



Uncovering Diversity's Many Dimensions

By Diane Rhodes

Stand up if ... If you were raised by a single parent. If you (or your parents) are an immigrant to this country. If you have a hidden disability. If you have felt pressure to remain silent on issues of diversity. If you had to take vacation time from work to practice your religion. The list goes on and more people stand. Soon, everyone is standing. Along the way, many are surprised by the reasons people stand. Assumptions are smashed.

This eye-opening experience happened at the Bing Ads Marketing Summit in Seattle April 4-6 and again in Sydney, Australia, on May 4. MJ DePalma, Bing Ads senior global channel marketing manager, created and hosted the 60-minute experiential session, *Diversity & Inclusion: Beyond the Obvious*, to broaden the view of diversity by demonstrating its many dimensions.

"This is not just about gender or ethnicity," MJ says. "All of us have a story. We can share that story so it can help someone else feel connected and understood."

In Seattle, six people from the Bing Ads marketing team, invited in advance by MJ, shared personal stories of times they've felt marginalized or have themselves unwittingly practiced an unconscious bias. The group then mapped each story to one of the D&I Ten Inclusive Behaviors. Some hit a couple of behaviors. Stories ranged from having a life-altering but invisible illness to growing up poor to sexual orientation to speaking English with an accent and feeling ignored in meetings because of it.

Through their stories, panelists in both sessions showed how failing to practice inclusive behaviors might have shut the door on opportunity, both professional and personal.

MJ invited attendees to ask questions of the panelists, but she urged more: "If you identify with any of these people on this panel, I challenge you to let them know. Maybe they spoke your story."

People stood up, stories poured out. The intimacy between the 80 people in the room in Seattle grew.

MJ recalls, "The most magic really happened right around there."

"This is an effort for the long game," MJ says. "It's the work that brings our mission to life and it runs through all products and services at Microsoft."

The more voices that we hear, the better decisions we make.

MJ highlights the hidden meaning of D&I's ampersand: It's a deliberate choice. "When two people collaborate, it's an &. When they contribute individually and come together later, it's an 'and.'" She challenged the group to find more opportunities for ampersands.

Note: *Interested in bringing Diversity & Inclusion: Beyond the Obvious to your team? Reach out to MJ DePalma with questions.*