

MEET-UP EVENT REPORT

November 14, 2018

Understanding Implicit Bias

from Martha Wiley, Host2Host Member and Host in Vancouver, Washington

Jae and Sandy of [Resolutions] Northwest led a mini-workshop at the Host2Host meetup on November 14 on the topic of implicit bias (racism), with the goal of helping us become better hosts by identifying, understanding, and addressing our own unconscious biases.

This was a great introduction to a complicated topic, and I left feeling as though we had barely scratched the surface.

What is implicit bias? Racism. We are taught to feel a certain way about people - we absorb it unconsciously from our families, our communities, and our culture. These attitudes and stereotypes about race and culture affect our understanding of people, our actions, and our decisions. They underlie every interaction we have.

How does implicit bias affect us as hosts? Take communication, for example. People in attendance described our ideal guest using words such as "engaging, friendly, respectful, and affable." The definitions of these communication characteristics are culture and race driven. What is the etiquette about communication between hosts and guests? Who decides what's the right way to communicate? Is it for the host's benefit or the guest's? Why do we assume that because they don't talk to us in the way WE decided they should, it's because they are unfriendly? Why do our guests have to talk in a way that make US comfortable?

Jae and Sandy emphasized the concept of accountability. We have to model the behavior we want to see, and take responsibility for our failures as well as successes. Notice when you are making excuses or justifying injustices. When you hold yourself and others accountable, you can't play favorites. It's hard to take ownership and show accountability for something you're sure is going to fail, but failure is the first step toward success.

For white people, who were most of the people in attendance, we have to recognize that we are in the position of power and privilege. Power plus prejudice equals racism. Jae and Sandy's helpful tips to address racism include the handy acronym BAKE. Believe when someone tells you about racism. Accept that we have different ideas, beliefs, and values. Knowledge must be sought. Evaluate your current position and how you feel.

Bottom line, for me, was that we don't talk about racism enough. Maybe if we had more opportunities for discussion, we'd all get better at recognizing racism in ourselves and in society. In today's cultural climate, the sooner we address it the better.