

JCI MI - Bystander Intervention Discussion

Transcript & Resource Document

The following notes capture much of the conversation between Linda, Michelle, and Gabe on July 24, 2024. The recording of the discussion is available on the JCI - Michigan YouTube channel.

Informational Resources:

- [American Psychological Association's Bystander Intervention Tip Sheet](#)
- [Breaking the silence - preventing harassment and sexual misconduct](#) (Breaking the Silence; Source of ABC approach referenced below)
- [Rockefeller University's Bystander Intervention Strategies](#)
- [Stanford's Upstander Intervention](#)
- [What is psychological safety?](#) (McKinsey & Company)

Introduction

Hi there, my name Linda LaNoue, I'm the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Director for the 2024 board of directors of JCI Michigan - previously known as Junior Chamber International. JCI Michigan provides leadership development opportunities that empower young people to create positive change.

We have here Gabe Murillo, Founder of Enjoy Talent and, 2023 DEI Director, and Michelle McGrann, current JCI Michigan President and international facilitator.

Gabe has been working in the DE&I space for over a decade. Gabe has designed and implemented DE&I programs for local, state, and national non-profits, large public universities, state and local governments, start-ups, and large public tech firms.

As an organization, JCI MI has discussed bystander intervention in the past - including the February 11, 2023 Year-End Conference in Mt. Pleasant. Today's discussion will build on those topics.

At a high level, Bystander Intervention is defined as a response to a situation that may be harmful to someone else. It involves recognizing the potential for harm and taking action to reduce it.

Prevention and de-escalation are core tenets of bystander intervention. Both of these skills are difficult to practice when it comes to potentially violent situations.

We're here today to talk through ways that we can create more safe spaces and communities.

Some of the main steps to engage in Bystander Intervention include:

1. Observe/Assess/Interpret - noticing whether this a problem is the critical first step
2. Feel responsible - see yourself as being part of the solution and able to help
3. Knowing what to do - safety is the most important consideration when intervening. Before stepping in, try the ABC approach.
 - a. **Assess for safety:** If you see someone in trouble, ask yourself if you can help safely in any way. Remember, your personal safety is a priority – never put yourself at risk.
 - b. **Be in a group:** It's safer to call out behavior or intervene in a group. If this is not an option, report it to others who can act. Buddy safety. Psychological safety.
 - c. **Care for the victim.** Talk to the person who you think may need help. Ask them if they are OK.
4. If you are safe, there are several approaches you can take:
 - a. be direct - address problematic behavior head on;
 - b. distract - be creative and do something unexpected to disrupt the situation;
 - c. document - record what you witnessed as soon as possible;
 - d. delegate - alert others who can help and ask for their assistance. The more people who are aware and able to help, the better;
 - i. COO or member of productions team; alert someone on the board about whether this is something that needs their attention - decide whether to escalate; this is something board members are trained in
 - e. delay - pausing can allow you to figure out the best course of action. Being intentional is important & it's normal to freeze in moments of uncertainty.

While bystander intervention can be applied in many contexts, to support the experiences of JCI Michigan's members and local chapters, we're focusing on bystander intervention in the context of public encounters, civic engagement, and volunteering with larger groups of people.

Questions for Gabe & Michelle

1. How do I notice a potentially harmful act? For example, what if I see something that seems like it could be an issue, yet it also seems like I would be overreaching to interpret it as a problem, much less take action. How do I know when to intervene (i.e., what are examples of the nature / context of an emergency that would help me identify that I should intervene)?

Gabe:

- a. Most people tend to have a decision phobia - yet no decision is a decision.
- b. It's important to examine the rationality of a decision;
- c. Focus on tactics (vs. strategy) as a function of care. Tactics can be as simple as eye contact, reading the room / being familiar with the space you're in
- d. Learning how to practice these skills are among the benefits of group engagement within JCI.
- e. There are layers of needs - the goal is harm reduction.

2. In what ways can someone take personal responsibility? How can I help? Similar: how can I practice being a more active community member to ensure safety in all spaces I'm in?
 - a. Michelle: Establishing common ground and supporting shared experiences;
 - i. Recognize that there are often power dynamics - be aware, is there a level of rapport/familiarity established?
 - ii. positioning / location / nonverbal cues
 - b. Gabe: Dedication to serving is the precursor; being present, observant, aware; ethics - gossip is a form of psychological harm
 - i. It is important to be aware of the chain of command and who to ask for help.
 1. This is why JCI - Michigan board members have green shirts (green is for 2024 specifically) - to make them easily identifiable.
 - ii. documenting what happened, however please *note: recording a situation can escalate the potential for harm*; refer to all [5 D's referenced in the Introduction](#)
3. How can we practice safety for ourselves and others when intervening?
 - a. Michelle: Thinking about the JCI context specifically, it is most likely not violent; what would be most common is some form of harassment, bullying, or gossip and then this could be directed toward you if you intervene;
 - i. It is helpful being a group - not being a singular target; there are ways to combine tactics;
 - ii. Consider asking the person harassing for help - seems counterintuitive to invite their engagement, yet this is such a powerful way to open an avenue for the person who is harassing to turn their energy toward a more positive direction;
 - iii. Showing empathy is a position of strength; reducing the fear upfront by not taking it (e.g., someone's response) personally;
 - b. Gabe: It's a great point to not only consider the target of harassment, you can also focus on the perpetrator;
 - i. It's important to distinguish between physical & psychological safety;
 1. any physical safety concern has to be delegated - not avoiding intervention but also not taking on a responsibility that you are not equipped to handle;
 - ii. Assess the risk you're taking; assess your motivation to prevent de-escalation - the goal is to get the target out of the room;
 - iii. Don't escalate by adding volume (e.g., pulling phone out to record, which is an implicit threat);
 - iv. Be aware of unintended consequences - more intentional approach
4. Do you have any tips on how to overcome fear and distress when intervening?
 - a. Gabe: Overcoming decision phobia by thinking ahead and planning. Do not wait until a moment of crisis;
 - i. Understand what it means to be an "upstander" this is a commitment made in advance - a philosophy, morality, approach to life;

- ii. Commit to a method - pros/cons list - thinking through the tactics and the possibilities of employing it - “very few cons as long as your tactic is aligned with safety” - con list is much longer when making the decision NOT to intervene.
 - iii. Know your range of options.
 - 1. Improv - have some silly jokes that you can say, irrelevant distractions are helpful.
 - iv. Knowing your strengths. There are small steps you can take to overcome fear.
 - v. Self Assessment is essential for leadership building.
- b. Michelle: there are lower stakes ways to intervene: consider calling the person who is being targeted or text them, “need your help, it’s an emergency” - this can sometimes be easier than stepping in.