

Supporting A Culturally Diverse Workforce



Hiring a culturally diverse workforce is an excellent way to remain agile and adapt to changes in business. Many organizations recognize the value of recruiting and hiring talent from diverse cultural backgrounds but hiring is only one step. Once you have a diverse workforce you need to create an atmosphere that encourages both participation and openness.

Many new Canadians report that once hired into a Canadian organization they feel a need to blend in with their Canadian co-workers. Canadian organizations and co-workers may welcome a diverse employee but that does not mean that they always create an environment where benefits of diversity are fully realized. Having a culturally diverse workforce and not actively supporting that diversity can result in stifling different voices from speaking with candour.

Create Opportunities For Different Points of View

Inviting cultural diversity means more than recognizing holidays, showing patience with language barriers and stocking different food in the cafeteria. To gain benefit you need to take steps to create opportunities for cultural diversity to exert itself throughout the work process and within relationships across the organization. Cultural diversity includes providing opportunities to see people and situations from difference perspectives and points of view.

3 Strategies you can implement to support cultural diversity in your organization

1. ***Two-way Orientation:*** The process of orienting new employees to the organization is important. Explaining expectations for professional work expectations and unique company culture can be useful but also stifling. Standards of professional behaviour/expectations vary across cultures. If your professional standards and expectations and do not consider cultural diversity the result may be employees who shut down and blend in. As part of the orientation an exchange of information about professional expectations and standards can be a two-way street. Share information about your company culture and standards of behaviour but also ask for information on how your employees view or interpret these standards

1. ***Actively Bring Different Perspectives Into The Conversation:*** Through formal and informal education and training offer information to all your employees on

different cultural perspectives. Instead of relying on your employees to spontaneously offer different perspectives find and share stories drawn from different cultures/countries. This can allow opportunities for your employee from a different culture to share his/her perspective. However, do not single the employee out to explain their different cultural perspective. Create the opportunity and see what happens.

2. **Provide Mentoring:** Mentors can offer a two-way exchange of information. The mentor can provide the employee with insights into work process and standards and explain cultural expectations for behaviour. However, the mentor can also provide an opportunity for your employee to comfortably share a culturally different perspective. The mentor can provide ideas on how to share a different perspective and why it is important to bring different points of view into the workplace. The mentor can also strategize with the employee when and how to provide a different perspective.

Creating an atmosphere that is open to different perspectives encourages different perspectives. Innovation and adaptability often emerges as a result of listening to different points of view. A culturally diverse workforce can offer opportunities to benefit from different points of view if you set the stage and invite the players into the play.