The five things I’ve learned (and am still trying to figure out)

By Neelam Chand, marketing and communications director, Office for Equity and Diversity

As I write this, I struggle to identify who my audience is, or should be. Is this for diverse communities? Marketers across campus? Students who are living and breathing social justice work? In situations like these, I can’t help but to think about the dichotomy of my work as a diversity marketing and communications director. On the one hand, in order to craft concise messages about our campus, my job is to distill experiences and perspectives into one-line slogans, stock photos, or 11”x17” posters. On the other hand, a social justice perspective urges me to deconstruct these very ideas and address all their complexities.

Straddling both worlds can be difficult depending on the audience. To some, I may be perceived as too radical or harsh. To others, especially in the world of social justice, I can be seen as not doing enough or as a “sellout.” As I continue to navigate these spaces, I’ve realized that there is no single right way to bridge the gap. And after five years of trial and error, and several mistakes along the way, I’d like to share five things that I’ve learned in the process.

1. Tokenism has become the go-to. Though well intended, it’s common to resort to tokenistic practices, especially when it comes to racial diversity. Once in a while, you’ll see an ad with that token person of color strategically placed in a photo because someone realized that the ad was seemingly “too white.” And the question that keeps coming up is, “How else would folks outside our campus know we care about diversity?” Or, “How do we recruit diverse students without representing them in our brochures?” However, I’ve learned that the real question to ask is, “What are the tangible ways we foster diversity on our campus?” This question helps me to facilitate a conversation on how to establish concrete ways of valuing diversity beyond a photograph.

2. Language, people, culture and dynamics are continually evolving. A lot of people are worried about using incorrect terminology to identify various groups. I, myself, have used problematic jargon in social justice circles and have been called out for it. In order for me to craft messages that resonate with different identities, it is essential that I understand how cultures, language and people are ever-changing. Whether it be by reading blogs, academic publications, and Google or by engaging with students and colleagues, I keep myself learning as much as I can.

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3. There’s a discrepancy between our perception and reality.
As marketers, it’s a part of our job to highlight all the positive things happening at our university. But sometimes the perception of how well we are doing with our diversity efforts doesn’t necessarily reflect the experiences of the diverse communities on our campus. I’ve seen marketing teams with good intentions who get caught up in self-promotion or only address the surface of the problem. I’ve learned that as we need to continually evolve with our language, etc. we should also constantly be self-assessing the work we do and adjusting according to the feedback we receive. If not, we run the risk of missing the mark, not doing enough, or actually causing more damage.

4. Navigating politics sucks, but you’ve got to pick your battles.
It’s a balancing act. When it comes to crafting general messages for our entire campus, I’ve got to determine how I’m going to participate. If I push too hard against the grain, I may lose my seat at the table. But if I remain silent while diverse voices are being left out, then I’m part of the problem. What I tend to do is calculate what projects impact institutional change and which ones seem to scratch the surface. The ones that move the needle on our culture and campus climate are the ones worth fighting for. Sometimes a more focused and measured response is where I’m most helpful.

5. Social justice work is not perfect and hardly ever done.
Because social justice work is complex and multifaceted, there’s never a point where I feel like I’ve “arrived” or that my work is complete. And there will be plenty of times when I will misstep and be called out by my peers (maybe even for something in this article!). In all the years I’ve worked in my position, my biggest takeaway is that I must have the ability to learn from my mistakes and continue to grow. This is the nature of the job.

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Are you interested in learning about issues around diversity? Attend our training modules to learn more about issues of diversity in a safe environment, which will be essential to better serve our ever changing student population. Please note, the modules must be taken sequentially.

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<th>Date</th>
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To register for these upcoming modules, please visit: http://sadc.utah.edu/events/training.php.

**TED Talks**

**Neurodiversity – the key that unlocked my world**

What do you think about, when you hear the word, “autism”? No diagnostic manual can truly explain the multifaceted experience of autism. It’s a neurological difference with a vast spectrum of representation within its population. It can come with remarkable gifts and skills as well as devastating traits. Autism does not necessarily equal disability and thankfully today, we have a word, that challenges this negative terminology. Neurodiversity. In her talk, Elisabeth communicates how it is to be autistic yet lead an independent and successful everyday life.

**What it’s like to be a transgender dad**

LB Hannahs candidly shares the experience of parenting as a genderqueer individual -- and what it can teach us about authenticity and advocacy. "Authenticity doesn't mean 'comfortable.' It means managing and negotiating the discomfort of everyday life," Hannahs says.
Upcoming Events

**Sept 4 @ 1-4pm**
Gender and Sexuality Workshop
Red Butte Room, Annex Building [more info]

**Sept 6 @ 4:30-7:30pm**
Get Out: Film Screening & Panel Discussion
SW Room 155-A [more info]

**Sept 10 @ 12-1:30pm**
American Dream Dialogue Series: What is happening to the American Dream?
Gardner Commons—Hinckley Caucus Rm [more info]

**Sept 12 @ 6-8pm**
How to Love Trans and Femmes While We’re Alive
SW Room 155-B [more info]

**Sept 16-Dec 31**
Utah Women in Medicine Exhibit
Eccles Health Sciences Library [more info]

**Oct 3 @ 11am-12pm**
Lean In: Speaking Truth to Power
380 SSB [more info]

Find More Events:
- [http://diversity.utah.edu/events/](http://diversity.utah.edu/events/)
- [https://www.utah.edu/events/](https://www.utah.edu/events/)

Upcoming Seminar

**Multicultural Orientation Framework: Leveraging Cultural Processes to Enhance Interactions**

Karen Tao, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology

Date: Wednesday, September 26, 2018
Time: 12-1:30pm
Location: Pano East, Union

[more information]