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GUIDELINES FOR ACHIEVING BIAS-FREE COMMUNICATION

1. **Be aware of words, images and situations that suggest that all or most members of a group are the same.** Stereotypes often lead to assumptions that are unsupportable and offensive. [*Example:* The writer who describes Mexican children as “well-dressed” may be unconsciously portraying this as an exception to a mental image of a “poor” or “unkempt” Mexican.]
2. **Avoid qualifiers that reinforce stereotypes.** A qualifier is added information that suggests what is being said is an exception to what is expected. [*Examples:* “A group of intelligent black students were guests as part of the orientation program.” A helpful test is to consider whether a member of the majority population is likely to be described in the same way; i.e. “the intelligent white students.”]
3. **Identify people by identity characteristics only when relevant.** Very few situations require such identification. [*Example:* If this identification is inappropriate, “Michael Bloomberg, noted heterosexual mayor of New York,” is this phrasing any different: “twenty-two House Democrats, led by gay Democratic Representative Barney Frank . . .?”]
4. **Be aware of language that, to some people, has questionable racial or ethnic connotations.** While a word or phrase may not be personally offensive to you, it may be to others. [*Examples:* Culturally deprived or culturally disadvantaged. These terms imply superiority of one culture over another. In fact, people so labeled are often bicultural and bilingual. Non-white – this word implies that white is the standard. In North American language, similar phrases such as “non-black” or “non-yellow” do not exist. Minority—this word is accurate in North America; however, its use ignores the fact that people of color comprise the majority of the world’s population (and may comprise the majority of one’s immediate locale).]

5. **Be aware of the possible negative implications of color symbolic words.** Choose language and usage that do not offend people or reinforce bias. In some instances, black and yellow have become associated with the undesirable or negative. [Examples: “black reputation” and “yellow coward”]
6. **Avoid patronizing language and tokenism toward any racial or ethnic group.** [Example: Once-a-year articles or special editions about a particular group may be interpreted as cultural tokenism, especially when such a group constitutes a large part of your community. This approach may suggest that that racial or ethnic group is out of the mainstream.]
7. **Substitute substantive information for ethnic clichés.** Don’t let ethnic clichés substitute for in-depth information. [Example: A person of Spanish heritage might prefer to be asked about family history or political experiences than about fiestas.]
8. **Review media to see if all groups are fairly represented.** [Examples: Are persons portrayed in positions of authority almost invariably white? Does your media provide racial and ethnic role models?]

Adapted from *Without Bias: A Guidebook for Nondiscriminatory Communication*, Second Edition with permission from John Wiley & Sons, Inc. © 1982.