

Commentary: AFIMC sensing sessions critical to understanding ourselves, one another

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JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas – As a diverse team of active duty and civilian Airmen working toward a common goal, there is no room for division or hate in the U.S. Air Force and the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center. Every team member is important. We need everyone's voice and ears as we explore, with empathy, ways to gain a better understanding of ourselves and our fellow Airmen.

This is why sensing sessions with open dialogue are essential. They inspire a sense of belonging amongst a diverse people. Issues related to diversity and inclusion are difficult topics to discuss in the workplace. Exploring them together can allow us to gain a better understanding and acceptance of the differences that exist between us.

To strengthen this understanding, we are conducting sensing sessions throughout AFIMSC. The need to have candid, respectful dialogue with colleagues on challenging topics has never been more crucial. Tensions have heightened over the past few years, fueled, in part, by national events. People perceive and react to these and other situations differently, depending on their individual backgrounds and experiences.

AFIMSC leadership fosters a diverse and inclusive workforce, promoting confidence amongst all Airmen, active-duty and civilian. Leaders at every level should encourage honest and respectful reflection. Individuals perform at their highest levels when they are cared for. Leaders must understand the perspectives of those around them. People are more inspired to perform and innovate in a healthy environment that cultivates a genuine sense of belonging. Under these conditions, individuals are more likely to accept responsibility and come forward when they know something isn't right. Open-mindedness overcomes barriers, encourages innovation and embodies the organizational culture we aspire to promote.

These conversations can be difficult, but when done with respect and civility, they encourage empathy and trust, strengthening the organization. Sensing sessions promote empathy for others' viewpoints by encouraging mutual engage on these challenging topics. Active listening helps us gain understanding of others' perspectives, get clarification where needed, and find common ground with those who think or believe differently on various issues.

AFIMSC sensing sessions are well planned-out to establish a safe environment within the workplace and minimize discomfort. Although some Airmen may not feel completely safe at first, AFIMSC leadership will continue working to make the sensing sessions a

safe and viable setting where critical dialogue can transpire between AFIMSC teammates. Once a safe environment is established, genuine, respectful conversations will help others enter into these difficult conversations.

AFIMSC continues providing voluntary, non-attribution sensing sessions across the enterprise, in which everyone is encouraged to participate. Please take advantage of the opportunity. Together, let's reach out to one another and engage, whether on a professional or personal level. Ultimately, we may discover that although our perspectives may differ, we have more in common than you think. It begins with a conversation.