

Achieving Diversity Is About Behaviour, Not Hire Numbers



It's not about how many minorities you hire but how you treat others

Question: Do you have a diverse and inclusive workplace?

The knee-jerk response is to say "of course." After all, you have strict HR policies to ensure that all job applicants and employees are afforded equal opportunity and don't suffer discrimination or harassment on the basis of their race, religion, sex, age and other personal characteristics protected by human rights laws. Of course, that's laudable. But avoiding discrimination isn't the same thing as promoting diversity and inclusion.

What Is Diversity?

Diversity is an attitude that not only tolerates but embraces personal differences. Those differences include not only race, religion, sex and other characteristics protected by anti-discrimination laws but also differences in values, culture, experience, education, communications style and personal interests. Complying with anti-discrimination laws isn't the ultimate goal but only the start of the diversity continuum. The far end is full inclusion where people in the workplace feel free to be themselves and everybody's opinions, abilities and contributions are valued.

A company where people are empowered to maximize their person potential has distinct advantages likely to translate into profitability and business success. That's not just a theory. Studies show that diversity and inclusion bolsters a company's ability to:

- Recruit and retain top people;
- Maximize productivity;
- Deliver superior service to customers;
- Serve the community; and
- Build and maintain its reputation.

6 Ways to Promote Diversity

It isn't just about numbers and how many minorities you hire. Achieving true diversity and inclusion requires changes in attitudes and behaviours. It's recognizing that all people have biases, even "good" people. Personal biases don't

necessarily make us “bad persons;” but they do cause stereotyping, close our minds and make it harder for us to personally know people who are different from us. The key to diversity and inclusive behaviour is to recognize and overcome our biases. Here are 6 things you can do to get started—and help your employees do likewise:

1. Recognize that You Have Biases

Personal bias is the enemy of diversity because it leads to stereotyping, or forming distorted judgments about individuals based on assumptions about the group they belong to. Stereotypes can be either positive or negative. Examples:

- “Asians are good at math”;
- “Women are more emotional than men”;
- “Mexicans are lazy”;
- “Computer experts are geeks.”

Inclusive behaviour is about filtering out personal biases when dealing with others and not allowing them to influence our behaviour.

2. Identify Your Own Biases

To overcome your hidden biases you must first identify them. **Exercise:** Look in the mirror and:

- Describe yourself in terms of the personal characteristics protected by human rights laws—race, age, religion, sex, etc.;
- Write down stereotypes associated with each of these characteristics; and
- Compare your “real self” to the profile you just created.

3. Challenge Your Biases

Recognize that biases and stereotyping can also cause you to misjudge people from the way they behave.

4. Develop Inter-Cultural Awareness

The danger of stereotyping from behavior is great when dealing with people from other cultures. For example, in Canada, direct eye contact is a sign of confidence and respect; in China, respect is shown via lack of eye contact. These are the kinds of things you must know when dealing with people from different cultures. Intercultural awareness isn’t something we’re born with; it must be learned. Some ways to develop it:

- Read books and watch movies about other cultures;
- Attend seminars on other cultures;
- Visit other countries;
- Socialize and talk to people from other cultures;
- Go to cultural events;
- When in doubt, directly ask the person for help in understanding what he or she is saying.

5. Develop Active Listening Skills

The first 4 steps are designed to liberate you from biases. The next stage is developing communication skills. Start with listening. The skill of learning to hear what people are saying without prejudging and jumping to respond is called active listening. It involves:

- Paying close attention to the speaker;
- Letting the person talk without interruption;
- Concentrating and suspending judgment;
- Paraphrasing what the person said to confirm you understood correctly;
- Asking questions to clear up doubts.

Exercise: Sit down with a friend or family member and let the person talk. After she finishes, explain what you thought she said. Get feedback. Try again but this time turn on loud music so you really have to focus on the speaker.

6. Use Inclusive Language

You must speak in a way that gives people the best chance to comprehend what you're saying. Beware of words and phrases based on a frame of reference that might not be familiar to your listeners. Examples:

- Sports terms like "grand slam";
- Idioms like "cross the t's and dot the i's";
- Slang terms like "selfie" or "dis".

Recognize that the seemingly neutral words and phrases you use every day may actually be offensive to some people. Examples:

- Gender-specific language like "chairman";
- Using "he" generically to refer to a doctor and/or "she" for a nurse;
- Politically- or socially-charged terms to describe groups like "Orientals" for Asians or "crippled" for a person with a disability;
- Derisive nicknames like calling a woman "honey."

Learn to avoid these words and phrases and use inclusive language instead.

Putting Principal into Action

Use the [Quiz](#) on the HR Insider website to test how well you learned these principals and apply them to real-life situations.