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MicroTriggers come in many forms. These are actions of one individual which create a negative response in another individual. The MicroTriggers can be in the form of comments made or signals sent through body language such as a sigh or condescending glance. We deal them every day at home, at work, in hallways, on the streets, in meetings, at the gym - anywhere. From the empty greeting from the next-door neighbor who can't remember your name to the colleague who takes calls throughout your meeting - the micro triggers are all around us and not reacting negatively can be challenging at times.

For me, when I hear people use the phrase "you people....." my blood pressure instantly rises 20 points. Whether the phrase is directed at me or a total stranger, followed by an insult or compliment - it doesn't matter - it still forces me to take a deep breath to prevent myself from making a negative comment of my own. I'm not sure why this phrase sends me into oblivion but it does. Perhaps it's the idea that the sender is clearly separating themselves from the receiver and then grouping people together with an assumption that they are all the same. The idea is simply unacceptable to me.

On occasion in Human Resources we need to hold firm to a policy that an employee would prefer didn't exist. Years ago in a prior firm where I was working in the benefits department, a client I was supporting was not happy with the policy surrounding flexible benefit plan reimbursement of some vitamins. Instead of allowing me to talk through the rationale behind the policy the client immediately became very upset. She instantly grouped me together with the insurance company who administered the plan, the IRS who wrote the ERISA regulations and the senior management team of the firm who would not want to break the ERISA regulations. She grouped us together by launching into "You people are just trying to" Needless to say our relationship was more than strained going forward and instead of looking for ways to help her in the future, I was looking for ways to avoid her.

Clearly that comment was intended to provoke a heated dialogue. Conversely in the same company I was faced with a new manager who was anxious to win over his new group with positive reinforcement. He pulled us all together to say "You people did a great job with.....". This time a compliment was intended, but from my perspective it was disappointing that he couldn't highlight the different contributions by different individuals. The signal I received was he wasn't focused on us as individuals and I would always be seen as just one person in a group regardless of my personal contribution.

Do you have a story to tell? Send it to JSmith@ivygroupllc.com