



National  
Defence

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# DEFENCE **ETHICS** PROGRAMME

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Presents

**A collection of short essays on ethical concepts**

**An addendum to the Conversations  
on Defence Ethics (CODE):  
a Defence Team Learning Event**



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# ON DIGNITY

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Dignity is central to our humanity. It is the heart of modern ethics and directly informs democratic forms of governance as well as international human rights laws and conventions.

It is also the foundation of the *DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics*.

“Respect the dignity of all persons”, the first ethical principle of the Code, comes from the profound realization that when we accept that every human being has equal value that it gives us a way to orientate ourselves in the world that has amazing impact on our ability to build just, peaceful and prosperous societies.

This concept has come to the point where there is near global consensus, officially, philosophically and intellectually, that every person has equal value and basic human rights.

For this concept to fully be realised, we must all matter equally despite differences in appearance, gender, religion, age, country of origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ability, ethnicity, etc.

Our capacity to reason and to understand the differences between right and wrong give us the ability to understand the importance of doing the right thing. They don't, however, make us perfect in how we handle ourselves. We are, after all, humans and humans make mistakes.

So, how do we reconcile the uglier side of humanity with the idea that we should respect the dignity of all? After all, crime, hate and discrimination exist.

First, we need to consider different definitions of respect.

The first kind of respect – the one most often linked with the word respect – depends on how individual behaviours and characteristics are viewed by others. In other words this kind of respect is conditional.

Someone might have earned your respect based on a particular skill or achievement you find impressive or admire. But if that person were to be found guilty of committing a crime you think is incomprehensible, the respect you had for them might be dimmed or eliminated. Here respect is conditional.

The type of respect we are talking about in the first principle – the one based in dignity – is unconditional. It is based on the unchallengeable dignity inherent in all people. It is not something someone else gives you or that you earn: it is part of the fabric that makes you human.

Even people who have admitted to committing terrible crimes and will be incarcerated for the rest of their living days must have their human dignity respected. If we don't respect it for the worst of us, then it means it is conditional. If we allow even a single person to be denied their dignity because of a set condition, then we risk someone else setting conditions where your dignity does not need to be respected. This is why when we see ethical and moral failings in others we can't use their behaviour to excuse our own similar failings. This brings us back to this near universal acceptance that all people deserve to have their dignity respected, at all times and without conditions.

Take the Law of Armed Conflict, for example. These laws are applicable to all parties in warfare. It is always wrong to deliberately target civilians and standing armies must try to spare non-combatants from harm as much as reasonably possible. If opposing forces break the rules and commit war crimes against civilians, soldiers on the opposing side would also be committing war crimes if they were to retaliate against the opposing force's civilian population or its prisoners of war.

Human rights would be unrecognizable in the real world without the concept of human dignity.

The inherent dignity of all people is a not claim that we will behave kindly towards each other. It is, however, a testament to our ethical obligations to strive towards treating each other as fellow human beings trying to live our lives to their fullest and foster relationships that bring meaning to those lives.

Fortunately, humanity has been gifted another core characteristic: having the capacity to choose how we respond to others. The DND/CAF has chosen dignity as a way to set the ethical foundation for all that we are and all that we do. It is hoped that by explaining why dignity was placed so central to our ethical framework that you will accept that our first principle is actually a meaningful and useful way to orient yourself in this world.

## ON INCLUSION

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Why is inclusion such an important concept for those on the Defence Team to get behind? This short essay hopefully makes the case for bringing inclusion into your own personal set of values.

In our first short essay on ethics we introduced the concept of dignity and how it became our first ethical principle. We discussed how there is almost universal acceptance all human life has equal value and this value is captured in the concept of dignity. In effect, dignity is our most important value, and while it stands alone at the top of the pyramid as a 1<sup>st</sup> principle, it needs to be supported by other strong foundational elements. We contend that inclusion is a value that strongly supports the concept of dignity.

So, how does inclusion support dignity? Well, how you navigate life and whether it brings you meaning has two fundamental elements: your worldview; and your willingness to shoulder responsibility for yourself and others. In part having a meaningful life requires you to shoulder the responsibility of actively engaging in the world to ensure that this fundamental belief about the equal value of all human life is made manifest in all that you do, for all those you meet.

