

## Chapter 7

# Develop Dispositions for Dignity

*“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”*

*– Mahatma Gandhi*

### Envision Personal Growth

Pick one of the following core dispositions that represents the biggest opportunity for your own personal growth: empathy, patience, openness, or listening. Which disposition did you choose and why? What might your life look like when have you further developed this disposition? Write your responses below.

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## The Courage to Be Uncomfortable

It takes courage to develop the personal dispositions that honor dignity: the courage to confront, challenge, and change ourselves. Each action requires courage. While on this journey, you'll likely discover things that disturb and may even cause pain. For instance, you may have to confront the fact that you (like most of us) are not as open to feedback as you'd like to think. Not being open to feedback makes it easy to violate dignity in ways such as resisting feedback, saving face, and shirking responsibility (Hicks, 2018). Then comes the hard work of challenging and changing.

When we journey together, we'll also get to know ourselves as a collective (team, organization, society, etc.), which requires the same type of courage. For instance, discovering that our collective behaviors, practices, or policies may unintentionally subject people to pain and harm through dignity violations and othering is not a joyful experience for most of us. If the process of discovery is done well, the process should involve disequilibrium, discomfort, and struggle, followed by growth. These uncomfortable stages are what bring about the very growth that we seek.

Thus, when we gather in a group to do this work, it helps to come to consensus around guidelines for interaction: how we agree to be in relationship with one another. These guidelines should encourage us to push our boundaries. It helps to remember that nothing extraordinary happens while we remain in our comfort zones.

## Co-Create Brave Space

The concept of *brave space* describes environments within which we acknowledge the unavoidable risk, struggle, and discomfort that accompanies authentic engagement with the concepts of dignity and belonging, which inevitably requires people to confront their participation in systems of othering and humiliation (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Krownapple, 2016). Brave space builds on the tenets of safe space. However, instead of promoting an illusion of a risk-free environment, the term brave space rejects comfort and safety as defining elements. Instead, it elevates the notion of courage.

One of the components of our *Dignity Framework for Educational Equity*—the *Dispositions for Dignity*—act as personal qualities and organizational capacities. As such, they have utility value as conditions for actualizing brave space. Table 7.1 offers possible guidelines for each condition. Notwithstanding, it is always best for a team to establish their own agreements, norms of operation, or guidelines. Imposing ground rules from outside of the group risks violating the dignity of the group through dominance on the part of the facilitator or group leader.

**Table 7.1 Brave Space Conditions and Guidelines**

Brave Space Condition	Sample Brave Space Guidelines
Empathy	Try on new perspectives. Stories shared here stay here.
Patience	Slow down to prepare to go far.
Openness	Take some risks and practice vulnerability. Keep an open mind.
Listening	Listen to understand not to respond.

## The Dignity Journey Starts Within

Learning to honor the dignity of our students starts with learning to honor the dignity in ourselves. The most important relationship each of us has isn't with our significant other, parents, friends, or family but with our self. Yet, this relationship is often assumed without reflection, despite the fact that many of us spend a lifetime trying to come to terms with who we are. The extreme fragility of the human ego leads countless people to question whether or not they are "enough" and most importantly, whether they are worthy to accord themselves dignity.

In that kind of thinking, what's misunderstood is that on the day we were born, each of us was bestowed with dignity, simply because we are human. We have always been enough from the very first breath we ever took. Yet despite the fact that our dignity is inherent, we're not born understanding how to honor it. Instead, as we go through life, we tend to distort our inherent dignity, not see it, and try to find it through locating ourselves within a human social hierarchy (Kendi, 2017). Moreover, when we can't see dignity in ourselves, we fear seeing dignity in others (because they might have what we think we don't have). Our primitive fear gives rise to envy. We feel that we must defend ourselves. As a result, we engage in actions that seek to strip away dignity from others as an unsustainable strategy to help ourselves feel better. We carry out this strategy by comparing ourselves to others and magnifying their flaws in order to feel more worthy ourselves. All of this results in a *false dignity* (Hicks, 2018).

