



Diversity Training

The main goal of this session is to help you understand the importance of diversity in the workplace and how you can support it for everyone's benefit. By the end of the session, you should:

- Identify the ways in which we are diverse;
- Understand both the challenges and the opportunities of having a diverse workforce;
- Help avoid discrimination in the workplace; and
- Follow organization policy regarding workplace diversity and discrimination.

Here are some of the ways in which we are diverse:

- By *race*—but keep in mind that members of the same race can be very different from one another;
- By *gender*—gender differences are particularly noticeable in jobs that traditionally have been all male or all female, but now increasingly include both males and females;
- By *physical appearance*—such as height, weight, and hair color;
- By *age*—age and generational differences are likely to be more noticeable as the number of older Americans in the workforce increases;
- By *education*—educational differences can affect the way different people approach the same job;
- By *cultural background*—this may reflect race or country of origin, but it may also reflect how we celebrate different holidays or what language is spoken at home;
- And final, by *physical abilities*—these take into account both special talents and special needs, including physical disabilities

- Consider your own history and how you may have been influenced to think about people of diverse backgrounds. Here are some important influences for most of us:
 - Our parents, who are often the number one influence on how we think about people who are different;
 - Our teachers and coaches, who may be our mentors in early life;
 - Our peers—what our circle of friends think about people with different backgrounds; and
 - The news and entertainment media, including radio, TV, movies, and advertisements; all these can influence what we think about other people.

➤ Think about the way your own background and the influences in your life may have affected the way you view other people.

In addition to diversity that can be obvious among people, such as gender and age, there are also diversities among people that may not be so obvious. These include:

- Religion,
- Mental/psychological disabilities,
- Beliefs and values,

- Sexual orientation, *and*
- Personal habits.

It's important that we be aware of these differences, even though they may not come through in the workplace every day. Diversity helps to build overall personality.

For the purposes of this training, we're going to focus on generational diversity. These are the years in which each generation is classified:

- Silent Generation were born before 1945.
- Baby Boomers were born between 1945 and 1960.
- Generation Xers were born between 1961 and 1980.
- And Millennials were born between 1981 and 2000.

➤ Remember, these dates are just approximations. There's some overlap between the generations, and people whose birth dates may put them in one generation might actually exhibit more traits of another generation.

Now let's take a quick look at the values and attitudes of the different generations, beginning with the Silent Generation.

Silent Generation:

- These workers were brought up either in hard times or with parental memories of hard times. For the most part, this influenced them to believe in the work ethic, loyalty, and dedication to their employer.
- They tend to focus on responsibility, duty, and sacrifice in terms of their employment and their families.
- These employees have respect for authority and rules.
- And they've been willing to "pay their dues" over the years, put in the hours and do the hard work to get promotions and raises. They never expected to be given a free lunch or a free ride.
 - They did, for the most part, however, expect to keep their job for life if they chose to. Many of this generation were solid union supporters who believed in seniority rights, the power of the union to protect their jobs, and the gratitude of their employer for their loyalty, dedication, and hard work.

Baby Boomers:

- The Baby Boomers, on the other hand, grew up in a time when rights were a big issue—in schools, voting booths, housing, and workplaces. They came to work with the notion that they had rights as employees and employers had to respect their rights.

- Boomers also brought with them the optimism of the sixties and the belief that change could and should occur, and that at work as everywhere else in their lives, there were lots of possibilities within their grasp.
- This generation has been more interested in career and personal growth than the previous generation.
- They have also tended to value self-gratification and self-interest more than loyalty and dedication to the organization.
- However, Boomers, for the most part, have been big on teamwork and participation. And when they moved into positions of power in the workplace, they put an emphasis on these strategies, which have been widely adopted and have proved very successful in American enterprises of all kinds.

Generation Xers

- Generation Xers tend to be independent and self-reliant, and may consider rules as guidelines rather than absolutes.
- They are also pragmatic rather than dogmatic. They use what works and work with what they have at hand.
- Xers are also growth oriented and interested in career advancement.
- They're comfortable with technology and keep up to date on workplace changes.
- Many of them need challenges to keep them interested and performing at their best.
- And, they value flexibility in their jobs.

Millenials:

The Millennials are still fairly new to the workplace, so it's hard to be definitive at this point about their values and attitudes. But for the most part they appear to be:

- Confident;
- Optimistic;
- Wired to every kind of technology;
- Multitaskers; and
- Respectful of diversity.

Can you think of other attributes and attitudes associated with members of the different generations?

There are challenges in being part of a diverse workforce if you're prepared for it:

- Differences among people, are OK. Keep in mind that being “different” doesn't mean “better” or “worse”—it just means “different.”
- Coordinating different styles of working can be challenging, because not everyone approaches a task in exactly the same way.

- Learning to communicate across cultural and language differences can also be a real challenge. Clear and open communication is key to working successfully in a diverse group.
- Developing flexibility is another important ingredient to dealing with diversity. It's important not only to listen to new ideas but also to implement different approaches.
- Finally, we should be willing to adapt to change. This includes both changes in the workforce itself and changes in the way we approach our daily tasks.

