Respect and Sensitivity Guidelines for Conversations in the Workplace

As we individually and as a community come together to move forward constructively, we appreciate that there are many opinions, viewpoints, and a range of feelings that people probably are having about the Grand Jury Decision and the events in Ferguson, the St. Louis area and across the nation. People may have increased anxiety, feelings of anger or confusion, and stress, all of which can increase conflict between people. Heightened feelings can negatively affect interpersonal relationships at all levels of our institution.

It is tempting to assume that each of us has the ‘correct’ viewpoint and that our feelings are shared by others with whom we interact at work. In reality, our co-workers may not share our points of view about recent events and what should happen going forward. Our feelings may be upsetting to a person we work near, or upsetting to someone standing in line with us at the cafeteria. Some people process their feelings and thoughts privately and it can be upsetting to hear a possibly ‘heated’ conversation in their workspace. Talking about what happened can be helpful, but not for everyone. Please be aware that this situation affects everyone differently.

Washington University is committed to tolerance and respect for the diversity of our employees, all of our opinions, values, religions, races, genders, etc. In order to maintain a community that thrives, we need to remember to have respectful conversations with people who choose to talk with us.

We want to remind everyone of some basic common sense guidelines about being aware, respectful, sensitive, and polite as you go through your workday.

• Avoid conversations that can cause concern for others. We don’t want to offend our co-workers.
• Ask if it is ok to talk to someone about the events in Ferguson and the Grand Jury Decision – or any other sensitive topic.
• Remember this is a work environment and personal conversations shouldn’t dominate. The work is the priority.
• Many conversations happen when others are around. Please keep private conversations private. Others don’t need to know our opinions and feelings.
• Respect others.
• Respect others right to not share their thoughts and opinions.
• Be aware of non-verbal reactions. If someone is turning away, it may be time to end a conversation.
• Be sensitive, compassionate and respectful regardless of anyone’s personal opinions.

Please join us in maintaining civility and courtesy as we all help to maintain the peace, hope and respect for others that make our University community a great and safe place to work.

We also want to remind you that LifeScope is available 24/7 for help for you and family members. Call 800-765-9124 to speak with a trained counselor. Additional great resources can be found at www.WUSTLEAP.com.