

# PRINCIPLE

*Guilt is the  
glue that holds  
prejudice in place.*



# THEORY

Many diversity training programs rely on guilt to motivate people to change their prejudicial attitudes. The sessions often consist of moralizing or blaming people for their privileged positions. Some programs review all of the ways in which participants have been racist or sexist or acted in other oppressive ways. These common approaches do not work. Condemning people, shaming them, and making them feel guilty are all unproductive strategies: they increase defensiveness rather than creating an opening for change. Guilt is especially useless, because it thrives on our turning inward, focusing on our own bad feelings about ourselves, rather than directing our energies outward, toward the work of becoming an ally. People change more readily when they are lifted up and appreciated rather than made to feel guilty.

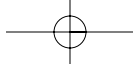
# EXAMPLE

A large metropolitan police department was under increasing public scrutiny for alleged racist practices. Daily articles attacking the department appeared in both local and national newspapers. Recent high-profile trials had produced evidence indicating widespread racism in the department. With the increased media attention, the police officers had become more defensive and isolated. When the police commission decided to introduce diversity training for officers in the department, the officers saw the training as one more attack on the department. The more community groups pointed out the police department's failings, the less willing the officers were to hear the criticism. They resisted all suggestions for change by saying, "We're the best police department in the world." With this siege mentality, the officers could not honestly look at the racism in the police force.

# ACTIVITY

Think of someone you work with or in your community whose prejudiced behavior you've tried to change. How many times have you tried to correct that person's behavior but it didn't work? Condemning people rarely helps them to change their behavior. Instead, think about what you honestly appreciate about the person. Also consider the ways in which that person has made progress, even if it's only slight, on the issue that is of concern to you. Practice telling that person the things she is doing right. Appreciation leads to action; condemnation leads to paralysis.

People are often afraid to appreciate someone whose behavior they disapprove of for fear that the appreciation will keep the oppressive behavior unchallenged. However, only by seeing what is human in the person who acts oppressively can we hope to bring about change. All of us are more receptive to suggestions to change when we know we are liked.



# WORKSHEET

Name someone whose behavior you would like to change.

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Think of three things that you can appreciate about that person.

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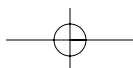
Determine a time and a place in which you will offer these appreciations.

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