Building Better Communication

The examples below are provided by the IIT Diversity Committee and are intended as illustrations to give greater context to and to be used as guidelines for furthering conversations. These examples are not policy. They are provided to encourage reflection and, hopefully, facilitate greater civility and understanding among IIT community members. Please use your own best judgment when presented with actual scenarios given the particulars of the situation. **Think the best before you assume the worst.**

#1–ASK RATHER THAN ASSUME

#2—DON'T FORGET THE PLEASE

THE SITUATION	ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT	BEST PRACTICES
• An employee, student, or faculty member tells a peer or colleague to complete a task without utilizing polite words to frame their request—or offering a personal greeting to someone looking for assistance; and/or • A person is not acknowledged by an employee, student, or faculty member as they pass each other in the hallway or ride on the same elevator together; and/or • Someone accuses a colleague of not returning an item and does not apologize to the wrongfully accused person after realizing the item was indeed returned.	• Don't show indifference when a member of the IIT community is seeking your professional assistance or slight a member of the IIT community; and/or • Apologize for a miscommunication to which you are a party	• When working with colleagues to complete a task, treat them the way you would like to be treated or the way they desire to be treated; and/or • Start and finish every new conversation with a sincere greeting and close; and/or • Acknowledge others as you meet them throughout your workday; and/or • When a miscommunication takes place, ensure that you do your part to extinguish any negative or hurt feelings—including apologizing.

#4—THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEARING AND LISTENING IS UNDERSTANDING

THE SITUATION	ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT	BEST PRACTICES
• A person says “yes” but means “I hear you, but I don‘t necessarily agree” or says “I don’t know/I’ll think about it”, but means “no”; and/or • Someone doesn’t respond. It could mean “I don’t know the answer, I don’t like the question, or I didn’t hear or understand the question or parts of the question;” and/or • A peer agrees to complete an assignment, but doesn’t specify a date of completion; you don’t give a deadline date, but you assume it will be done as soon as possible.		

#5–FACE IT. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN YOU NEED TO PICK UP THE PHONE OR DELIVER THE MESSAGE IN PERSON

THE SITUATION	ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT	BEST PRACTICES
• You are working with your department/team/unit/colleague to implement a new policy/system/process. Emailing becomes frustrating because everyone has a different interpretation for how things should work and no one is on the same page. Communications are becoming strained because not all thoughts can be expressed in the way they were intended via electronic communications. Now defensive behavior is engaged. Someone is ready to attack (verbally or via email).	• Don't engage in a flurry of heated email exchanges that become more rude and less cohesive with every keystroke.	• Walk over to or call the person or request a time (either right then or later) to discuss the issue and not how you perceive it; and/or • Mention that email doesn't seem to be the best solution to complete the task and determine a time to work together to get the job done; and/or • Share the responsibility of not being more clear in your communication. Remind yourself and the other person that you are working together toward the same goal; and/or • If things have gone too far and communication is broken, be mature enough to apologize and admit you misspoke/overreacted. If you were on the receiving end of the offense, be mature enough to acknowledge what happened and move past it. Once the air has been cleared, move forward with the business at hand.

#6–ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR OWN PERSONAL STEREOTYPES (I.E. YOUR BAGGAGE)

THE SITUATION	ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT	BEST PRACTICES
• An item goes missing from your office or classroom. Someone infers that a particular person must have taken it.	• Don't make assumptions based on a person's race, gender, financial situation, etc.; and/or • Don't focus on the person, focus on the problem.	• Recognize that we have all developed biases and dealt with stereotypes. This is natural, but it is inappropriate to act upon it; and/or • Become aware of your personal biases (through assessments or self-reflection); and/or • Pause and reflect before acting/responding in situations where your personal biases are likely to surface.

#7–KNOW WHEN IT’S A GOOD THING FOR YOU (AS A THIRD PARTY) TO ACT AND WHEN IT’S BETTER FOR YOU TO WATCH FROM THE SIDELINES (I.E. TO LOOK THE OTHER WAY)

#9–PERCEEEE E