DIGNITY: THE ESSENTIALS
We have the knowledge, wealth and technology to solve even the most complex problems. So why is there so much hate, injustice, violence and inequality in our world?
Everyone is born with dignity. It is our inherent value. Dignity is an inextricable part of what it means to be a human being. There is so much that divides us: ethnicities, religions, skin color, gender, politics, borders, and status. But dignity is the great equalizer. It cuts through all divisions and unites us around our shared humanity.

— PREAMBLE OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, 1948
THE RIPPLE EFFECT

In order to truly transform ourselves and our communities, it’s important that the principles of dignity be manifested in four areas. It starts with recognizing your own inherent dignity. Then, it’s critical that we also acknowledge the fundamental value of others—and that our individual humanity is bound up in the humanity of all people. Next, we can build cultures of dignity in our organizations, schools, workplaces and communities. At the highest level, the principles of dignity lead to the creation of new politics and economic systems and, ultimately, societies and nations that are more just, open and peaceful.

INDIVIDUAL
Self Worth
Confidence
Resilience
Integrity
Agency

RELATIONSHIPS
Open-mindedness
Compassion
Kindness
Love
Empathy
Forgiveness

CULTURES OF DIGNITY
Trust
Transparency
Belonging
Recognition for everyone’s unique talents, voice and contributions

SOCIETIES + NATIONS
Justice
Equality
Peace
Openness
Inclusion
Safety
IT BEGINS WITH YOU

Every one of us is born into this world with dignity and deserves to have our dignity honored.
RECOGNIZING YOUR OWN DIGNITY, VALUE AND SELF-WORTH EMPOWERS YOU TO:

» better navigate a complex and often difficult world;
» help and protect other people;
» become a change maker;
» transform your communities and the world, and
» cultivate resilience and inner-strength.

AN IMPORTANT PART OF HONORING THE DIGNITY OF OTHERS IS TO ENSURE EVERYONE CAN FULFILL THEIR FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEEDS:

Safety: physical and psychological security.

Autonomy: power over our environment and circumstances.

A Connection to Others: close personal relationships that allow us to depend on and share emotions with one another.

A Sense of Purpose: goals that give life meaning.

ACTIVITY

1. With these needs in mind, think about a time when your dignity and needs were honored. What happened? How did you feel? Why do you think you felt that way? What did you do? Optional: share with a small group.

2. Now, think about a time when your dignity was violated, and your ability to fulfill your needs was limited. What happened? How did you feel? Why do you think you felt that way? What did you do? Optional: share with a small group.
WHY DO WE LOSE SIGHT OF DIGNITY?

Dignity starts with each one of us. The next step is to see and honor the dignity in every other person.
AS HUMANS, WE NATURALLY GRAVITATE TO PEOPLE AND GROUPS SIMILAR TO OURSELVES.

We tend to identify with those who share the same race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, status, gender, abilities, and social status. It’s easy to see people outside of these groups as “other.” But every person on the planet shares a much larger identity: as a member of the human family.

ACTIVITY

Reflect on a personal or world conflict resulting from people being dehumanized, humiliated or seen as “other.” Summarize the experience for yourself on paper, or share with others if you are working in a small group.
HONORING THE DIGNITY IN EVERYONE

Every single one of us has a right to be treated with dignity. In turn, we all have a responsibility to treat everyone else with dignity.
The Ten Essential Elements of Dignity

Donna Hicks is a renowned authority on dignity and author of *Dignity* and *Leading with Dignity*.

Dr. Hicks explains that when we honor someone's dignity, we:

**Accept their identity** and give them the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged.

**Recognize their unique qualities**, talents and ways of life, and give them credit for their contributions, ideas and experience.

**Acknowledge them** and make them feel seen and heard. We validate and respond to their concerns and what they have been through.

**Include them** and make them feel that they belong and are part of a community.

**Make them feel safe**—both physically and from fear of being shamed or humiliated.

**Treat them fairly** and with equality.

**Give them a sense of freedom** and independence, and empower them to experience a sense of hope and possibility.

**Seek understanding** and give them the chance to explain their experiences and perspectives.

**Give them the benefit of the doubt** by starting with the premise that they have good motives and are acting with integrity.

**Apologize and take responsibility** when we have violated their dignity. We make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors.

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**Activity**

1. Individually or as a group, choose three of the Ten Essential Elements of Dignity that your school, organization or community are doing well.

2. Now choose three Elements that your school, organization or community could improve upon, and how.
DIGNITY VS. RESPECT

The words dignity and respect are often used interchangeably. In fact, they are different.
DIGNITY IS INHERENT.

We are all born with dignity and it cannot be taken away. It is the core of our identity and self worth. Respect is earned. It is given to you by others based on your actions, abilities or achievements. You don’t need to respect someone’s behavior, but you should always remember their inherent dignity. This helps you break free from cycles of revenge, hatred, and resentment that lay at the heart of so many conflicts within families, communities, organizations and society.

ACTIVITY

Think of people from history, literature, films or from your own family or community, who:

» demonstrated their dignity even though they were not treated with respect

» is respected yet does not treat people with dignity

» is respected and honors the dignity of others
HOW CAN YOU CREATE CULTURES OF DIGNITY?
Like any skill, dignity must be practiced. Cultivating our own dignity awareness helps us stay true to our core when someone does us harm. Think about why people like Gandhi, Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and Malala Yousafzai are revered: their fights for human rights are rooted in compassion and love, not revenge and hate. If we dedicate ourselves to practicing dignity in our daily lives, we can then build dignity into our schools, workplaces and communities.
YOU’VE TAKEN TWO CRITICAL STEPS ON YOUR DIGNITY JOURNEY:

We’ve covered the first two areas of dignity—recognizing your own inherent worth, and the dignity and value of all others. Now it’s time to work together to create cultures of dignity by taking action.

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

All organizations have a culture. It’s reflected in the way people relate to each other, how business gets done, what’s considered acceptable and what’s not.

Leaders play a special role in setting or changing organizational cultures, which is why leaders who understand and implement the principles of dignity are needed everywhere: our schools, governments, non-profits, businesses, and every workplace.

CALL TO ACTION

What is one action you can take this week to create or contribute to a culture of dignity:

» in your school?

» in your community?

» in your home?

ACTIVITY

Individually or in small groups, think about how the Ten Essential Elements of Dignity can help transform:

» our classrooms?

» our schools?

» social media?

» our workplaces?

» any organization or group important to you?
BUILDING SOCIETIES AND NATIONS OF DIGNITY
THE FINAL STEP ON OUR DIGNITY JOURNEY IS THE MOST DIFFICULT.

Ultimately, we need to build entire societies and nations where the dignity principles are at the heart of our politics, our economies, education, healthcare, and justice systems. The fundamental question is: what kind of world do we want to live in, and pass on to our children? History shows us that individuals and groups, sometimes working alone and sometimes working with enlightened leaders, can transform their societies into ones that uphold the values of equality, freedom, tolerance and freedom of expression.

ACTIVITY

Imagine a place where the dignity of every person is honored. What would it look like? Write about it, draw or paint it, make a video, or express it in any creative way you’d like.
We are building a global movement rooted in the belief that our shared humanity depends on honoring the dignity of others. Heal your community. Transform the world. Become an artisan of hope. Join us.