As defined in Chapter 6, *false dignity* is an inflated sense of value. This artificial substitute for self-worth only exists relative to others' "faults" and "lesser" status or identity. In its simplest form, a false dignity manifests in the form of petty gossip or bullying in order to make oneself feel superior. At its worst, it is the source of processes and conditions that propagate group-based marginality and inequality throughout our world. Be it racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, or Islamophobia, the root cause is the lack of self-worth that is replaced with an artificially inflated sense of value, which carries assumptions of superiority relative to those who don't possess the attribute (able-bodied, straight, White, male, U.S. citizen, standard-English speaker, etc.) that brings about false dignity. The greater the inadequacy and fragility of one's self-worth, the more likely one is to project that inadequacy and fragility onto others. Therefore, if we are ever to be successful in meeting the equity needs of our students, we must first come to terms with our own sense of self-worth so that we can acknowledge the equal human worth of each student.

### But Isn't That Selfish, Egocentric, or Even Narcissistic?

If you're like many responsible educators, you're probably feeling conflicted right now. Maybe even a little annoyed. Working on yourself may sound good in theory, but you need to teach, you might be saying to yourself. You have no time to waste. Students are being underserved at this very moment. You barely have time to stop and read this book, much less indulge in self-care. Shouldn't we focus on actions in the service of others instead

of self-reflection and self-care? Isn't taking time to get better acquainted with myself simply selfish and self-indulgent and a poor use of my time?

We understand these thoughts, but we want to stress the axiom that “we can't give what we don't have.” To do this work—to accord dignity to others—we must start within ourselves and honor our own dignity. This is a truth that spiritual wisdom leaders have stressed for thousands of years. Here are a few examples.

It's found in the customary Hindu greeting of *Namaste*. Translated, it means “the divine in me bows to the divine in you.” Notice how it starts with recognizing one's own value—the divine within—that then extends outwardly in the form of a bow. Similarly, Jesus said, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Careful examination of this commandment reveals that Christian beliefs also prioritize self-care. In Islam, it's incumbent upon every Muslim to care for him or herself as a way of showing gratitude for the blessing of health and well-being bestowed upon them by Allah, as narrated in this hadith (words of advice): “Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your riches before your poverty, your free time before your work, and your life before your death.” One of the currently popular representations of this begin-with-yourself idea are the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” If we want healthy schools, each of us needs to be healthy, and to be healthy requires self-care.

Our process, which begins with this self-care, is consistent with these wisdom traditions: We need to slow down and take the

time to get to know ourselves (both individually and collectively). If we do this well, we'll be able to better recognize the humanity in others, improve our relationships across categorical dividing lines of difference, and greatly influence for good the equitable and inclusive changes in our relationships, families, schools, organizations, and world.

Make no mistake, self-care is action. It's work before work. Learning to honor our own value and worth *is* vigorous, positive, and urgent action. There's nothing self-indulgent about it. Introspection leads to awareness and to our better selves. It requires effort and this effort, we believe, must be made in order to successfully undertake the journey to meaningful change. Therefore, let's embark on this journey without apathy, confusion, or false concepts of selfishness. We must get comfortable with the discomfort of confronting ourselves. There is simply no time to waste.

## Dignity Violations Also Start Within

The fact is that many of us can be insecure about showing up in professional and social settings as our authentic selves. We aren't sure we'll be valuable enough to others. Phrased differently, we don't have a firm grasp on our dignity. As an unfortunate response to our perceived inadequacy, we can try to be someone we are not, and we end up violating our own dignity and the dignity of others in the process. In addition, when other people *witness* this self-betrayal of authenticity, we humiliate ourselves. Consider these examples:

A novice teacher pretends to be an expert and is terrified of being exposed. A high-achieving Black student pretends to know far less than he does to fit in with a social group. A student with Korean heritage tells her friends that she hates Korean food when she actually loves it. A White teacher who knows little about hip-hop writes and performs a poorly written rap to teach Shakespeare in an attempt to connect with her urban students, primarily African American, only to end up perpetuating stereotypes.

Violating our own dignity prevents us from recognizing dignity in others. It's like a Bizzaro World inverted version of Namaste. "The emptiness in me gives the middle finger to the value in you." Or, maybe it's more like, "I can't even see myself, how do you expect me to see you? It's dark in here!"

