

Workplace Wellness



The Key to Growth: It Is Here

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Whether at work or at home, it is a given that at some time or another a disagreement will happen. Like it or not, we are confronted with conflicting ideas from time to time.

If you have not heard the story of the Indian traveller at the train station, it is a beautiful metaphor and possibly offers a clue to how to reduce conflict in our lives. A little boy sees a fellow sitting cross-legged on the floor and asks the man if he is Hindu. The man, opening his eyes, says, “No, I am an Un-do.” Undoing or, at the very least, unravelling our firmly held beliefs is the key to growth and change.



A mentor once taught me that each person sits inside a bubble of their own perspective. At the same time, we exist in a shared relational field, either through culture or language or some other common factor. The closer and more intimate we become with one another, the greater the odds are of sharing personal interpretations, and thus the higher the risk of conflict. There are eight billion humans in this world, and each one has their own understanding of reality. Take a moment to imagine the potential for disharmony!

I have learned that unravelling my own views is necessary every time I get into an opposing dialogue with another person. When I think that I am “right” and I interpret a challenge to that “rightness,” the risk of reaction and conflict increases. Dialogue may become louder or perhaps someone walks away. The harder I impose my views on the other, the worse it will become.

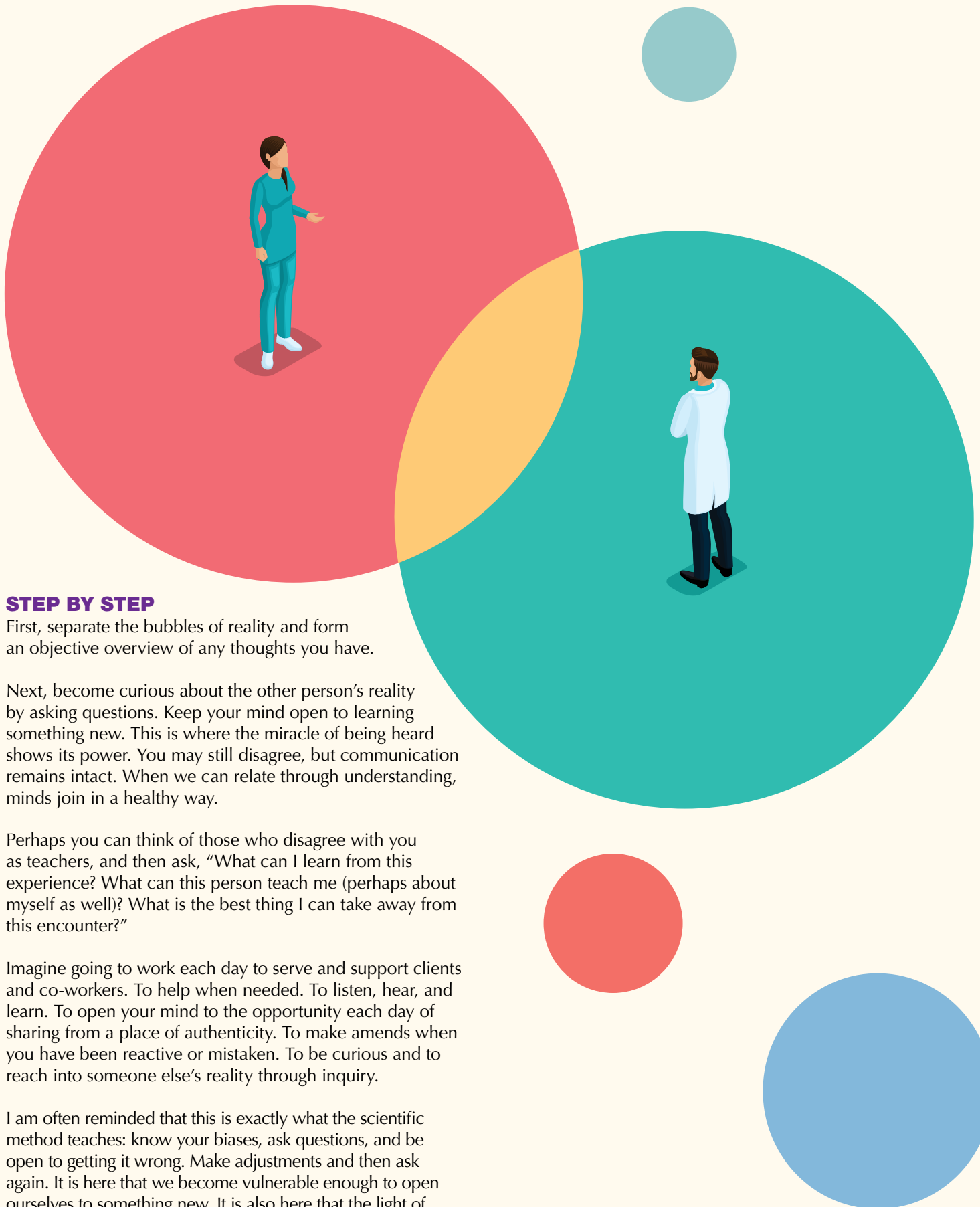
Understanding mental health is important: everyone wants to be seen and heard and accepted for who they really are. When we disagree, it is because we are pressing against the edge of our bubbles and defending what is inside instead of respecting the interpretation of the person in front of us, and then becoming curious about how they came to hold their views. When everyone feels completely heard the chances of conflict happening are greatly reduced!

The ego is the defender of the bubble and will fight to preserve its “truth” because it does not like any holes in its perception of the world. When beliefs clash, the ego feels threatened and its sense of safety fractures. In a last-ditch effort for psychological viewpoint survival, it will fight, flee or freeze. This is interpersonal conflict but at a macro level, it leads nations to engage in war.

So, what is the right action to take when our perception bubbles collide?

When reaction happens, start by taking a psychological step back and ask, “Am I truly listening to the other person and trying to understand? Does the way I share my beliefs leave room for another’s interpretation to exist? Am I defensive?” Asking the right questions moves the ego aside a little and serves as a telephone line between the bubble spaces.

Once we understand our own bubble and how it projects outward, the journey of true learning begins. Conversations can become open, honest, rich, and deep. Curiosity, cooperation, and negotiation begin to blossom. Curiosity opens the door to understanding, and negotiation creates a win/win situation. Both parties begin to lay out their reality and begin to resolve issues.



STEP BY STEP

First, separate the bubbles of reality and form an objective overview of any thoughts you have.

Next, become curious about the other person's reality by asking questions. Keep your mind open to learning something new. This is where the miracle of being heard shows its power. You may still disagree, but communication remains intact. When we can relate through understanding, minds join in a healthy way.

Perhaps you can think of those who disagree with you as teachers, and then ask, "What can I learn from this experience? What can this person teach me (perhaps about myself as well)? What is the best thing I can take away from this encounter?"

Imagine going to work each day to serve and support clients and co-workers. To help when needed. To listen, hear, and learn. To open your mind to the opportunity each day of sharing from a place of authenticity. To make amends when you have been reactive or mistaken. To be curious and to reach into someone else's reality through inquiry.

I am often reminded that this is exactly what the scientific method teaches: know your biases, ask questions, and be open to getting it wrong. Make adjustments and then ask again. It is here that we become vulnerable enough to open ourselves to something new. It is also here that the light of interpersonal connection can foster a new vision for us all.