Compassion and Sensitivity: Understanding Defining Moments

Complete this exercise with your team to help them understand what it feels like when you don’t “fit in.”

Plan on about 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the size of your group and the length of the discussion. Begin by sharing a time when you felt “different” or did not fit in with a group. Perhaps it was a time when others were not sensitive to what was happening. It is better if it is not something that was done deliberately. Pair team members up and tell them to share their own situations and how they felt at the time. After 5 minutes (you may wish to give a half-time signal so that both have time) ask for a couple volunteers to share their situations to the entire group. Use the following questions to start discussion:

- How did you feel when the situation occurred?
- How did you feel while telling your story? Why do you think that may have occurred?
- What did you learn about these kinds of situations?
- Do you think that the others were aware of their lack of sensitivity or compassion? Usually not.
- How do compassion and sensitivity relate to the culture and atmosphere we are trying to create in our department?
- What will you do differently as a result of this exercise?

You may wish to point out that even those in the majority have experienced feelings of being different. Being perceived as different creates negative feelings that often linger after the incident is over. If the feelings occur often enough, it creates misunderstood behavior. Encourage everyone to remember their own feelings the next time they are in a group in which someone may feel “different.” Encourage compassion and sensitivity.