Take the example of the unfortunate rapping teacher mentioned above. Let's entertain the scenario that the students were (at best) embarrassed for the teacher and (at worst) insulted by her attempt to connect with them. Let's go with the second possible reaction: insulted. In that case, the teacher's actions violated her students' dignity by reducing them to an insulting stereotype, which is a dignity violation. If we trace the violation back to its source, we can see that this "outward" violation started with the teacher's own "inward" self-violation, which in turn was based on her own sense of inadequacy. When we are under the influence of inward self-violations, how alarming is our ability to ruin things. As paradoxical as it might seem, teachers have a far better likeli-

hood of connecting authentically with students if these teachers are in touch with their own dignity—their own innate worth—and are able to show up as their authentic selves. Vulnerability expert Brene Brown (2012) calls this sense of self-love and belonging *worthiness*. It is through worthiness that we are able to more clearly see our own dignity.

### Cultivating Worthiness

Sounds good, right? So, you may ask, “Where can I get some of this worthiness?” The truth is, we can’t ever “get” it—not from a store, not from Amazon, not from anywhere outside ourselves. That’s because we are already whole and worthy in ourselves. After all, each one of us was born with human dignity. Yet, clearly seeing our own dignity seems incredibly hard. That’s because these four common distorters mess up our perception:

- Apathy
- Judgment
- Intolerance
- Denial

We’ll take a systematic look at each of these four elements in Table 7.2, but first we can state that they distort our self-image, blocking us from worthiness. For instance, a lack of patience with self, feelings of guilt and shame, resignation to meaningless work, and wallowing in past regrets all devalue our own self-worth. However, we have the power to change. We can encourage ourselves and each other to release or let go of thoughts, values,

and beliefs that fuel these distorters. By learning how to let go of our dignity distorters, we develop the ability to engage with our lives and our work with a strong sense of worthiness. In turn, we are able to nurture the inner capacities that make it easier to honor dignity. We call these helpful “letting go” dispositions the *Dispositions for Dignity*.

- Empathy
- Patience
- Openness
- Listening

Table 7.2 details the four dignity distorters and their four antidotes. These antidotes can correct the self-imposed distorters that undermine and degrade our sense of worthiness. Each remedial dignity disposition, when worked toward, strengthens our sense of worthiness. We’ve framed distorters and dispositions in terms of mindsets: “Let go of” and “Embrace.”

**Table 7.2 Correcting Dignity Distorters and Nurturing Dignity Dispositions**

To correct distorters:	<i>Let go of . . .</i>	<i>Embrace . . .</i>	To nurture dignity dispositions:
Apathy	What you're "supposed to" do	What makes you come alive	Empathy
	Rationalizing in your head	Listening to your heart	
	Numbness to pain	Self-determination	
	Thinking you're alone	Feeling connected	
	Blaming others	Owning feelings	
	Busy-ness	Reflection	
	Mindlessness	Mindfulness	
	Productivity as self-worth	Play as self-care	
Judgment	The need to control	Trust	Openness
	Perfectionism	Self-compassion	
	What people think	Authenticity	
	Comparison	Creativity	
	Guilt and shame	Forgiveness	
	Fear of the unknown	Adventure	
	Being cool, watching from the sidelines	Singing, laughing, and dancing like nobody's watching	
	Feedback triggers	Feedback as a gift	

## Belonging Through the Culture of Dignity

To correct distorters:	<i>Let go of . . .</i>	<i>Embrace . . .</i>	To nurture dignity dispositions:
Intolerance	The need for immediacy	The beauty of the journey	Patience
	Need for certainty	Faith	
	Anxiety as a normalized lifestyle	Stillness and calmness	
	Scarcity mindset	Gratitude attitude	
	Productivity as self-worth	Rest and relaxation as self-care	
Denial	Self-doubt	Self-affirmations	Listening
	Past regrets	Creating future	
	Noise	Silent reflection	
	Distractions	Focus	
	Needing to be understood	Seeking to understand	
	The need to be right	Self-validation	
	The need to be noticed	Self-appreciation	

### Core Dispositions for Dignity

These four inner dispositions make it easier to honor dignity: empathy, patience, openness, and listening. We can nurture each attribute within ourselves. This is self-care in action. What's needed is awareness, commitment, and personal resolve. This inner development allows us to recognize dignity in ourselves, interpersonal

relationships, institutional practices and policies, and systemic relationships. This is *the* work that must precede the work of equity.

