

Encouraging Workplace Diversity



The workplaces of the 21st Century are becoming increasingly diverse. Most organizations employ a variety of people of different cultural backgrounds, religions, sexual preferences, nationalities, and others. Regardless of your personal biases or fears, the workplace is changing. It's important for you to understand that your professional reputation and future success will depend on your ability to accept and embrace the differences of others.

Diversity Opportunities

Having a variety of cultures, opinions, and experience can bring new perspectives, innovative ideas and out-of-the-box thinking. However, this variety can also lead to miscommunication and disagreements that might lead to conflicts in the workplace. For example, if you accidentally offend someone by not understanding the element that makes that individual a diverse member of your workforce, offer an immediate and sincere apology. Explain that you didn't understand or recognize the root of the issue. If someone says something offensive to you, consider that they might not be aware of the diversity issues at hand. Calmly explain why their actions or language was inappropriate.

Opening the Lines of Communication

Oftentimes, differences are so apparent that they can dominate our immediate impressions and weigh heavily on our reactions, interactions and behavior. Through the development of the working relationship, professionalism, and workplace coaching, those differences will fade, allowing positive working relationships to form.

- Here are some basic rules of communication to help those with differences interact with each other:
- Avoid commenting on the cultural, ethnic or racial background, or sexual orientation of a coworker.
- Actively listen to what's said, pay attention to others, and look out for the visual cues that indicate how well the exchange is going. Be responsive and engaged in the conversation.
- Avoid casual, off-color comments or jokes that might be offensive or that poke fun at others.

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Being a Part of the Team

No matter what the element is that makes someone diverse, every individual in the workplace wants to be judged for his or her performance, professionalism, and personal success. When labels and stereotypes are allowed to become "workplace identities," they can impede the sense of accomplishment anyone wants to feel.

Encouraging diversity includes giving diverse employees the opportunity to "fit in" with the rest of the workforce. Involve diverse employees in your life. You can invite them to lunch, talk to them in the break room, and even ask how things are going outside of work. Inclusion is a very powerful tool when supporting diversity.