Almost everywhere I go in this country, EuroAmericans often tell me they are perplexed about how they can be good allies to people of color. What holds them back is that they are often afraid of making a mistake or of doing further harm by, one more time, unconsciously exercising their white privilege. So, here is my wish list to all those EuroAmericans out there who are searching for some practical ways of connecting with and being good allies to people of color.

Know that:

You will make mistakes, hurt, irritate and upset people of color. I say that because as a white person, you have had over five hundred years of “don’t ask and don’t tell” regarding diversity issues in this country, so, of course, you’re going to hurt someone of color in your attempts to relate to them. That’s part of the growing process. No one is going to die if you, as a white person, make a mistake, except maybe your expectations of needing to be that perfect white person chosen to save people of color from those other unconscious, bigoted, red-necked whites. Acknowledging your whiteness is the first step in your recovery and connection with people of color.

The rite of passage is to be curious about what you’ve done or said that might be racist, to share how you feel about what you’ve learned and, then, finally, to change. So many times, what frustrates people of color is that when they share why and how they were offended to whites, what they get back is that the white person often says nothing or cries profusely and people of color end up consoling them and/or other whites come to their defense.

Racism is not just what you see, do or hear, but it’s also about what you don’t see, do or hear. I think that one of the great illusions in this country is believing that if you study the history of racism, gather data and read lots of books about racism, you will have “arrived.” Or, as one white male said to me recently, “It shouldn’t be this way.” After which, he changed the subject, despite the look of disappointment on my face.

A good example of what we don’t see and hear is illustrated by the group of armed whites who have taken over a federal reserve building in Oregon and how the FBI and local police have not confronted them. I wonder, as do many other people of color, would that have been the same response if the militants were armed Muslims, Blacks or Mexicans or American Indians?

To me, racism isn’t just what we don’t see, do, or hear, it’s also looking at why we don’t have to notice or care. What kind of privilege rewards us if we only see our similarities and not our differences, encourages us to celebrate our differences, but does not make use of any of our differences in our workplaces, schools and communities?

When we will have “arrived” is when we integrate our unique differences into our everyday business, educational and government practices in the way we hire, teach, or make policies. How do we do that? When we engage in daily intimate and authentic conversations with those who are different from ourselves, when we practice being curious about what we fear or afraid to ask or learn about. When we stand up and say something when someone is talked down to or demeaned or not promoted. When we stay in the room when we are called out for discrimination and model our response to others by being open, curious and emotionally connected. When we stay the course by staying committed to issues of diversity, not just when it is convenient or to check off a box, but as an on-going and necessary part of our learning and our growth.

In the film, Contact, Jodi Foster’s honesty is admonished for not understanding that the world just doesn’t work that way. Of which she replies: “Funny, I always thought the world was what we made of it.”
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January 19, 2016
Charlotte, NC
Responding to Racial Microaggressions and Facilitating Race Conversations in the Classroom
Not Open to the Public

January 29, 2016
Carrolton, GA
A Cross Gender-Race Conversation
Not Open to the Public

February 4, 2016
Albuquerque, NM
An Unfinished Conversation
Some Events Open to the Public

February 10, 2016
Alameda, CA
If These Halls Could Talk: Film Showing & Diversity Dialogue
Open to the Public

February 18-20, 2016
Minneapolis, MN
Cross-Cultural Facilitation Techniques for Educators, Administrators & Staff- Beginner & Intermediate Levels and Creating Community in a Diverse School Environment
Not Open to the Public

February 24, 2016
New York, NY
Keynote: Walking Each Other Home: The Art of Creating Community & Connection
American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) Conference • Open to the Public

February 26, 2016
Savannah, GA
Keynote: Walking Each Other Home: The Art of Creating Community & Connection
Cross-Cultural Counseling & Education Conference • Open to the Public

February 29, 2016
Newport, RI
An Unfinished Conversation
Some Events Open to the Public

StirFry Calendar of Upcoming Events

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Enter coupon code NEWS20 upon online checkout at www.stirfryseminars.com/store.
* Some restrictions apply • Expires February 29, 2016

Too often we are afraid to begin a conversation about race and racism because we have had a bad experience or feel that we will say something wrong or hurtful. This workshop is particularly exciting and satisfying because it allows everyone the opportunity to practice talking to someone who is different from themselves in a compassionate and honest way. Participants will learn that they are not alone in their fears and that all of us lack a “model” of how to begin this type of conversation. The most important ingredient is our sincerity and our willingness to learn and understand each other.

StirFry’s complete Calendar of Upcoming Events, please visit www.stirfryseminars.com/events

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