The first ethical principle of the *DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics* is Respect the dignity of all persons so the notion of inclusion is already built into the Defence Team's very foundation.

Inclusion, as a concept, is simply an articulation of a way to support that fundamental belief. In other words, dignity is the what, inclusion is the how.

When we include people we are in fact actively engaging in a process that respects their dignity and our own for that matter. Think about that for a moment. By simply making people feel welcome and engaged, regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs, you add meaning to your life, but also make the world a better place in the process. Your own dignity calls to you for action in this regard.

Inclusion takes practice. One simple first step is to commit to recognizing and setting aside stereotypes and get to know people as individuals. So, the next time someone new joins your team simply think about their dignity, find ways to include them, make them part of the team and make an effort to get to know them.

# TIPS FOR CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

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Let's first consider The Defence Team's 1st ethical principle, Respect the dignity of all persons. When you take moment think about it, *dignity* is the *what* and *inclusion* is a big part of the *how*.

Leading an inclusive Defence Team is about more than hiring individuals with diverse backgrounds, cultures and lifestyles. Although that is a great starting point, inclusion requires a little bit more effort from team leaders, so why not make creating a more inclusive workplace one of your leadership goals?

We'll give you some guidance on how you can achieve that goal, so keep reading to enhance your leadership skills even further!

## Diversity vs inclusion: Is there a difference?

Before we get into how you can create an inclusive workplace, it's important to fully grasp the definition of inclusion.

Many times, inclusion is seen as a synonym of diversity and the two concepts are used interchangeably, but that's not exactly correct.

Both diversity and inclusion are very much needed in order to create a positive work environment. But they vary in the sense that while diversity refers to the differences and similarities between people, inclusion focuses on embracing and celebrating said differences.

A diverse workplace would be an office with employees from different countries, sexual orientations, religions, and such. An inclusive workplace would be an office that acknowledges all of those differences and makes sure that everyone feels accepted and valued for who they are.

A workplace that is inclusive is nothing less than the recipe for success and the following statistics prove it!

## Why is inclusion in the workplace so important?

The answer to this question can vary.

For one, as human beings, we should always support each other. Whether we're speaking about employees, individuals in authoritative positions, your colleagues...open-mindedness can only lead to forward-looking connections.

Diverse businesses that have adopted an inclusive mindset report several improvements in the bottom line, and we can draw conclusions that the advantages of inclusive workplaces are far reaching. While the Defence Team has different primary motivations than profit, we can draw parallels with our own operations and surmise that an inclusive workplace would be a benefit to us as well:

- Companies that are more diverse than average had 19 percent higher innovation revenues in 2018.
- In that same year, 43 percent of companies with diverse boards achieved higher profits.
- Companies that are ethnically diverse are 35 percent more likely to achieve above-average financial returns.

Keep reading and learn how you can transform your office into an inclusive workplace.

### **1. Connect with your employees**

First things first, if you want your workplace to be inclusive, you need to lead by example.

So, we invite you to consider the relationships you have with your employees at the moment. Do you think that the way you interact with your team members makes them comfortable to be open with you?

The only way you can create an inclusive office is if everyone feels like they can speak to you and not be judged based on who they are as a whole person.

So as the first step in this journey to inclusion, make an active effort to connect with your employees authentically and at a personal level. Don't make any assumptions about people's lifestyles, but rather, let them open up to you.

Do keep in mind that this attitude might lead to some difficult conversations. As such, it's crucial that you are well-prepared for these conversations, by knowing what to do if a client, partner, employee or manager judges or excludes someone and being prepared to stand by your beliefs even when someone is trying to challenge them.

Unfortunately, not everyone will initially subscribe to an inclusive mindset even though our basic humanity calls for it. Look at minor missteps along the path to inclusion as learning opportunities, but do be seen to be taking action against those who willfully refuse to adapt to our values.

### **2. Be open-minded**

Being open-minded is just as important as connecting with your team.

So, practice putting your assumptions and stereotypes aside. We all have them, but they're not helpful to make others feel comfortable.

Instead, make sure you learn with every step you take in your journey for better inclusion at work. Even if you've never been in such a diverse space, time and experience will let you know which responses are appropriate and which aren't.

As long as you're aware of how your demeanor contributes to the inclusion or lack-there-of in the workplace, open to hearing the opinions of others and willing to change what you need to change, you'll be on your way to success.

