We all make assumptions about our own identity and that of others. Unfortunately, when we work together, assumptions are often treated as reality. These assumptions influence our beliefs about how others think and their motives.

Social identity comprises the parts of your identity that come from belonging to particular groups. We use social identity to categorize people into groups, identify with certain groups ourselves, and compare various groups—typically thinking more highly of our own. Use the following questions to work through some of your assumptions. You may wish to keep a particular person in mind (someone you’ve just met or someone you have problems with) when answering.

- When you are building a relationship at work, what do you want to know about the other person? What do you notice first? Are you attracted to certain characteristics?
- What assumptions do you make about other people based on their social identity?
- If someone else were describing your identity, what do you think they would notice first? What would be most relevant to them? Why?
- What assumptions do you think other people make about you based on your social identity?
- How much do you think you have in common with other people with whom you work?
- What would most likely be different?
- What insights occurred as you responded to these questions?

Your awareness of social identity—both yours and that of others—is important in today’s workplace. People are different, but each person can maintain his or her group identity while also valuing the contributions of others from different groups. What do you think you need to do next?