### 1. Empathy

Simply stated, empathy is the ability to see the world through the eyes of another person by feeling what they're feeling (or trying your best to) and walking a metaphoric mile in their metaphoric shoes. Even though some people may be born with a greater disposition toward empathy, we believe that empathy can be grown and developed. Empathy can't be taught, but it can be nurtured with intentional practice. For our purposes, it's well worth the effort involved.

The research on empathy should wake us up like a shot of espresso. It's generally assumed that relationships make a difference in schools. However, a teacher's capacity for empathy is one of the top two indicators (along with power-sharing) of a quality teacher–student relationship that results in accelerated growth and achievement, equating to approximately 1.5 years of growth for one year in the classroom (Corwin, 2019).

Even brief exercises designed to nurture empathetic mindsets have yielded enormous results. For instance, in one study (Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2016), a group of teachers who received an empathy treatment were half as likely to suspend students over the course of a year than teachers who did not have this exercise. What was this exercise? It simply focused attention on reading about empathy and discussing the importance of maintaining positive relationships when students misbehave.

Although empathy is a powerful force in honoring dignity, empathy can be easily compromised. Just think about times when you've been angry, disappointed, and frustrated with another person (spouse, child, friend, student, etc.). Almost certainly, it was incredibly hard—if not impossible—to have rational thoughts about the other person's feelings when your brain and body were flooded with stress chemicals. The result? Unless we were skilled in empathy, we likely violated dignity, first our own and then that of the other person. But when our empathy and patience skills are both strong, we can honor dignity even in stressful situations.

It's worth noting, though, that there is a cost to too much empathy. *Empathy fatigue* describes the strain and exhaustion that results from caregivers revisiting their own wounds as they help others deal with trauma, grief, loss, and so on. This fatigue also happens to people whose success in life is contingent upon empathizing with people in power. When empathy becomes a survival tool or way of life, empathy fatigue can ensue. We can become drained on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. Our resiliency and ability to cope deteriorate. Empathy then transforms into apathy, which is one of the four dignity distorters. With too much empathy, our inner light dims.

How might we mitigate this risk as we work to develop our capacity for empathy? The short answer: self-care. This is especially important for people when they are routinely marginalized, dismissed, mistreated, and otherized within our organizations and society. As Audre Lorde (1988) said, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of po-

litical warfare.” Why the violent metaphor of war? Because when societal norms violate our dignity on the structural level, practicing self-care is an act of resistance.

For self-care guidance, we can turn to the concept of self-empathy (Rosenberg, 2003). This term describes our ability to focus our attention on what is happening inside of us, opening ourselves to a healing energy that flows into and through us. We extend the healing power of empathy to ourselves. Through self-empathy (Table 7.3), we give ourselves the gift of peace and relief. In short, learning self-empathy is learning to love ourselves, unconditionally. Again, it’s all about honoring dignity in ourselves before we can honor it in other people. Consider this quote that is often attributed to Maya Angelou: “I do not trust people who don’t love themselves and yet tell me, ‘I love you’” (Monti, 2014).

**What resonates with you from this section on empathy? Why does it resonate with you?**

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**Table 7.3 Reflective Questions That Nurture Empathy and Self-Empathy**

<i>Empathy</i>	<i>Self-Empathy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What words do I want my child (or students, friends, spouse, family members) to use to describe me?</li> <li>» What do I say and do on a regular basis so that my child (or others) is likely to use the words I hope he or she uses?</li> <li>» What words do I think my child (or others) would actually use to describe me?</li> <li>» If the words my child (or others) uses to describe me is different from the words I hope he or she uses, what changes must I make to bring the two descriptions closer together?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Within myself . . .</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What am I <i>observing</i>?</li> <li>» What am I <i>feeling</i>?</li> <li>» What am I <i>needing</i> right now?</li> <li>» Do I have a <i>request</i> of myself or someone else?</li> </ul> <p>Sometimes four questions feels like too much work, so an alternative is to simply ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What am I <i>feeling</i>?</li> <li>» What am I <i>needing</i>?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Would I want anyone to say or do to me what I have just said to my child (or others)?</li> </ul>	<p>Example: You beat yourself up for overeating. Next time, try this instead of criticizing yourself.</p> <p>1) <i>Observation</i>: Identify what you’re doing and any judgments you are making (e.g., I notice I’m telling myself I’m a failure and a loser).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» In anything I say or do, what do I hope to accomplish?</li> </ul>	<p>2) <i>Feeling</i>: Ask yourself, “What am I feeling?” (e.g., I feel disappointed.)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Am I saying or doing it in a way in which my child (or others) is most likely to listen to what I have to say, not become defensive, and respond in a constructive manner?</li> </ul>	<p>3) <i>Need</i>: Connect that feeling to a need/value that’s important to you. Ask yourself, “What need is not met?” (e.g., I have a need for willpower and accountability). “Sit with” that need and how important it is to you.</p>
<p><i>Sources</i>: Goldstein &amp; Brooks, 2005; Rosenberg, 2015</p>	<p>4) <i>Request</i>: Do you have any requests of yourself or someone else? (e.g., I am asking for self-restraint. I am willing to ask my friend to hold me accountable. I will ask my spouse to help me not keep junk food in the house.)</p>

