to what they're doing, you might go to them because you want to bring to their attention what they're doing because of their well-being. And you might want to point out that to them, not mentioning the coworker who was on the receiving end. But, you know, when you say stuff like this, it makes people think that you're whatever. And so it's just things to consider when you are witnessing microaggressions. How does the person on the receiving end want to handle it? What is your relationship with everybody involved? Is it so serious that maybe you take it to HR, and so a lot of things to consider in that scenario.

**Julie Dower:**

That's perfect. So in this situation where someone might be dealing with a client and the client says something that is perceived as blatantly racist or a blatant microaggression, if there is a board or another executive on the team who's asking that to be overlooked because they spend lots of money with the company, how would you address that situation?

**Robin Paggi:**

Yeah, I had this happen after I conducted harassment prevention training. And I so very clearly told people if a client is saying inappropriate things to your employees, you need to do something about it. And even though I was very clear I had someone come up to me afterwards who was one of the owners of a bank here in town, and he told me he has a client who says things to him, jokes, making fun of his appearance and such, but that he also says things to the female tellers that are inappropriate. And they have complained about it. And he said, do I need to do anything about that? The obvious answer is yes. I just told you in training, but he did not want to hear that answer. If you wanted me to tell them, no, it's a client. You can't control what your clients do. And that's not what I told them. I said, yes, you need to do something about it. And he said, I am afraid if I say anything, he will remove his money from my bank. And I said, if you don't say anything, your employees might sue you and they'll get that money. So one way or the other, you're at risk of losing it. Microaggression is a little bit different, because sometimes they're again, often they're not intentional and they're not substantially interfering with a person's ability to do their job, which is what harassment is. But I think it's the same concept. I think it is you've got to protect your employees from harassment and microaggressions and to talk to the client about when you made this comment, it offended my employee. Please refrain from making such comments in the future. And so, again, it's really important to discuss the behavior, the comments, and not attack the person and not insinuate

that the person is a racist or sexist, stupid, or anything. It's just that you might be unaware that when you said this, it had a negative impact. And so if you could refrain from saying, like things like that in the future, I'd really appreciate it. Now, no matter how nicely you say it, you're still at risk of losing a client because people get defensive when it's brought to their attention that their behavior is anything but perfect. But. That's the kind of thing that we have to do in order to make change in our society. We've got to fight some hard fights sometimes in order for there to, for people to not engage in behavior that constantly communicates, "we're better than you and you're not one of us." And so sometimes it takes losing a client and that's just the right thing to do.

**Julie Dower:**

Perfect. Thank you so much. So that's actually all the questions that we had. So I just wanted to take a couple of minutes to thank everybody for joining us today. Again, this webinar and the PowerPoint presentation that we shared with you today will be available for viewing and download on the Vensure website. You'll get an email after the session concludes with information on how to access. But thank you, everybody, for joining us. We look forward to having you at a future session. Have a great day, everybody.