Twitter Thread by Dr Claudia Antolini ■■#BLM she/her ■



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People! Have you seen people being rude to each other during meetings, maybe directed at women/people of colour/disabled people/LGBTQ+ people? Do you want to help prevent this abuse?

Some tips you can consider as a bystander depending on the situation (thread)

Have a code of conduct and circulate it. Make it clear that abusive behaviour will not be accepted. Build in accountability strategies (what happens if someone violates it). Have a moderator/chair to observe the dynamics of your group.

This kind of behaviour is very normalised and insidious, so train yourself to spot it. Is there somebody that usually interrupts? Is there somebody that usually gets interrupted and silenced? Are there signs of aggressive communication?

Not everyone might like that you jump at their defense - your heart might be in the right place but it can come across as patronising. Try to bring up the subject with your colleagues and see what they think. Foster a culture of positive communication.

Once you see that somebody is trying to interrupt - politely redirect the discussion towards the person that was originally speaking. Eg "thank you for that, now I'd really like to hear what person xyz was saying earlier".

Give credit where credit is due. If something proposes an idea with little reaction and someone else says the same without crediting them - point out it's an addition to person xyz's original suggestion.

You can reinforce your message with your body language/tone of your voice. Be firm when you redirect the conversation. Sound and act interested when the person that was interrupted is speaking again.

If the discussion gets heated, the moderator should step in, remind people about the code of conduct and the expectations on behaviour, identify behaviours that should be stopped and ask people to abandon them. Again this takes training.

If people refuse to comply, they are asked to leave the meeting. This will be in the code of conduct that you have set in the beginning as a foundation to a meaningful conversation.

Check in with the person you think has been silenced afterwards. Offer them support privately afterwards - but don't let that be the only thing you do. Ask them if there is anything they would like you to do and respect it.

Speak to the moderator and ask for their perception of things. If the moderator appears not to be effective, report the situation to your line manager/project manager/head of department/HR representative/union representative.

Read the company/institution diversity policy (if there isn't one, push to write and enforce one!). Use it when you are reporting higher up as those are the words of the company and they have committed to it. Argue that you witness a climate that doesn't foster it.

Face the person that has interrupted/been abusive. Call them out/call them in. Tell them why you think what they did created a negative or toxic environment. Clarify that it's a behaviour you don't accept.

It's really important that as uncomfortable as it might make you feel you push back. Peer pressure can be used positively in this context. Share your thoughts with like-minded people and start pushing back as a group.

You can apply all of the above in email chains too!

I've said this before - it's important that whichever action you take you respect the agency of the person that is being silenced. Center them, not yourself. Some of these tips would work, and some might not, depending on the individual situation. Do more reading. Keep learning.

Please add your suggestions/thoughts to this as I am always looking for more ways to address these situations.

Apologies for typos.