## 2. *Patience*

It's easy to become impatient when we want to control a situation—another person's behavior, a student's poor behavior in a classroom or school, an organization's outdated practices, or a good Internet connection when Wi-Fi is painfully slow. Like the proverbial watched pot that never boils, we want the waters of change to reach a boiling point quickly. Like now. Or yesterday.

Yet, as another axiom goes, "Good things come to those who wait." In fact, the ancient Christian theologian Saint Augustine claimed that patience is the companion of wisdom. As such, patience is a virtue. But why is it important to cultivate this virtue of patience? How is patience related to wisdom? The insight begins with the fact that each of us is an imperfect being who lives in an imperfect world. Imperfection calls for patience, and this is wisdom. Without patience, our default setting is judgment and intolerance, which is lack of wisdom. Without patience with our imperfect selves, we can condemn ourselves harshly and destructively for falling short of (or not perfectly meeting) the standards of others and society.

When it comes to healthy interactions with people to honor their dignity, patience is also key. Treating people equally is simple. We refer to the standard or the rule book and apply it uniformly and mechanically. However, treating people fairly—*with value and worth* (i.e., treating people with dignity)—requires careful deliberation and consideration of the whole person within the context of the specific situation. That requires patience and expresses wisdom. Similarly, the process of building or repairing relationships and community does not happen quickly. It takes patience and a relentless commitment of time and energy.

Without taking the time to respond with patience and wisdom, we can easily take foolish and reckless actions that may yield disastrous results. We may not have time for inaction, but we certainly don't have time for foolish action. Wisdom takes patience, and patience can be nurtured and can grow to become a strong attribute.

**What new activity can you start as a way to nurture your own patience? Set a goal.**

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### 3. *Openness*

For our purposes, the definition of openness contains these three aspects:

- Having an accommodating attitude or opinion.
- Being receptive to new experiences, environments, ideas, cultures, people, behaviors, and so on that are different from the status quo's or one's own.
- Choosing vulnerability, transparency, and frankness.

Psychologists have identified openness as one of the descriptive domains for human personality (Goldberg, 1993). As such, openness involves intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity, active imagination (fantasy), attentiveness to inner feelings, and a

preference for variety. Research has found that openness is the trait that most correlates with transformational leadership and overall well-being (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012).

We can further define openness by contrasting it with its opposite: judgment. What we mean by judgment is an excessively critical, condemning, and fault-finding point of view. When judgment rules our perception, we are closed-minded. We close ourselves off to other people's beliefs and experiences. We immediately assign meaning to what we perceive instead of questioning it and seeking to understand.

In his book *The Four Agreements*, Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) writes about how being judgmental ultimately violates our own dignity, hurting ourselves more than anyone else.

We make the assumption that everyone sees life the way we do. We assume that others think the way we think, feel the way we feel, judge the way we judge, and abuse the way we abuse. This is the biggest assumption that humans make. And this is why we have a fear of being ourselves around others. Because we think everyone else will judge us, victimize us, abuse us, and blame us as we do ourselves. So even before others have a chance to reject us, we have already rejected ourselves. That is the way the human mind works. (p. 47)

In contrast, choosing to be open-minded (and, thus, vulnerable) benefits our well-being. Sharing our authentic selves and allowing new and different ideas to enter our minds has many benefits, including enriching relationships, enhancing decision-

making, strengthening trust, fostering innovation, and nurturing personal growth.

