

Diversity Awareness: Fostering a Climate of Inclusion, Sensitivity, and Respect in the Workplace

Nicole F. Smith, M.Ed, CDBC

Director, Instructional Design and Learning Development

nsmith@americanpayroll.org

210-630-4321

Diversity awareness has evolved from focusing solely on eliminating discrimination to proactively seeking inclusion. In the end, diversity is about cultivating meaningful relationships.

Types of Diversity

- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Cultural Background
- Age
- Socioeconomic class
- Regional Origin
- Education
- Physical Ability
- Military Background
- Religion
- Personal Values
- Sexual Orientation
- Sexual Identity
- Personal History
- Language/Accent
- Thinking/Cognitive Styles

Understanding Bias

- **Fundamental attribution error:** Explaining someone's behavior based on inherent personality traits rather than external circumstances.
- **Subtle stereotyping:** Characterizing people in terms of high or low warmth and high or low competence based on their "type" or "profile."

Rather than thinking we can eliminate bias, a better approach is to consciously address it by questioning the validity of our assumptions and choosing behaviors that support fairness and equity.

*You yourself can be the
lesson and plant the seed.*

Diversity and inclusion are quite simply the right thing to do

It's about creating equal opportunities for everyone – and we can all see signs of progress. But, the statistics make it equally clear that there's still a long way to go.

Take gender equality. Women account for 60% of college graduates but only 3% of leaders worldwide. Women and girls also represent two-thirds of the world's illiterate population.

It is time to move from diversity initiatives alone to creating a culture of inclusion and extending learning beyond just senior leaders and implementing an enterprise-wide awareness.

Diversity is being invited to the party, Inclusion is being asked to dance. ~Verna Myers

To respond effectively to global trends and changing demographics in the United States, it is essential to have both diversity & inclusion, sensitivity, and respect.

Diversity & Inclusion is understanding and respecting differences and similarities between people and cultures to create a positive climate for all employees to bring their best efforts to the workplace.

Diversity refers to differences of all kinds, including but not limited to gender, age, personal values, educational opportunities, personal history and physical ability.

Inclusion is creating a climate where differences and similarities are respected and people are welcomed into that workplace, have voices heard, and contributions recognized.

Inclusion confers importance to the opinions, talents, and skills of all team members.

Working together is more than a good idea, it's essential to individual and organization success.

Framework for Organizational Inclusion

- Demonstrate a desire to seek diverse perspectives at all levels.
- Find and capitalize on the unique skills of each individual.
- Establish a buddy system that connects each new employee with a veteran employee to “show them the ropes.”
- Find non-bureaucratic ways of challenging the status quo.
- Foster an atmosphere of flexibility and learning.
- Admit mistakes, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities.

Workplace Design

If you have the ability to influence the physical layout of your organization, here are some ways to foster a more inclusive environment:

- Create common spaces where employees can interact easily and informally.
- Consider larger tables in break or lunch rooms so more people can mix together at one time.
- Consider needs of different populations/profiles, e.g., a space for nursing mothers, ergonomic adjustments for older employees, etc.

Aspects of Inclusive Workplace

- ✓ Everyone is valued and treated with respect.
- ✓ Everyone feels listened to.
- ✓ Every employee at every level practices the behaviors that support an inclusive environment.
- ✓ Potential or actual tensions are actively addressed.
- ✓ The makeup of the workforce represents the local community and its customers.

Different Ways of Conveying Respect

- ✓ **Direct vs. Indirect** eye contact and communication
- ✓ **Time:** Value of punctuality or relationships
- ✓ **Individual vs. Group** achievement and recognition
- ✓ **Hierarchy:** Value of position and status or accomplishment based on skill
- ✓ **Reserved vs. Emotional** demeanor

Be Part of the Solution

Every person has the ability to lead by example and influence other individuals and the organization.

- ✓ Don't look to be offended.
- ✓ Respond with grace while setting the record straight.
- ✓ Speak up if you experience or notice truly offensive behavior.
- ✓ Treat others with respect.

Continued dialogue to educate train, and make both ends of the spectrum aware of the importance of a diverse and inclusive workplace is paramount to the success of individual leaders, as well as the organization at large.

“Any organization, big or small could consider making diversity and inclusiveness a part of its culture. The business value is proven. Organizations generate more revenue, innovate more, and attract and retain high performers as a result of it. To reap the benefits of D&I needs to be factored into all key business processes and day-to-day decision-making.”

Jennifer Brown, Author of *Inclusion: Diversity, The New Workplace, and The Will to Change*

Knowledge Share

Increase your awareness of D&I

- Within the U.S. – the shift has expanded over time from a focus on affirmative action, compliance, and quotas
- Definition of Diversity & Inclusion
- Benefits and Consequences

Develop your understanding of key demographic changes that affect the organization you support

- D&I differs significantly in different parts of the world, but is important globally as a response to changing demographics. (ex. Multi-generational, United States and the gender gap, other countries and their unique differences).

Serve as a guide to incorporate and sustain D&I practices in your organization

- Elevate inclusion initiatives to the C-suite in order to give it the importance it deserves.
- Help leaders understand and appreciate the range of perspectives and styles of team members, exercise flexibility to establish shared norms, and include members with styles that diverge from those of others on the team.
- **Group Think** can take over – yields less robust decisions that have costly ramifications.

Help employee realize their full potential and develop their skills.

- Implement training. Cultivate a new culture of learning and personal growth. Engage those individuals or groups that currently feel excluded.
- A culture of diversity and inclusion fosters amplified creativity, especially when innovation is rewarded instead of only results.