### **3. Support and celebrate your differences**

By now, you know to connect with your employees with an open mind, so what's the next step?

Easy: it's commemorating!

Being heard is great, but being celebrated is even better.

So invite your employees to share their traditions with the rest of the team. Doing this is nothing but valuable, as everyone will learn more about everything.

Here are a few ideas on how to celebrate the different cultures in the office:

- Create a shared calendar

Every year, ask your employees to add festivities to a shared calendar that are important to them.

This way you can show respect to different cultures on special days simply by wishing the employee



a good Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Kwanzaa, Cinco de Mayo - you name it. When appropriate, you can even organize small celebrations.

- Have a prayer room in the office

People don't leave their religion out of the office door - or at least they shouldn't have to.

While many areas have places set aside already, consider having a prayer or reflection room with in your work area that allows folks to conveniently pray or meditate whenever they need to, safely and privately, without having to choose between their beliefs and their professional life.

- Train your team on cultural diversity

Investing in this type of training might not be the first thing you consider when planning out your business's budget, but it's certainly advantageous.

You can do something as simple as organizing a monthly workshop on topics such as gender identity, mental health, hurtful stereotypes and more.

#### 4. Rethink your meetings

Inclusion in meetings is all about making sure that everyone feels like they can speak up and contribute to whatever's being discussed.

Often, managers plan their meetings in a general way, but considering the specifics might be a better strategy and here is how you can do it:

- Create a plan for the meeting before-hand and send it to the participants

This is beneficial to all participants, as it gives everyone more time to think about ideas and suggestions.

But it's even more useful for your introverted or socially-anxious employees, as having some time to properly prepare themselves will boost their confidence, making it a lot easier for them to actually share their opinion with others.

This approach will also benefit team members who would like to discuss in their second (or third, or fourth!) language the topics at hand.

- Praise your employees

Did someone come up with a great idea that benefited the organization? Well, a meeting is a perfect place to give credit to that person!

This will encourage others to participate in future meetings, improving the dynamic of the team.

- Be aware of your communication style

We've all heard about people who often explain something in a condescending way, assuming from the get-go that the other person doesn't know it.

This is a great example of a communication style that doesn't promote inclusion but rather makes people feel less than, and the same mistake can happen between races, religions, and more.

To avoid this, make sure that you speak to everyone on the same level.

This will make everyone more comfortable to let you know that they don't understand a certain concept and when that happens, it's your cue to explain.

## **5. Create resource groups**

It's possible that some of your employees aren't yet comfortable with whatever differences they have compared to the rest of the team.

A great way of handling this is by initiating employee resource groups.

Check your team's needs with an anonymous questionnaire and, based on the replies, create groups that focus on topics that might benefit your team members and boost their self-confidence.

## **6. Make sure everyone's safe**

As mentioned before, not everyone is a fan of diversity and/or inclusion.

In some cases, this might even put the minorities in dangerous situations and it's crucial that you do something about it as soon as you realize that your office isn't a safe space for everyone.

If someone comes up to you with a complaint on this matter, make sure to speak with everyone involved and find a solution that's fair and that'll prevent similar situations to come up.

## **7. Speak up about inclusion**

Finally, be vocal about the importance of inclusion in your office. A few easy ways you can do this are:

- Including inclusion as a topic in your onboarding material

This way, new employees know from the start how important it is to accept others and their differences.

- Including inclusion as a topic on your website

You know by now how important inclusion is for Canadians, jobs seekers and industry leaders. Mentioning it on your website lets them know that you're aware of this.

- Celebrating diversity wherever you can

A social media post to celebrate Pride month, another to celebrate all the different holiday festivities, another one to acknowledge mental health awareness month... you get the drill. Don't forget to go beyond annual events and celebrate everyone's accomplishments throughout the year.

## **Creating an inclusive workplace: It's all about listening**

Making an effort to make your team members feel heard and understood is halfway to creating an inclusive workplace.

Once they realize the effort you're making towards celebrating and valuing each and every single one of them, they'll be even more willing to give it their all at work.

And those statistics that we mentioned earlier? Well, you might just start noticing them as you analyze your business progress and results.

Plus, your employee retention will be like never before: after all, who would want to leave a workplace that has an inclusive mindset?

\*This content was adapted and translated with permission from WorkLogicHR