Developing openness to feedback is especially important to the process of honoring dignity. Receiving feedback is often challenging, no matter who we are. One reason feedback is often challenging is because learning about the impact of our actions and our cultures sometimes leads to new information that conflicts with our intentions. This can be painful, sometimes surprisingly so. That intensity is because feedback brings into conflict two basic human needs: (1) growth, and (2) acceptance for the way we are. This explains how dignity violations (protecting ourselves and our egos by rejecting feedback) are constantly in conflict with our basic need to belong (Hicks, 2018).

In their book *Thanks for the Feedback*, Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen (2014) offer three triggers that—if not transcended—close us off to feedback and, subsequently, to honoring the dignity in ourselves and others (Table 7.4).

**Table 7.4 Triggers That Close Us Off to Feedback**

<i>Truth Triggers</i>	Feedback that we rationalize is uninformed, ill-informed, under-informed, or simply not true.
<i>Relationship Triggers</i>	Feedback that we discount or reject because of the giver’s character, competence, or credibility, as well as our connection with them and perceptions of their intentions.
<i>Identity Triggers</i>	Feedback that we reject because it conflicts with our sense of self and identity (the story we tell ourselves about who we are).

Conversations aimed at equity and inclusion eventually include information about harm done through behaviors, norms, practices, and policies. This information can be perceived as criticism by those who are well-served by the dominant culture. In light of this dynamic, let's pause and consider more closely the three feedback triggers described in Table 7.4.

**What has been your experience receiving feedback? How might awareness of these triggers help you honor your own dignity and, thus, remain open to feedback?**

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#### *4. Listening*

"I'm listening to you," is something easier said than done. Although listening is our most-often used mode of communication, it's the skill we least often develop to its full potential. Listening is different from hearing. Hearing is a physical process that deals with receiving sounds. Listening is a complex process that builds on receiving information by constructing meaning and then responding to spoken and nonverbal messages. We spend upwards of 80% of our time listening while communicating; however, there exists a preponderance of evidence that we

don't listen well. As individual people and as a society, we desperately need to develop better listening skills (Krownapple, 2016).

- Untrained listeners only remember about 25% of what was said. Most of that remembered material is often inaccurate or distorted.
- Less than 2% of adults report ever having formal training on listening skills.
- Even in university-level communication courses, less than 7% of the time is dedicated to learning how to listen.
- In K–12 schools, only 8% of instructional time is dedicated to listening skills.
- Of the 80% of our waking hours we spend communicating, 45% of that is spent listening. Yet, during 75% of the listening time we are preoccupied or distracted.
- Unproductive patterns of listening are normal (Costa & Garmston, 2002) and detract from our capability to listen and, instead, risk violating dignity (Figure 7.1).

**Figure 7.1 Unproductive Patterns of Listening**

<p><b><i>Autobiographical Listening</i></b>  <i>Rooted in the social need to connect.</i></p>	<p><b><i>Solution Listening</i></b>  <i>Rooted in need to help others.</i></p>
<p><i>Voice in your head:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Compares your experiences to those of the speaker.</li> <li>» Initiates immersion in the listener’s story and inattentiveness to the speaker’s story.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Voice in your head:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Identifies listener’s problems and generates solutions.</li> <li>» Filters speaker’s information, listening for information to support your solution.</li> <li>» Rehearses a solution response for when the speaker stops talking.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Potential Dignity Violation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Dominates</li> </ul> <p>Shifts the focus of the conversation by elevating the speaker above the listener.</p>	<p><i>Potential Dignity Violation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Presumes incompetence</li> </ul> <p>Enables dependency and communicates low expectations.</p>
<p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “I did that, too. Here’s what happened . . .”</li> <li>» Sharing unsolicited details of your family member’s death after a friend tells you that a family member died.</li> <li>» A colleague shares details of a frustrating relationship, and your mind focuses on one of your own frustrating relationships.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» “Here’s what you need to do . . .”</li> <li>» “Why doesn’t she ___? She is going to have to make sure that she ___.”</li> <li>» Responding to what was said by giving unsolicited advice for what someone should do in a situation.</li> </ul>

