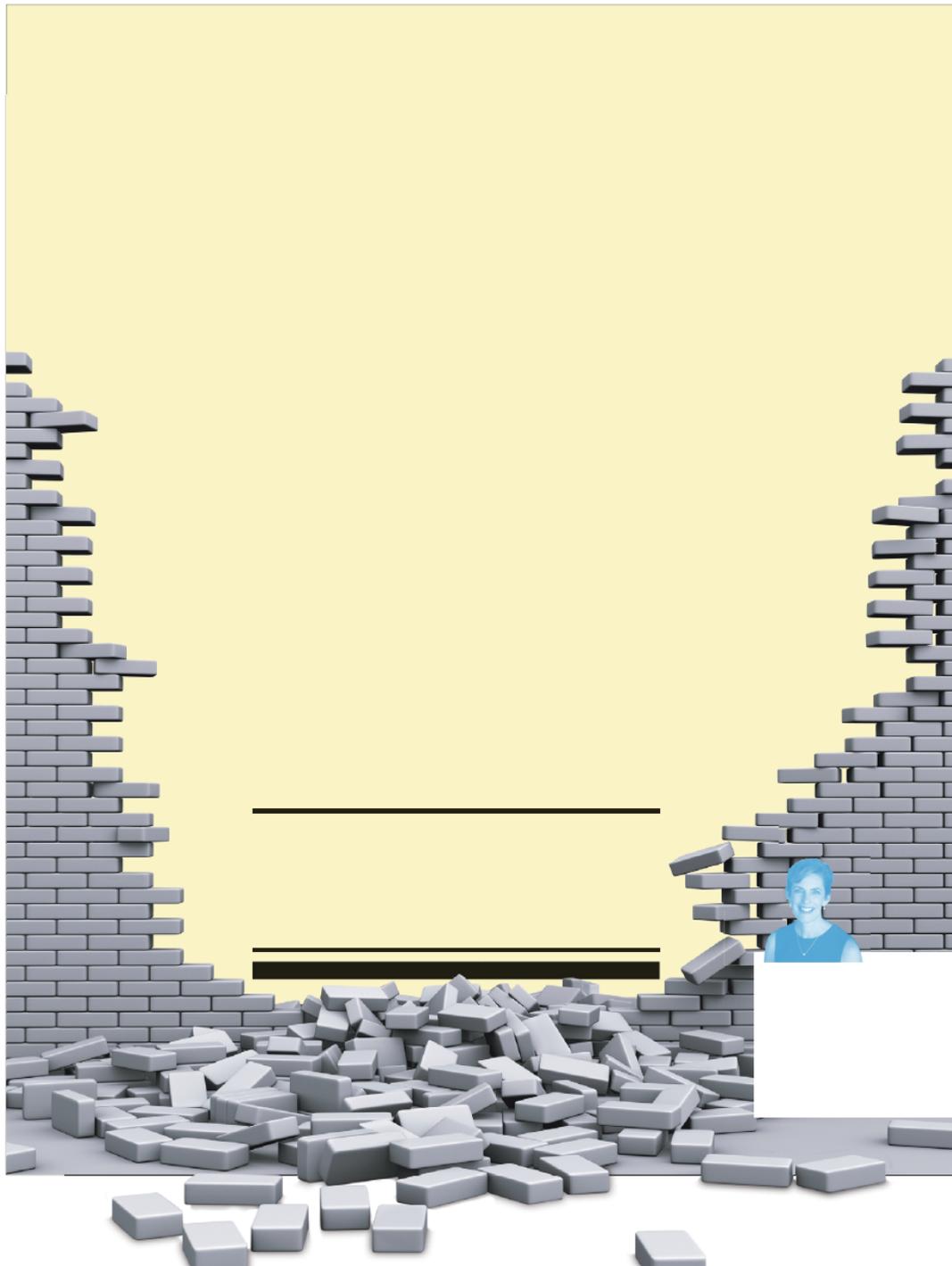


Tear Down This Wall

Karen Catlin

2 Minutes

WHEN IT COMES TO DEI, ASSOCIATION AND PUBLISHING PROFESSIONALS NEED TO WALK THE WALK AND TALK THE TALK



1 Offer to Start a Parking Lot

There is a phenomenon that association speakers and presenters should look out for: showboating. It's when an attendee asks off-topic questions during a presentation to make themselves look smart. By doing so, they test the presenter, perhaps undermining their credibility. It's a power play that's been used for years, forcing someone in a position of authority at the beginning of the meeting to start defending their expertise.

The next time someone interrupts a speaker and asks an off-topic question, I'll offer to start a "parking lot" of topics to be addressed later. Then, with a nod to the speaker, proclaim, "I've made a note of that question. You can keep going."

2 Avoid Language that Lightly References Painful History or Experiences

What's considered acceptable changes over time, and a word that seemed OK to use just a few years ago, might no longer be inclusive.

Dr. Suzanne Wertheim shares this example: "We're at a moment of increasing sensitivity to mental health and mental illness, but in English, we currently use mental health terms extremely loosely, usually to add intensity to a description." Think of words like "crazy" or "schizophrenic" or "OCD." Yet using these terms casually can trivialize the experience of someone grappling with mental health issues.

Now you may be thinking, how do I keep up with shifts in language? It's too hard to memorize a long list of words or phrases. Instead, she recommends inclusive language doesn't lightly reference painful history or experiences.

3 Avoid Describing Job Candidates as Diverse

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Consultant Tara Robertson started a recent blog post with a question she's asked every week: "Which job board do I post on to reach diverse* candidates?"

She footnoted "diverse" and wrote:

"People use 'diverse' as a shorthand for saying what they actually mean because it's short, sweet, and many of us have been taught that it's impolite to be specific. If you're looking to hire women for engineering manager roles, say that. If your university internship program is focused on university students with disabilities, say so. If you're looking specifically to hire Black senior leaders, then say that. Using vague language like diverse allows us to hire someone who is different in a small way (like someone who has a university degree, but it's not from an Ivy League school). This means we dodge accountability for prioritizing historically marginalized people and moving the needle in meaningful and necessary ways."

4 Offer Assistance (Thoughtfully)

We recently received an email from a potential client with a signature line that stated, "I am deaf." When replying, a member of my team wrote, "I noticed your signature says that you're deaf. For an initial call with Karen, do you have assistive technology or a preferred video platform to use?" They thanked us for asking, and explained that they use a version of Zoom with subtitles.

Allies, let's not assume we know what kind of help someone might need or that they need anything at all. Let's offer assistance without being patronizing.



Karen Catlin is an award-winning author, leadership coach, and passionate advocate for inclusion in the workplace.

[*linkedin.com/in/kecatlin*](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kecatlin)

[*betterallies.com*](https://www.betterallies.com)
