



## Fumble Forward

*Example resource directly from The Bold, in June 2024.*

<https://theboldcu.com/2021/04/magazine-9-fumble-forward/>

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A framework in which a group can allow compassion for people trying to approach sensitive subjects without necessarily being fully educated in the matter at hand. To view videos via the PDF, click the titles within the video boxes to access the hyperlinks.

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By Tayler Shaw  
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## "Fumble Forward": Why it's better to say something rather than nothing

By Tayler Shaw

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It's the lump in your throat that forms when you're asked to share your opinion. The way your heart starts to race as you try to find the right words. The panic that sets in when it becomes clear that you've said the wrong thing. *I knew I shouldn't have said anything*, you think to yourself.

Despite the common urge to keep silent on controversial topics, during the summer of 2020, many people began a journey of learning how to talk about racism—something that, like

politics, was often taken off the table for everyday conversation. As the **trial of Derek Chauvin** continues following the death of George Floyd in May of 2020 and with the recent death of **Daunte Wright** after being shot by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on April 11, conversations about race and police brutality continue to prove relevant.

The demand for national discussions about racism has also expanded towards recognizing racism against those of Asian and Pacific Islander descent. As reported by a **Poytner article** published in March of 2021, "hate crimes against Asian Americans increased by 149% between 2019 and 2020" and throughout the first year of the pandemic, approximately 3,800 hateful incidents against the AAPI community occurred. Following the **March 16 mass shooting in Atlanta, Georgia**, of eight individuals, six of whom were Asian women, conversations about the connection between anti-Asian racism and the rhetoric used to describe the COVID-19 pandemic, such as calling it the "**kung flu**" and "China virus," were sparked.

Concerns over gun violence further increased on March 22, when **ten people were killed** at a local King Soopers store in Boulder, Colorado, in a mass shooting, changing the Boulder community and sparking conversations about mental health and gun reform.

In addition to racism, mental health and gun reform, conversations about discrimination on the basis of gender orientation are increasing. The Arkansas state legislature recently passed a bill that "bans gender-affirming care for trans youth, making it illegal for clinicians to provide puberty blockers and hormone therapy," as reported by journalist Raisa Bruner in a **Time article**.

It can feel overwhelming to talk about complex topics like racism, discrimination, LGBTQ+ issues, mental health or gun reform, especially if you are unfamiliar with the history and hidden cultural implications involved. With the added importance of these recent events, there feels an additional pressure to say the perfect thing, especially if you are in a leadership position. Rather than risk offending anyone or exposing our lack of knowledge on something we think we should already know, we keep quiet—even when current events beg for these conversations to be had.

Donna Mejia, an associate professor and director of graduate studies in dance at the University of Colorado Boulder, aims to help initiate these conversations in productive ways through a conversational tool she calls "fumble forward."

"I designed fumble forward for classes in which I felt we were always going to very charged and emotional and sensitive topics, and many students I noticed were hesitant to even join the conversation because they didn't want to step on toes," explains Mejia.

“And so, I wanted to create a way for us to allow confusion to be able to find an entry point to the conversation without feeling like perfection was demanded of us,” Mejia continues. “And so we have a practice where we preface our comments by saying, ‘I’m about to fumble with my words,’ and the entire class knows that’s a social cue—it’s a request for a social contract—and everyone answers as a chorus, ‘Fumble forward,’ which is permission to be awkward, to not be perfect and to say, ‘OK, well, here’s my clumsy version of what I want to say.’”

*Watch Donna Mejia describe what fumble forward is and how it can be applied.*

### Donna Mejia: Explaining Fumble Forward



By employing this method of conversation, Mejia hopes to get more people engaged in discussions about complex, controversial topics that impact our society and the lives of others. While she understands the tendency to keep quiet on topics we may not feel comfortable discussing, especially if we don’t share the same level of information or the same opinions as others, she believes these open, honest conversations are one of the best ways to learn, to grow and to critically problem solve these issues.

“Fumble was an admission that our clinging to perfection and our avoidance of shame prevents us from learning deeply sometimes,” says Mejia. “And so my goal is to make it possible for people to feel that whatever percentage of truth is awakening and igniting in them, that they can continue to bring it forward and let it develop.”

*Watch Donna Mejia explain the importance and responsibility of leaders to engage in complex conversations, rather than remaining silent. The importance of leadership engagement in*

*conversations and issues surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion has been of recent discussion at CU Boulder, with the CU Student Government recently censuring President Mark Kennedy and diversifyCUnow speaking out against the president.*

## Donna Mejia: Leadership and fumbling forward



The fumble forward tool is not only useful in the classroom, says Mejia. She has had students tell her that it's something they've used in their everyday relationships and back home during holiday break with family members. Witnessing the widening application of this tool over the years has been beautiful to see, as it's a tool meant to be employed by anyone and everyone, she says.

"We need the statistically dominant numbers of folks who stand for truth to not turn themselves into wallflowers, but to continue to be present and to lean in so that we can kick start this human evolution," explains Mejia, sharing the importance of being brave enough to share your truth and engage in hard conversations. "And to me, that's what I want folks to take from fumble forward, that there is always a starting place and we are not without tools to really dig in and figure these monumental things out."

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## Tayler Shaw / About Author

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