This article is the second in a three-part series that applies Edwin Friedman's A Failure of Nerve, Gregory Kramer's Insight Dialogue, and Karl Weick's "Small Wins" to addressing racial inequity through cultural competence. Cultural competence is the knowledge set, skill set, and mindset to work effectively with people across similarities and differences. Racial inequity is the loss of personal power and privilege based on the social construct of race.

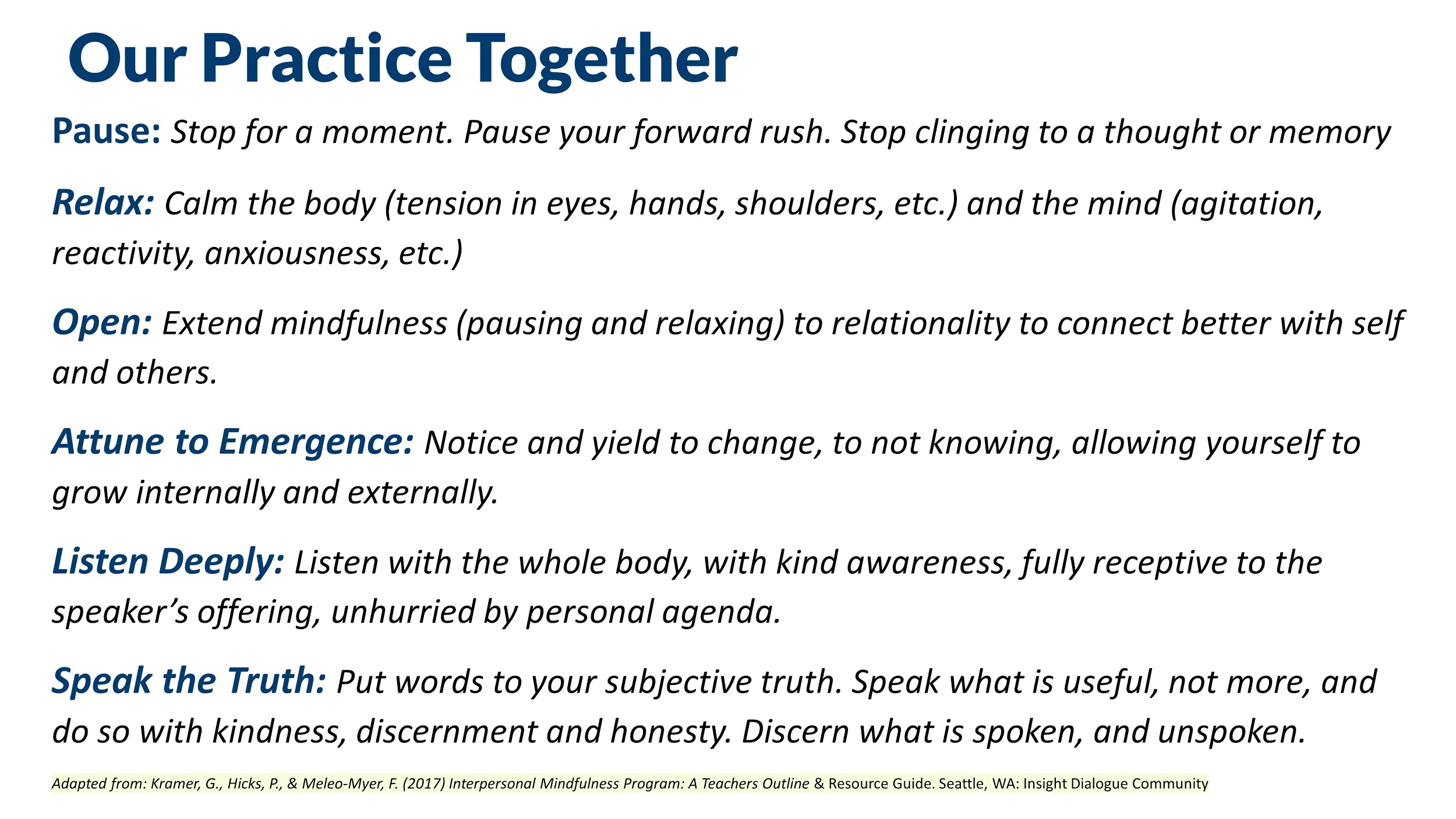
The first article's theme was that cultural competence requires differentiated leadership, a deep sense of calm, self-understanding, and other understanding. A differentiated leader understands what is unique and special about themselves and can advance their ideas in a steady, undeterred drumbeat. Because they also help others understand and cherish their uniqueness, people gravitate to them, they attract allies and deter enemies. Regarding racial equity, differentiated leaders are the balm that improves the whole organization by enabling people to conduct a self-examination of their racial biases and stereotypes.

