



Unit 14

Diversity in the Work Place

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Avoid the pitfalls related to diversity
- ✓ Use a technique for dealing with inappropriate behavior
- ✓ Develop a management style to encourage diversity
- ✓ Take action if you or one of your employees feels discriminated against

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The Cornerstones of Diversity

About the Cornerstones

Diversity experts Armida Russell, Amy Tolbert, and Frank Wilderman have identified four cornerstones of diversity development. They are knowledge, acceptance, understanding, and behavior.

How do you see these cornerstones as keys to diversity?

Knowledge

The best way to battle stereotypes is to inform yourself about the truth. Some activities you can do on a personal level include:

- Ñ Visit ethnic museums or memorials
- Ñ Take ethnic cooking classes or language classes
- Ñ Travel
- Ñ Attend different places of worship
- Ñ Watch movies or read books about stereotypes (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Amistad*, *Schindler's List*, and *Ghosts of Mississippi* are some excellent resources)
- Ñ Involve yourself with people that your stereotype could apply to. Find out what they're really like.
- Ñ If you have children, involve them in your studies.

What other ways can you think of to increase your knowledge?

Understanding

Once you have some knowledge about diverse groups, put that knowledge into action. If you understand why a person is acting in a particular way, it may be easier to empathize.

Here are some ways you can put yourself in other people's shoes:

- Ñ Try placing a phone call using a TDD device.
- Ñ Rent a wheelchair and go to a shopping mall. Make sure to visit the restroom.
- Ñ Volunteer for an organization that provides services for new immigrants or people with disabilities.

Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean adopting the behaviors or rituals of a culture as your own. It also does not mean condoning behaviors that clash with your value system.

Acceptance does mean respecting the values and behaviors of other cultures. Let's say that we need to schedule team meetings and I feel that the best time to do this is before the day starts, at 8 a.m. every morning. However, Pam has a conflict: she attends worship every morning before work. Perhaps I don't go to church every morning, but I can respect the fact that Pam has this commitment. Rather than ask Pam to alter her religious commitment, I can respect it and schedule the meeting for another time.

Developing acceptance can open up a whole new range of possibilities for everyone involved. To start, if you listen with an open mind, you'll probably learn something about your co-worker or even about another culture. And, when different viewpoints are exchanged in a respectful manner, amazing ideas are bound to result. This respectful, healthy exchange builds respect and communication skills, resulting in a stronger team.

Behavior

Now that all the pieces are in place, you can begin to look more closely at your behavior. For each scenario below, outline what you would do.

Your company has beer and pizza every Friday at lunch. Your newest employee does not eat meat nor drink beer for religious reasons.

You're in a training class and you've noticed that one person is being excluded from the activities because English is a second language for them.

Your new supervisor is from an African nation where tradition is very strong. Some of the other members of your team make jokes about this person's dress and the unusual similes he uses.

How to Discourage Diversity

Even if we try to be diversity-oriented and politically correct, no one is perfect. Let's look at some common pitfalls and how you can avoid making these mistakes.

Making assumptions.

Assumptions are at the root of most human conflict. Don't assume that you know the proper name for someone's ethnic background; don't assume someone in a wheelchair does or doesn't need help; don't assume that a person has a particular quality because they're from a particular place. Always ask to clarify your assumptions.

Hiring just to fill affirmative action measures.

This is probably the absolute worst thing you can do to promote diversity. Trust us; if you need to fill affirmative action measures, there are plenty of qualified candidates out there. If you hire solely based on the person's ethnicity or gender, you are doing several things:

- Ñ Devaluing the person by not recognizing their real qualities
- Ñ Promoting the stereotype that people of various ethnicities can only get jobs if employers are forced to hire them
- Ñ Placing a person in a position they cannot succeed in, further promoting stereotypes and harming the person's self-esteem
- Ñ Placing your company at risk of reverse discrimination lawsuits
- Ñ Costing your company time and money

Failing to follow up after training.

Diversity cannot be accomplished with just one day's worth of training. Our goal here is to help you recognize the areas in which you can be more diverse and start you on the road to open-mindedness. It's up to you to continue the learning process and work on the plan we've set in motion today.

Neglecting learning opportunities.

