

# DIGNITY INTELLIGENCE

**Dignity intelligence (DI)** is the capacity to acknowledge, uphold, and protect the inherent worth and value of every individual in the workplace.

It is a form of leadership intelligence that focuses on **treating people as people**—rather than tasks, numbers, or problems—ensuring they feel their contributions and authentic selves are honoured and respected.

## DIGNITY CHECK-IN FRAMEWORK

The **Dignity Check-In Framework** is a short, repeatable reflective practice that helps HR professionals and managers pause, orient, and respond in ways that protect human dignity—especially during emotionally charged or high-stakes conflict. The framework serves as a:

- A lens for decision-making
- A self-regulation tool for HR professionals and managers
- A way to surface and repair dignity injuries before conflict escalates

Question	Purpose
<b>Have I acknowledged their experience?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I want to acknowledge how frustrating this has been for you.”</li><li>• “I hear that this experience left you feeling disrespected.”</li></ul>	<b>Recognition</b>
<b>Have I protected their autonomy?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Here are the options available to you right now.”</li><li>• “You get to decide how you want to proceed.”</li></ul>	<b>Agency</b>
<b>Have I created a safe space to speak?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “This conversation is about understanding, so take the time you need.”</li><li>• “You can share your perspective without fear of retaliation.”</li></ul>	<b>Safety</b>
<b>Have I considered identity or inclusion impacts?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I want to be mindful of how power dynamics may be shaping this.”</li><li>• “Let’s talk about whether this process feels equitable to you.”</li></ul>	<b>Belonging &amp; Fairness</b>

### Before a difficult conversation

“Am I steady enough to hold this conversation? What dignity repair might be needed before content can land?”

### During conflict

“Am I giving ample space to explore the issues? What else might be going on here, under the surface? Am I signalling curiosity or control?”

### After harm or escalation

“Did I prioritize efficiency over care? How might I have done this differently? How can I repair harm?”

# TEN ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DIGNITY

(Donna Hicks, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2011)

Dignity Element	Definition
<b>Acceptance of Identity</b>	Approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities. Assume they have integrity.
<b>Recognition</b>	Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas and experience.
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating and responding to their concerns and what they have been through.
<b>Inclusion</b>	Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, region, nation).
<b>Safety</b>	Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm; and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, that they feel free to speak without fear of retribution.
<b>Fairness</b>	Treat people justly, with equality, and in an even-handed way, according to agreed-upon laws, policies, rules, and norms.
<b>Independence</b>	Empower people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility.
<b>Understanding</b>	Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives, express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them.
<b>Benefit of the Doubt</b>	Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.
<b>Accountability</b>	Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another, apologize; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviours.

## Ask yourself...

- What does it look like when I violate someone's dignity, or compromise my own?
- If I were to say that I conducted myself with dignity, what would my behaviour look like?
- If I wanted to treat someone with dignity, what would I do?

**If we don't lovingly embrace our own dignity, it's harder to do it with others... we're not only valuable and worthy, but we are invaluable. We're priceless, and we're irreplaceable... Acknowledging another's dignity, resisting the temptation to violate another's dignity, and repairing dignity violations can and will heal our deep divides.**

—Dr. Donna Hicks, Harvard Research Associate and Conflict Resolution Expert