The third article in the series discusses how Karl Weick's organization theory of "small wins" can reduce individual and organizational anxiety regarding race and racism and accelerate personal, professional, and organizational effectiveness.

This article's central point is Relational Meditation (RD) aids individuals model Friedman's "differentiated leadership" and grow their own and others cultural competence. Relational Meditation (RM) is based on Insight Dialogue (ID). It fosters cultural competence because it encourages practitioners to generate the psychological safety needed to examine emotional and anxiety raising issues such as racism. Gregory Kramer, its founder, describes Insight Dialogue "as a way of bringing the tranquility and insight attained in meditation directly into your interactions with other people." It is a practice that involves interacting with a partner in a retreat setting or on your own as a way of accessing a profound kind of insight.

The distinguishing feature of Relational Meditation (RD) vs. Insight Dialogue (ID) is that RD applies what was designed as a personal or dyad approach to leadership, coaching, and management. Therefore, RM is a vital aspect of "how" cultural competence and differentiated leadership facilitate insight, wisdom, and transformation. Its meditation aspects of mindfulness (pause and relax), relational growth (open and attune to emergence), and wisdom (listen deeply and speak the truth) allows two or more people to pause, suspend judgment, and be curious of each other in a vulnerable, caring, and discerning manner. This presence is crucial for cultural competence.

I have slightly adapted the RD/ID meditational guidelines for cultural competency coaching (figure 1. Our Practice Together). RD/ID is a "practice together" versus "interaction ground rules or norms." Ground rules are methods to regulate behavior among group members, and many times to legislate against "misbehavior" when the group would learn far more if the behavior showed up. As modeled by RM/ID, a practice fosters an atmosphere where group members can learn from each other's mistakes, missteps, and "inappropriate" comments. A practice is a mind, spirit, and body that incorporates breathing techniques, meditation or relaxation, and deep contemplation to cultural competency.

Below is a full explanation of Our Practice:

* **Pause:** Stop for a moment. Pause your forward rush. Stop clinging to a thought or memory. Pause is the first ID step, and I would argue, the most crucial. Leaders have a natural tendency to push forward. Moreover, we all cling to thoughts or memories that have generated pain or pleasure. I have been called a "nigger”; others have suffered police brutality or sexual assault. A cultural competency coach will need to foster a psychologically safe environment for learner self-exploration. They will need to be in the here and now to resolve organizational challenges quickly.
* **Relax:** Calm the body (tension in eyes, hands, shoulders, etc.) and the mind (agitation, reactivity, and anxiousness, etc.). *Reflect on your mind and body state after I mentioned the examples above and stated the "n-word." I became tense as I wrote, and you may have gotten anxious as you read.* A cultural competency coach needs to ease tension, identify our "clinginess" (so that we can let go in the moment), and foster relaxation. This state opens the door to relationality and mutuality.
* **Open:** Extend mindfulness to relationality to connect better with self and others. A cultural competency coach can share, emit, and foster a feeling of shared action or relationship between two or more parties.
* **Attune to Emergence:** By being open, we yield to change, not knowing, and allowing a shift in perspective so biases, stereotypes, and exclusion can be explored and examined. We connect better with ourselves and others. This shift in mindset fostered by pause, relax, and open is crucial to empathizing with yourself and others. You are ready to listen deeply.
* **Listen Deeply:** Listen with the whole body, with kind awareness, fully receptive to the speaker's offering, unhurried by personal agenda. A cultural competency coach fosters relationality by modeling listen deeply. At this point, a coach begins to enable Friedman's differentiated leader. Differentiated leaders have a strong, immutable, enduring sense of who they are and their values and principles. Confident in their uniqueness, they are a calming presence through whom others can learn from one another. Differentiated leaders can listen with their whole self without personal agenda.
* **Speak the Truth:** Put words to your subjective truth. Speak what is useful, not more, and do so with kindness, discernment, and honesty. Discern what is spoken and unspoken. A cultural competency coach fosters wisdom and action from "listen deeply" and "speak the truth." Similarly, differentiated leaders recognize and address the pain of stereotypes, bias, and racism and, thus, close windows individuals use to escape discussing these issues. They exemplify the emotional maturity needed to execute a bold plan to foster racial equity.

