

Matt Ricke, Ph.D., BCC
University Ombuds

DIGNITY INTELLIGENCE

Strengthening Conflict Resilience in the Workplace

Office of the Ombuds
Colorado State University

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS 01.

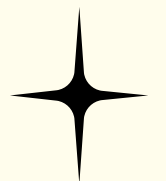
CONFIDENTIAL. INFORMAL. IMPARTIAL. INDEPENDENT.

The Office of the Ombuds serves all CSU employees who **voluntarily** seek **confidential** assistance in managing and/or resolving concerns or conflicts related to the workplace.

Ombuds Services

- Confidential consultation
- Conflict coaching
- Informal mediation & facilitated dialogue
- Shuttle diplomacy
- Workshops, trainings, and facilitation

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WHAT IS DIGNITY INTELLIGENCE ?

02.

Dignity: Inherent worth and value = *non-negotiable*

Respect: Earned through behavior = *discretionary*

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 honored and respected.



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF DIGNITY 03.

1. Acceptance of Identity
2. Recognition
3. Acknowledgement
4. Inclusion
5. Safety
6. Fairness
7. Independence
8. Understanding
9. Benefit of the Doubt
10. Accountability

(Donna Hicks, 2011)



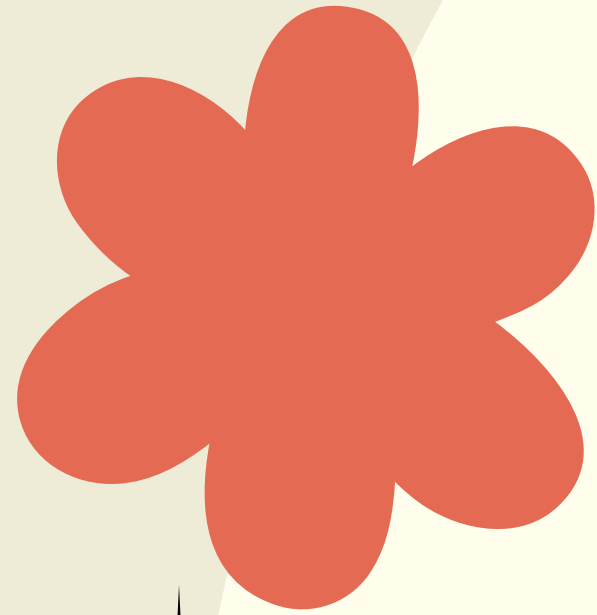
THE ROLE OF DIGNITY

04.

“Understanding the role of dignity in the workplace enables us to repair and rebuild relationships that have been broken because of conflict, and illuminates paths to reconciliation. By honoring the dignity of others, we can experience the freedom necessary to invite positive connections.

We all share a longing for dignity that, when experienced and recognized in one another, creates a sense of safety for all parties, something necessary for growth and human development.”

**Dr. Robyn Short
Workplace Peace Institute** ✨



DIGNITY IN HR & MANAGEMENT

Where does dignity show up in an HR or management context?

- Performance feedback
- How employees are managed
- Investigations
- Terminations
- DEI/JBA challenges and identity-based harms

Dignity violations are “hidden accelerants” in conflict

- Feeling ignored
- Being humiliated or belittled
- Being excluded socially and professionally
- Losing autonomy or agency



06.

SMALL GROUP WORK

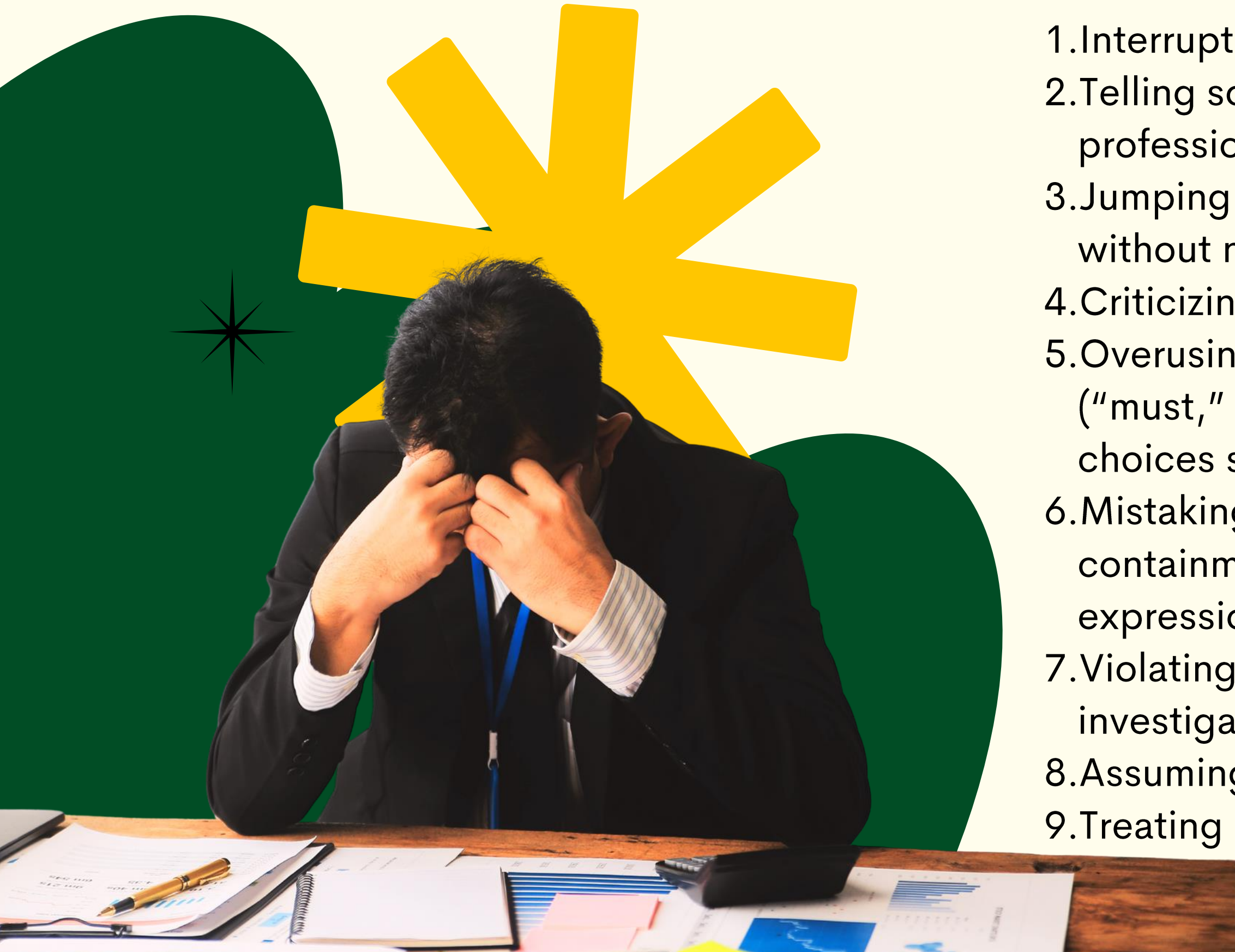
At each table, you will have a scenario.
Think about the role that you might play in the scenario.