## Belonging Through the Culture of Dignity

<p><b><i>Inquisitive Listening</i></b>  <i>Rooted in satisfying our own curiosity.</i></p>	<p><b><i>Judgment and Criticism Listening</i></b>  <i>Rooted in our need to be right and determine our place within a hierarchy.</i></p>
<p><i>Voice in your head:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Focus on details in the story relevant and interesting to the listener.</li> <li>» Unconcerned with the speaker's main focus.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Voice in your head:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Points out flaws or greatness of the speaker's ideas.</li> <li>» Discredits what was said.</li> <li>» Assigns power or superiority.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Potential Dignity Violation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Degrades differences and uniqueness</li> <li>Elevates the listener's needs and interests at the expense of the speaker's interests and needs.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Potential Dignity Violation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Blames and shames</li> <li>Erodes self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and relational trust.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» A friend shares a story of mistreatment at work, and you ask, "How do you like your benefits package?"</li> <li>» Interrupting a story with tangential questions.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» "If she just would have___"</li> <li>» "Oh, how ludicrous!"</li> <li>» "Let me tell you what's wrong with what you just said."</li> </ul>
<p><i>Source: Adapted from Costa &amp; Garmston (2002).</i></p>	

Skilled listening has tremendous positive potential. When we listen well, we give the speaker the gift of feeling heard. There's a ton of evidence about the transformative power of listening, and researchers have been proving its benefits to relationships since the 1950s. Here are some research-based examples that illustrate the role of listening in effective leadership.

- Effective listening positively correlates with the productivity of staff.
- Ineffective listening correlates with high absenteeism and turnover, low morale, ineffective horizontal communication, and an absence of upward communication.
- Because of leadership listening deficits, people quit their jobs more often than you might think. In 1999, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that 46% of people who quit their jobs did so because they didn't feel heard (Spencer, 2014).
- A leader's poor listening causes staff to withdraw from conversations that matter, which causes problems to grow and fester until they plague the work environment.
- A person trained in listening and nonverbal communication is more sensitive to differences and more effective in cross-cultural interactions.

As educators committed to equity and inclusion, we realize that we have no choice but to become better listeners. The skill of listening is obviously fundamental to honoring dignity, which is the foundation of strong relationships. Without listening, relationships suffer. They break down or don't ever develop in the first place.

Although we may conclude that listening is extremely important, we can also draw these broad conclusions: (1) We aren't all that good at listening, and (2) we, as a society, have not valued teaching and learning listening skills. So how can we start to develop our listening skills? Table 7.5 contains some practical suggestions.

**Table 7.5 Practices to Develop Listening Skills**

<p>Buddy up with <b>quietness</b></p>	<p>Get comfortable with empty space that allows reflection and thinking about what messages you have sent or received.</p>
<p>Kick <b>unproductive patterns</b> to the curb</p>	<p>Recognize when you're engaging in autobiographical, inquisitive, judgment/criticism, or solution listening. These patterns of listening shift the focus to you and get in the way of seeking to understand.</p>
<p><b>Focus</b>, focus, focus</p>	<p>Get rid of distractions and potential distractions. Recognize when your focus shifts away from the speaker and correct it. Practice concentration, determination, and intention.</p>
<p>Process <b>more than words</b></p>	<p>Words matter. But Albert Mehrabian's (1981) groundbreaking work showed that nonverbal communication matters more. Only 7% of meaning is from spoken words; 38% is from paralinguistic information (the tone or way we say the words), and 55% is from facial expressions, gestures, posture, and other forms of body language.</p>
<p>Name <b>values, beliefs, and assumptions</b></p>	<p>Listen carefully for word choices that represent the speakers' unexamined systems of belief. Identify clues as to how they perceive the world, people, and events. Help them name language.</p>
<p><b>Reflect</b> what you hear</p>	<p>Skillfully paraphrase or mirror (repeat verbatim) to help the speakers hear their own thoughts, check for understanding, show that you are interested and engaged, and encourage speakers to continue.</p>

**Why do you want to become a better listener? What practice(s) from Table 7.5 represent the biggest opportunities for personal growth. Why?**