As mentioned above, Relational Meditation, as developed by Emma Donaldson-Feilder, takes Insight Dialogue further into the coaching and management sphere to foster mindfulness, relational growth, and wisdom. For my purposes, RM helps individuals foster cultural competence because the approach stresses self-understanding, pausing, suspending judgment, and becoming deeply appreciative of others. Mitch Hammer defined cultural competence as the capability to shift perspective and adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities. Cultural competence reflects the degree to which cultural differences and commonalities in values, expectations, beliefs, and practices are effectively bridged, an inclusive environment is achieved, and specific differences in your organization or institution are addressed from a "mutual adaptation" perspective.

As listed in the framework above, The Intercultural Development Continuum® (IDC®) (modified from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity initially proposed by Dr. Milton Bennett) identifies five orientations that range from the more monocultural orientations of Denial and Polarization to the transitional mindset of Minimization to the more intercultural or global mindsets of Acceptance and Adaptation. Your success in addressing racial inequity is better served when you can more deeply understand culturally learned differences, recognize commonalities between yourself and others, and act on this increased insight in culturally appropriate ways that facilitate shared wisdom.

One can quickly discern the role of Relational Meditation to foster cultural competency. Typically, cultural differences generate discomfort, anxiety, and fear well before they inspire joy or pleasure. Individuals often retreat from the self-examination, empathy, and honesty required to foster cultural competency. Without this self-examination, compassion, and honesty, one cannot become Friedman's differentiated leader. The framework outlines how a culturally competent and well-differentiated coach can help individuals and teams grow their cultural competence. What is particularly exciting about applying relational meditation to cultural competency is that it provides a method to help people face the trauma, fear, and anxiousness of discussing their roles in perpetuating or addressing racism, bias, and stereotypes within an organization.

The RM goal is to achieve a degree of wisdom that comes from suffering, feeling, and "seeing things as they are in the present moment." In this way, Relational Meditation fosters Friedman's disinterested compassion that allows leaders to brave the most challenging humanity questions, such as our historical mistreatment of others based on race or skin color.

How might we use relational meditation in practice? Let examine the case below:

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| **Situation**: School district leadership team of 18 is attempting to develop an Inclusive and Anti-Racist strategy.  **Pre-work:** Read the first two articles in this series, "Failure of Diversity is a Failure of Nerve," and Fostering Cultural Competence through Relational Meditation."  **Set up:** Establish six groups of 3 individuals. Within each group, begin with a minute of silence to embrace the opportunity to pause, relax and be open. Each person has 4 minutes to talk uninterrupted, with a final 4 minutes for a discussion within the group. Then, general group discussion follows for 5-10 minutes. The contemplative topic is: *what about us inhibits us from addressing racial disparities*?   * **Round 1:** Why is addressing racial disparities necessary? * **Round 2:** Why might I have "a failure of a nerve" (biopsychosocial struggles, challenges) to actively support reducing these disparities?   **General discussion:**   1. What did we learn about ourselves that might impede our efforts to be an inclusive and anti-racist organization? 2. How might we address our failure of nerve with kindness and accountability? |

As Emma Donaldson-Feilder mentions in her article, I believe relational meditation can provide a safe space to observe our relational habits and racial inequity patterns. As cultural competence requires, relational meditation can also help us foster a psychological safety to pause, suspend judgment, and gain insight from similar and different individuals.

The second article in the series discusses how Karl Weick's organizational theory of "small wins" can reduce individual and organizational anxiety on race and racism and accelerate personal, professional, and organizational effectiveness.