Instructions:

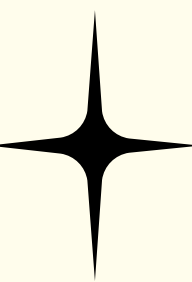
- Read the scenario together.
- Identify the **presenting issue** and the **dignity issue(s)**.
- Name which **elements of dignity** are at risk and how.
- Discuss how an HR professional or manager might **change the dynamic using dignity intelligence**.



COMMON DIGNITY VIOLATIONS 07.



1. Interrupting or talking over someone.
2. Telling someone to "calm down" or "be professional."
3. Jumping straight to facts, process, or policy without naming impact.
4. Criticizing in public or in front of others.
5. Overusing institutional authority language ("must," "required," "non-negotiable") when choices still exist.
6. Mistaking professionalism for emotional containment and inadvertently silencing expression.
7. Violating confidentiality principles during an investigation.
8. Assuming neutrality equals fairness.
9. Treating policy as morally neutral.



THE DIGNITY LENS

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.

It is **NOT**

- A script to follow rigidly
- A substitute for policy or legal compliance
- A therapeutic intervention

It **IS**

- 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

08.

"Before I move forward, what does dignity require in this moment?"





WHY WE NEED THIS



HR professionals and managers operate under constraints:

- Policies, timelines, investigations
- Organizational power asymmetries
- High emotional load from others' distress

The Dignity Check-In creates a micro-pause that:

- Reduces defensiveness (yours and theirs)
- Prevents unintentional dignity violations
- Increases trust—even when outcomes are unfavourable

DIGNITY CHECK-IN

10.

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

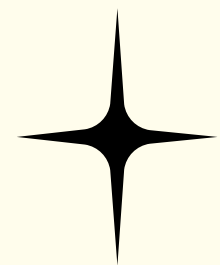


11.

WHY THIS HELPS

The Dignity Check-In...

- Slows reactivity
- Preserves relationship capacity
- Prevents cumulative harm over time
- Protects HR professionals and managers from burnout by grounding them in purpose, not just process



HOW TO USE THE DIGNITY CHECK-IN

Before a difficult conversation

"What dignity repair might be needed before content can land?"

- Prepare by asking...
- Which dignity elements are likely at risk?
- Where might I unintentionally minimize harm?

During conflict

"What might be going on here, under the surface? Can I slow this down?"

- Notice emotional escalation
- Pause and name what's happening
- Re-anchor to dignity before proceeding

After harm or escalation

"How might this have gone differently? What can be done to repair harm?"

- Name what didn't go well
- Acknowledge impact
- Re-establish agency



13.

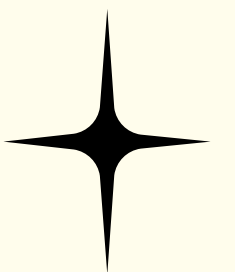
DIGNITY REPAIR LANGUAGE



"There's nothing I can do." → *"I may not have the answer you're hoping for, but I'm committed to walking you through what's possible."*

"That's just how it's done." → *"Let's talk about how this process impacts you and what choices you still have."*

What are some other commonly used phrases that you could reframe into a dignity repair statement?



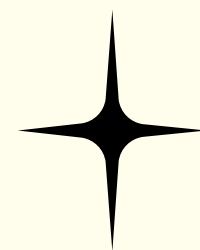
What will you change to build dignity intelligence into conflict moments?

WRAPPING UP

Conflict isn't only about problems—it's about personhood.

Consider integrating dignity checks into:

- Regular one-on-ones
- Performance coaching meetings
- Annual evaluations
- Exit conversations
- Conflict resolution conferences
- Intake appointments and investigations



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University Ombuds



**THANK
YOU!**

ombuds.colostate.edu
Matt.Ricke@colostate.edu
970.491.0936

SCAN ME



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