

## Personal Growth Plan

Collins's (2018) definition of white privilege perfectly describes why I have cringed so often when I have heard that phrase. He describes the reason for the discomfort because I am not used to being defined by my race, nor do I feel like I have been afforded privilege (Collins, 2018). However, the truth is that I have been afforded many advantages because I am an academically educated middle-class white cisgender woman who is surrounded by other academically educated middle-class white cisgender individuals. There is not much diversity in my social circle, work circle, or community. My lens of looking through life from other perspectives has only been through books, movies, and surface-level discussions with people with similar backgrounds. My three goals are intended to change this so that I am more aware of other cultures and my interactions with individuals from other lived experiences.

### **Goal #1: To diversify my personal reading list.**

My results of the *Cultural competence self-assessment checklist* (Rexdale Women's Center, n.d.) indicate that I lack knowledge of other cultures. One of the best ways I learn about different topics is through fiction books. I looked at the 103 books on my Goodreads "To-be read" list and realized that white cisgender authors wrote more than 90% of them.

From now through the end of the year, I want to add 50 books from authors who are BIPOC, non-cisgender, non-American, and non-Christian. While this will not help me fully understand a culture, it will open my awareness to individuals with different backgrounds. This will also allow me to provide more diverse reading recommendations as a librarian.

To find quality books and authors, I will use the American Library Association's recommended reading lists for diverse topics (ALA, n.d.), which provide lists from diversity

awards and grassroots organizations focused on diversity. Since I work in the children's and adult departments, I will ensure that I include children's, young adult, and adult books.

My challenge will be to read these books rather than just add them to my list. I often find that I only like a book if I can identify with the characters or the author. I must challenge myself to open my mind to the views of others. I will know if I am successful by examining my “read” books on Goodreads at the end of the year and I have read 25% of the books I added as part of this personal growth plan.

**Goal #2: To learn more about cultures that are different than my own by listening to podcasts with themes about experiences of underrepresented cultures.**

I scored 10/10 on the *Equity & diversity in the U.S. re-perception quiz* (EdChange, 2017). However, that was because of good guesses rather than because I am well-educated in diversity-related statistics. To improve my knowledge about other cultures, I want to listen to podcasts focused on the experiences of underrepresented cultures.

My first step will be to identify podcasts that are well-researched and authentically tell the story of a culture by members of the culture. The Webby Awards include an award for Diversity, equity, and inclusion—limited-series and specials podcasts (Webby Awards, 2024). The current and past year's nominees list offers a great starting point for listening to podcasts from underrepresented cultures.

My next step will be to continue to curate a list of podcasts to fold them into my podcast routine. My challenge will be to control the tendency to listen to podcasts that I can more easily relate to on a personal level rather than challenging myself to maintain a diverse podcast routine. Demonstrated progress will be when I do not notice a “diverse” podcast because it will become part of my routine.

**Goal #3: To increase my score on the Diversity Awareness Profile (Stinson, 2012) by becoming more aware of my biases and prejudices.**

My score on the Diversity Awareness Profile (Stinson, 2012) classified me as a perpetrator. Although I disagree with this classification because many of the questions did not apply to me, I do recognize that I may not be aware of situations where my own biases and prejudices may be hidden under the surface. I want to increase my awareness of these situations by listing when I see cultural competence lacking.

My action plan is three-fold. First, I will open a notes document on my phone (which is linked to my computer) to capture when I see actions that are offensive or even those that are borderline offensive. Second, after three months, I will categorize the list by type of behavior, community impacted, and my actions. Third, I will use those samples to take the Diversity Awareness Profile (Stinson, 2012) again to gauge any changes I have made in the spectrum. This will allow me to have clear evidence of any progress and identify specific areas I should continue to focus on.

My challenge will be to be aware of situations that seem ordinary at first glance, but if I stop to think about the impact of a situation on others, I may identify room for growth. For example, if I am at a grocery store and there is a cashier who is black and a cashier who is white, both without a line of people, I will notice if I tend to go to the white cashier's line. Some situations may cause me to look at my motivation. For example, I am working in the library on a display, am I picking diverse authors naturally, or am I picking diverse authors because that is our library policy? The challenge will be to determine what is natural and what is because I am focused on changing my behavior.

## Reflection

The assessments and readings about cultural competence have made me think differently about my biases and prejudices. If you had asked me a month ago if I had any, I would have confidently said no. But one of the biggest takeaways I have learned so far is that that statement alone shows that I do have biases and prejudices—I have just never labeled them as those words.

I see my strengths as a willingness to learn how to be a better citizen and advocate for those who may not have a voice. Especially as we enter a contentious presidential campaign with one candidate against diversity in every aspect, it is more important that those with a voice speak up for those who may feel unheard. I am unapologetically liberal but do so from the comfort of my couch. I have never protested, I have never written a letter to my congressional representatives, I have never fundraised for diverse causes. I have never even posted anything on my social media platforms to indicate that I embrace diversity. My stepson and sister-in-law are both gay, and I have never even posted anything to support them for Pride Month. Although my goals are about self-awareness, I think I need to balance that with some action.

As a new public librarian, I have yet to deal with book challenges or people who may be against diverse cultures. However, as the political year ramps up, I will have to have a difficult conversation at some point. Ringer's step-by-step checklist for engaging in difficult conversations makes sense to me, but I think having those difficult conversations will be hard for me. When I was going through my onboarding week, I met one of my coworkers who is trans. Actually, I have to correct myself. I do not know if they are trans. All I know is that the coworker wore a dress during my onboarding week, and their name tag indicated the preferred pronouns of them/they. I am jumping to the conclusion that they are trans without knowing this to be true. I was helping a patron with a computer question, and the patron noted that the last

time she was there, a “nice young man” helped her and was very knowledgeable. However, she could not believe that “he” had a dress on, and she talked about how handsome “he” would be if he wore some khakis and a nice shirt. I was unsure how to react, so I said, “Cally is one of the best librarians we have.” Mind you, I had been there about a day and a half and had not even had a conversation with Cally yet. I had an opportunity to advocate for a coworker, but instead, I said a one-liner, hoping to end the conversation. I hope that I can change those kinds of behaviors.

While other classes I have taken in this program apply to specific tasks of a librarian, this course applies to life within and outside of the library. Libraries are about people, not the collection. I must challenge myself to be able to serve all members of the community, and cultural competence is the building block to doing so.

## References

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