Take every opportunity to learn about new things. If you're invited to a new place of worship, try it. If a new ethnic restaurant opens, try it. It doesn't mean you have to like it or even do it again, but it will put you on the road to understanding.

The STOP Technique

The Four Steps

Introduction

Diversity expert Lenora Billings-Harris has developed a four-step technique that you can use when someone is behaving in an inappropriate manner. It's called STOP. Although it can be applied to almost any situation, she has designed it for dealing with diversity issues.

S: State the inappropriate behavior objectively.

Tell the offender what needs to be changed in a specific, objective way. If you show your feelings, the offender will often respond with anger and denial, which will get both of you nowhere.

Example: "Bob, when you call my ideas retarded..."

T: Tell the offender how you feel when s/he performs this behavior.

This is where you can add your feelings or opinions, although feelings are usually best so that this doesn't become a debate. Make sure you stay as logical and unemotional as possible.

Example: "... it really hurts my feelings and makes me feel devalued."

O: Give the offender options.

In addition to telling the person what you don't want them to do, offer several suggestions for what they can do.

Example: "I would prefer that you use a different word, like silly or illogical. It would be even better if you could simply ask me to explain my idea further."

P: Positive results.

Let the offender know what the results will be if they change their behavior. Dale Carnegie states that in order to change behavior, the person must know WIIFM (what's in it for me?).

Example: "I really feel that this could improve our working relationship and our communication skills. I think our ads would be a lot more creative, too."

Tips and Tricks

Here are some tips for making STOP work for you.

- Ñ The first few times you use STOP, test it on a child when they act inappropriately.
- Ñ Plan out what you'll say. This will help you identify your feelings, options, and possible results.
- Ñ When you talk to the offender, make sure you're in private.
- Ñ Don't expect miracles. If the person does not change their behavior, you can try the process again until it does work.
- Ñ If the behavior does not change and it interferes with work, bring it to your supervisor's attention.
- Ñ If the behavior does change, show appreciation as soon as you can.

Role Play

Scenario One

Cindy and Bob are in a one-on-one meeting to discuss Bob's performance review (Cindy is his direct manager). Cindy is reviewing some new reports that Bob has had difficulty preparing on time and correctly. Bob replies, "Geez, you're right uptight, are you on your period? Quit bitching at me!"

Role Play Notes

Scenario Two

Tom is the company’s administrative assistant. He is blind. He has noticed that his manager, Samantha, has a unique way of introducing herself: she comes up behind him and squeezes his shoulders. He often finds this startling and uncomfortable.

Role Play Notes

Scenario Three

Mark is one of the company’s senior accountants. He is preparing a major report for the company’s CFO. When he asks Tom, his manager, to review his figures, Tom says, “It’ll be alright; you’re an Asian so you must be good at math.”

Role Play Notes

Scenario Four

Jamie, Alice, Sarah, and Susan are all sales representatives managed by Steven. Jamie is gay and Steven knows this, although he is not very understanding and accepting. At a business gathering, Steven introduces himself, and then says, “And these are my gals” to introduce his salespeople.

Role Play Notes

Scenario Five

As a Catholic, Mary does not eat meat on Fridays. Her co-workers are aware of this belief. One Friday, she attends a company lunch and is dismayed to find that the menu items are meatballs and beef lasagna. One of her co-workers says, “Geez, I’m sure God will forgive you for eating meat on a Friday.”

Role Play Notes

Scenario Six

You have just started a new job in a multi-story office building. You are in a wheelchair, and you’ve found the entrance ramp a little tricky, but you’ve figured it out. However, one of your co-workers often comes up behind you and starts to push your chair without saying anything.

Role Play Notes

Managing for Diversity

What Can I Do as an Employee?

There are many things that you can do as an employee to help your company become a more diverse place.

To start, be open-minded. If your employer is hiring a broader range of people, don’t jump to conclusions or make assumptions. Make an effort to talk to these people as you would any new staff member, to learn about them and build a relationship. Make sure you focus on them as a person and as

your co-worker, and not as a science project. If their culture is significantly different, you might want to do some research.

Make sure you continue your education. Accepting diversity and embracing it can take a long time. After this workshop, continue to read books or magazines, watch videos, and talk to people of other cultures. Continue re-evaluating your stereotypes and biases so that you're aware of them when making decisions.