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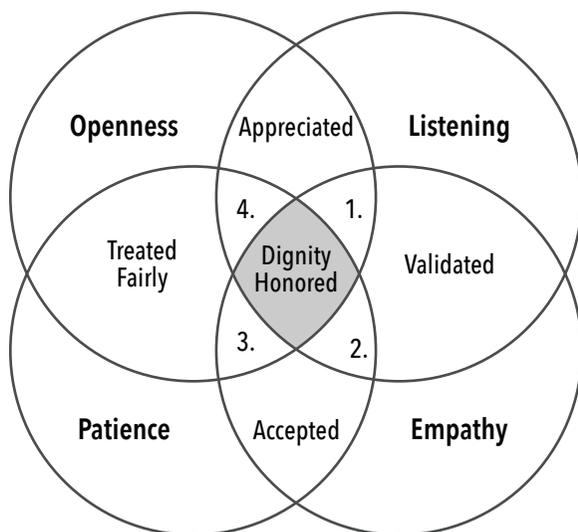
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### The Origin Story

The four *Dispositions for Dignity* may resonate with you, yet you may have asked “where did these come from?” The short answer is they emerged from our research of work from worldwide experts in dignity, humiliation, and belonging studies (Hartling & Lindner, 2016; Hicks, 2018; Kaufmann, Kuch, Neuhäuser, & Webster, 2010; Lindner, 2002; National Dignity Council, 2016; powell & Menendian, 2016).

As stated in Chapter 5, Dr. Donna Hicks’s *Ten Essential Elements of Dignity* greatly influenced our thinking because of its practical application. Each essential element pointed to a specific action that honored dignity. As we analyzed these actions in the context of our experiences in equity work and our learnings from other experts, we recognized several themes that ran through the entire body of work. The themes indicated who people needed to *be* in order to *do* dignity. In other words, dignity being came before dignity doing. Hence, the four *Dispositions for Dignity* emerged.

Figure 7.2 Four Overlapping Dispositions



Our *Dignity Framework for Educational Equity* started with these four dispositions as overlapping circles (Figure 7.2). The four *Indicators for Belonging* then emerged as we researched the concepts of belonging and othering. They represent the experience of humans when their dignity is honored: they feel validated, accepted, treated fairly, and appreciated. Note that it is the overlapping nature of particular dispositions that nurture these experiences. For example, empathizing and listening to someone helps that person feel validated.

The unique ways the dispositions overlap can also guide us on what we can *do* (behaviors, practices, and policies) to honor dignity. In Figure 7.2, we represent those actions with numbers one through four. These comprise the final component of the framework: the *Standards for Dignity*. Ultimately, to shape and

maintain a culture of dignity, these are the behaviors educators must work to normalize. We will explore how to do that in the next chapter.

### Exercise

Read through the reflections you wrote throughout this chapter or write an overall reflection. In a group, take turns sharing reflections. After several rounds, open up a discussion about ideas shared. Consider, if helpful, using a structured protocol to promote patience and listening.

### Apply

With a team of colleagues, discuss questions such as these.

- Within this chapter, what ideas stick out?
- How are we reacting to this information?
- In what ways are each of us going to work on developing our own core *Dispositions for Dignity*? How can we work together to address them as organizational capacities within our team/school/office?

## The Bottom Line

- The core *Dispositions for Dignity* make it easier to **honor dignity**, increasing personal ability and organizational capacity.
- The *Dispositions for Dignity* can serve as **conditions for brave space**, an environment where people encourage one another to embrace the discomfort that accompanies authentic engagement with dignity, belonging, and inclusion.

- The dispositions are: **empathy, patience, openness, and listening.**
- **Empathy is a component of effective teacher–student relationships** that correlates with student growth and achievement as well as inclusive disciplinary practices.
- **Empathy fatigue is a risk** for dignity-conscious people. Mitigate this risk by engaging in self-empathy and learning to love yourself through self-compassion.
- **Patience accompanies wisdom.** Without patience, we can easily take foolish action.
- Developing **openness requires us to confront and overcome three common feedback triggers:** truth, relationship, and—especially—identity triggers.
- **Listening is at the core of healthy relationships.** Although it's extremely important, (1) we aren't all that good at listening, and (2) we, as a society, have not valued teaching and learning listening skills.
- In the next (and final) chapter, we will focus on how to shape a **culture of belonging and dignity.**