But along with the challenges of diversity, there are plenty of positive opportunities:

- A diverse workplace can help attract and retain high-quality people from a variety of backgrounds.
- Morale increases when everyone feels that he or she is welcome and appreciated, regardless of background.
- Productivity improves as morale increases.
- Accepting and encouraging diversity reduces discrimination and the risk of lawsuits.
- Decision making is improved when there is a diversity of approaches present in the workplace.
- And finally, our organization's profile and reputation in the marketplace will improve when the workplace becomes known for encouraging diversity and treating all employees fairly.

Now we'll turn to the issue of discrimination in a diverse workplace.

First and foremost, it is illegal to discriminate against someone in any aspect of employment, including:

- Recruitment, hiring, and firing;
- What someone is paid, including benefits;
- Promotions, transfers to another position or location, and layoffs;
- Opportunities for training or apprenticeships; and
- Retirement plans and disability leave policies.

Another form of discrimination is harassment of a person or group of persons because of their differences. Harassment includes:

- Slurs or jokes, or other offensive comments or actions, based on someone's race, national origin, religion, gender, or age;
- Segregating a person or group of people from others on the basis of these characteristics;
- Stereotyping or making judgments about the abilities of a person based on these characteristics;
- Making unwanted and unwelcome sexual advances of any kind or sexually offensive remarks or actions directed at another person; or
- Derogatory comments about another person's cultural or religious practices.

There are a number of legal protections from discrimination and harassment that help support a diverse workplace. These laws include:

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Generally, this law prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin. The only exception is if one of these characteristics is absolutely necessary in order to perform a job, such as hiring a female to monitor the female restroom.
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act, or ADEA, prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of age; employees who are aged 40 or older are protected by this law.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, prohibits discrimination on the basis of physical disability and requires employers to make reasonable accommodations to disabled persons who are otherwise qualified.
- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits the federal government from discriminating against qualified, disabled persons.
- The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) prohibits employers with 15 or more employees from discriminating against applicants or employees on the basis of genetic information, including family medical history. Employers cannot request, obtain, or use genetic information to make employment decisions.
- Finally, the Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from having different pay practices on the basis of gender.

Let's review some common misperceptions about diversity.

- One misperception is that there is only one person who is best qualified for a particular job. In fact, different people have different combinations of skills and qualities that may be right for a job in different ways.
- Another common misperception is that members of a minority group always get along better with people from the same group, rather than with other groups. That is not always the case; there is always diversity within any particular group, regardless of having certain characteristics in common.
- A third misperception is that diversity programs are established to benefit only members of minority groups. The fact is, diversity programs are intended to make sure that everyone in the workplace is treated equally and fairly.

You may be able to think of other misperceptions about diversity and people who are different from you because of their background or characteristics.

The following information discusses specific things you can do to make diversity work and help prevent possible problems.

- Learn the names of the people you work with, and use their names frequently. This shows that you recognize and respect them as individuals.
- Show interest in the lives of your co-workers beyond the workplace. Ask members of other groups about their cultures and traditions.

- Never assume stereotypes about people based on their backgrounds.
- Encourage teamwork among co-workers from different backgrounds.
- And, always avoid making personal comments that are derogatory or offensive.
- Approach controversial topics in a general way. If you find yourself discussing controversial issues, avoid expressing opinions about particular individuals.
- Always treat males and females equally, and avoid forming groups based on gender.
- Avoid making sexist comments, either to males or females.
- Don't make guesses about a person's race or background based on personal appearance. In fact, try to avoid categorizing people at all.
- Also, learn—and use—acceptable terms when discussing people who are different.
- Use the variety of experiences among your co-workers to have beneficial discussions about ways to approach things differently.
- Always show respect for differences in the cultures and traditions of others.
- Look at the *abilities* of your co-workers, not their disabilities. Don't make assumptions about persons with disabilities; instead, look at what they *can* do, not what they may not be able to do.
- Don't go along with others who might make insensitive comments or offensive jokes about other groups.
- Finally, maintain an attitude of including others, rather than finding reasons to exclude them.

Communication:

- Communication with and among employees is one of the most important issues any supervisor has to manage. Generational diversity introduces some extra considerations. For example, make sure you communicate with all your employees regularly. That means from the youngest to the oldest and everybody in between.
- Make an effort to understand generational differences to make your interactions with employees more effective. By recognizing and accounting for possible generational differences, you can target your communications more accurately and successfully.
- At the same time, use language and references you're comfortable with and that anyone can understand and relate to when communicating to all your employees. In other words, be yourself but be aware of your own generational influences so that they don't negatively impact your interactions with employees.
- Always listen carefully to ensure mutual understanding with any employee of any generation. Clarify your understanding and ask questions if you don't understand others' words or meanings.

- Also, take steps to ensure that workers communicate effectively with one another, regardless of generational differences.

Here are the main points about diversity that have been discussed in this session. Please try to put them into practice in the workplace.

- Diversity respects the differences among other people.
- Diversity encourages new ideas and perspectives on doing your work.
- Diversity promotes fairness, and fairness allows everyone to contribute and share in success.
- And finally, diversity helps create a stronger, more unified, and more successful organization that will benefit everyone.