Tools & Takeaways:
"Together in the Tough Stuff: Building a Culture of Respect"

Build a Respect-First Culture

- Create shared team agreements: Co-develop phrases like "We speak up with care," "We protect dignity," or "We don't joke at others' expense." These statements work best when they reflect real, shared values—so take time during the forming stage of a team to talk about behavioral norms and expectations (e.g., no interrupting, listening fully, attributing ideas, focusing on behaviors not character).
- Normalize feedback: Make it common to say, "That didn't land well—can we revisit that?" This only works well when psychological safety is in place.
- Do temperature checks: At the end of meetings, ask "Did everyone feel heard today?" or "Anything we need to course-correct?"

Daily Respect Habits

- Start meetings with a human moment: "What's something you're carrying today?"
- Rotate who leads or opens meetings: This gives more people voice, visibility, and shared ownership.
- Use names correctly, respect pronouns, and avoid assumptions about identity or background.
- Be aware of non-verbal behaviors: Especially in virtual settings, non-verbal cues can communicate inclusion—or exclusion. For example, turning your camera off, avoiding eye contact, or visibly disengaging can send unspoken messages. Inflection, facial expressions, and silence matter, too.

Responding in the Moment
- Calmly disrupt without blaming: "Let's pause—I think that could be interpreted differently than intended."
- If something feels off, ask for clarity: "Can you tell me what you meant by that?"
- Encourage collective responsibility: "How do we want to handle situations like this as a team?"

After the Moment
- Debrief tough moments: Not to shame, but to learn. Ask: "What went well? What can we do differently next time?"
- Support one another privately: "You were put in a tough spot—I saw it, and I've got your back."

When a colleague hears or witnesses something negative, especially something exclusionary, biased, or dismissive—what they say (or don't say) can either reinforce harm or build a safer, more respectful culture. Here are ways colleagues can stand up in the moment, with phrases that support the target and invite accountability without escalating tension:

How Colleagues Can Stand Up in the Moment

Support the Target
- "Hey, I just want to say I value your voice here."
- "Are you okay? That didn't sit right with me."
- "You shouldn't have to deal with that. I'm here for you."

Interrupt the Harm (Calmly)
- "Let's take a moment—I think that comment could be hurtful."
- "Can we pause? I don't think that reflects our values here."
- "That may have come across differently than intended—can we clarify?"

Redirect or Reframe
- "Let's bring the focus back to the issue—not the person."
- "I think we can express concerns without it getting personal."
- "Let's keep this space respectful for everyone involved."

What to Say Afterward (Privately or as a Team)

To the person harmed:
- "I noticed that interaction earlier—just wanted to check in. You good?"
- "That didn't feel okay to me. If you want to talk or take it further, I've got your back."
- "Thanks for your patience back there. I'm sorry that happened."

To the person who made the comment:
(If you have a trusting relationship)
- "Hey, can I give you some feedback about what happened earlier?"
- "I don't think you meant harm, but that comment might have landed in a way that made someone feel excluded."
- "Let's think together about how we show up as a team—this is one of those moments."

Tips for Speaking Up with Confidence
- You don't have to be perfect—just present.
- Use "I" statements if unsure: "I felt uncomfortable when..."
- Focus on behavior, not character: "That statement felt off," not "You're a bad person."
- Practice common phrases so you're ready in the moment.