Make suggestions to your manager. If there is a practice in the workplace that you feel is excluding others, talk about it. Or, if you have suggestions on how to be more inclusive, share those as well.

What Can I Do as a Manager?

Make the effort to implement change in your organization. Start a diversity committee, organize a food or culture festival, arrange a discount program for foreign films, invite speakers in... do whatever you can to show your staff about the world around you.

It's also important that you listen to your employees and provide flexibility. Let's say that it's a tradition in your company to close for the week of Christmas. This is a great reward for many staff, but what about those who don't celebrate Christmas? For example, in India, what we would call Christmas takes place in October, and is called Diwali (or Deepavali), or the Festival of Lights. If the company is going to celebrate holidays or give time off for these special occasions, it must be done fairly.

Remember that you can apply the Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you) in management. This doesn't mean everyone is always treated the same: it means that people are treated fairly. Also remember that making exceptions isn't charitable, it's expected. It's your job to make employees comfortable, unless those accommodations make other employees uncomfortable. It's a fine line and it can be difficult to make everyone happy, but it is part of your job. And, the points mentioned above about education apply to you, too. If you set a good example, your workplace will be much more open to embracing diversity.

Dealing with Discrimination

What is Discrimination?

Let's talk a little bit about discrimination. Discrimination is when you're treated differently from other people because of your age, race, physical appearance, ethnicity, ability, gender, or medical problems.

As An Employee

If you're an employee and you feel that you're being discriminated against, the first thing you need to do is document each event: the date, time, place, people involved, and what happened. Then, present your complaint to your manager. If you can't complain to your manager or you don't receive results from this step, then speak to your Human Resources department. Most complaints can be resolved in this way.

If you don't receive an appropriate response from the Human Resources department, consult with a lawyer who specializes in employment law. They will help you determine if you have a valid claim and help you decide on the next steps.

As A Manager

If you're on the other side of the table, as a manager, the most important thing you can do in preventing discrimination claims is to document your decisions, especially when exceptions or accommodations are made.

Let's look at an example situation. You manage a team of four people: Susan, Sharon, Jacob, and Christopher. Christopher is in a wheelchair. He works from ten a.m. to six p.m. The other three employees work nine to five. These time rules are strict, and disciplinary measures are taken if an employee is tardy. Recently, Sharon was tardy for the third time this month, so she was suspended for a day without pay. She is alleging that Christopher gets special treatment because of his disability, and that she is being punished because she is not disabled; in essence, reverse discrimination.

Now, let's say that when Christopher came to work for you, he explained that the special taxi service he uses (which is the only one in town providing service to people in wheelchairs) only starts at 9:30 a.m., meaning the earliest he can be to work is 10 a.m. You confirmed this with the taxi company, documented the conversations, and made the exception. Now, when Sharon challenges you on this decision, you have proof that this decision was not made on the basis of gender or ability; it's simply a special circumstance.

If an employee brings a discrimination complaint to you, make sure you ask for documentation and look over it carefully. This is why it's important to be aware of your biases and stereotypes; if you have a stereotype that affected a decision, you certainly don't want your same stereotype clouding your judgment a second time.

We recommend that you also consult your human resources department and your legal department (if you have these resources available) while you are evaluating the complaint. You should also try to complete your evaluation within a few days.

Once you have reached a decision about whether or not the complaint is valid, meet with the employee. If you've decided that the complaint is valid, ask the employee what they would like to see as a solution

and work out an action plan with them. It's also important to follow up on the plan and make sure the problem doesn't reoccur.

If you feel that the complaint is not valid, explain why you feel this way, and provide any supporting documentation that you have. Be firm and do not get drawn into a debate. If the employee provides additional documentation, explain that you will need more time to review it. Be sure to let the employee know what his/her options are if s/he doesn't agree with your decision.

Discrimination cases are very difficult to handle. Each situation is different, and the laws are constantly changing. Obtaining specialized legal advice is always a good idea.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Kemp, Sid. Perfect Solutions for Difficult Employee Situations. McGraw-Hill, 2004.*
- ✓ *Mor Barak, Michalle E. Managing Diversity: Toward a Globally Inclusive Workplace (2nd Edition). Sage Publications, 2010.*
- ✓ *Wildermuth, Cris. Diversity Training. American Society for Training and Development, 2006.*