



ellen krug

writer, lawyer, human

“Gray Area Thinking”™

Presentation Description: All humans habitually categorize and group others who are “different” from “us,” which often leads to black and white thinking, as in “good” versus “bad” or “native” versus “immigrant” and a host of other isolating labels. With this presentation, Ellen (Ellie) Krug offers a toolset—Gray Area Thinking™—for interacting with diverse humans in a mindful and compassionate way. Attendees will appreciate and value how it’s necessary to consciously work to “Think Gray!”™

Gray Area Thinking™ is a simple three-part toolset for interacting with diverse humans: (1) awareness of another human’s vulnerability or suffering; (2) risk-taking to alleviate or lesson that vulnerability or suffering; and (3) compassion and kindness for both self and others.

Why this Presentation Works: Most diversity and inclusion trainings address unconscious bias by educating audience members about neurobiology and the human tendency to deny being biased. However, audience members often aren’t given easy to understand “tools” to employ in their day to day interactions with diverse humans.

By utilizing memorable training tools (the Darnell Barton video, Ellie’s voice and story, etc.—see below), this presentation “sticks” particularly well with listeners. This presentation also provides an easily understood/remembered toolset that can be utilized by audience members as soon as they walk out of the training room.

Learning Objectives:

1. The value of diversity and inclusion based on an understanding that we must consciously work to not categorize or label others and instead, view everyone as “human.”
2. Understanding that fear of the unknown (including a fear of interacting with persons who are “different”) is core to the human condition and strategies for addressing that fear (e.g. risk taking and self-compassion).
3. Increased appreciation for the challenges that all humans face when interacting with various systems (law enforcement, social services, educational, legal, etc.) where one’s uniqueness isn’t easily recognized.

Mechanics: Candidly, the presentation begins merely with Ellie saying “Hello.” Audience members immediately understand that her voice (deeply masculine) doesn’t match her appearance (very feminine). This learning moment introduces the topic of how humans are “wired” to categorize others and transitions to discussing the bumpiness that results when we encounter humans who can’t be easily categorized. The presentation then proceeds to a video of how a Buffalo, N.Y. bus driver named Darnell Barton saves a woman from committing suicide (viewers watch this unfold on the screen). Darnell is black; the woman he saves is white. This, in turn, allows for examining the three components of Gray Area Thinking™ (awareness; risk-taking; compassion/kindness) and exploration as to how audience members might be able to take risks as they encounter diverse humans (with something as simple as “Hello, how are you today?” to a diverse human constituting a “risk”).

Other components of this presentation include training on “allyship” (e.g. methods of actively supporting diverse humans) and on how to shut down micro-aggressions (confronting another’s racism, homophobia, and other marginalizing behavior).

If time allows (or if the sponsor specifically seeks), the presentation can include the “Identity Word Game” where audience members are posed a series of questions (e.g. “the part of my identity that I am most aware of on a daily basis” “the part of my identity that garners me the most privilege”, etc.) and asked to stand by identifying words (“gender” “race” “sexual identity” etc.) printed on placards and affixed to walls in the training room.

A small part of the training involves Ellie sharing about her experience as a transgender woman who transitioned genders at age fifty-two. If the sponsor specifically seeks, this can be expanded to provide an element of “Transgender 101” training.

All Gray Area Thinking™ attendees are presented with a handout. (Unless otherwise arranged, the Sponsor will bear the cost of copying/distributing the handout.)

Technical Needs: This presentation requires Wi-Fi access and space for Ellie to “roam” as she speaks. (Ellie doesn’t utilize a podium or power point for her presentations).

Duration: 75 minutes at a minimum; up to 120+ minutes depending on Sponsor’s goals.

For additional information contact:

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