

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR DIVERSITY

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We begin with a quote from James Baldwin, "it was a great shock at the age of five or six that in a world of Gary Coopers, you are an Indian." At times in our career we will be Gary Cooper, at others we will be the Indian. It is time to change the framework of the discussion. Diversity is not about "the other," it's about us. Continuing the conversation about managing "the other" reinforces discrimination and diverts attention away from effective strategies to minimize internal conflict and maximize the contribution of each employee.

We are more alike than we are different. The issues that we deal with as individuals, mothers, sons, fathers, daughters are the same. The professional challenges shared by engineers, professors, attorneys and scientists are not dependent on the color of skin, ethnic background or sexual preferences.

Diversity management is the practice of good management skills in all organizations, regardless of the makeup of race, creed or preference of employees.

It is the defined set of values, principles, behaviors, attitudes and structures that enable employees and managers to work effectively. An organization that manages diversity well has demonstrated a commitment to maximizing the ability of *all employees* to contribute to its goals:

- Demonstrated commitment from senior management
- Clearly established roles and accountabilities for management and employees
- Venues for feedback from subordinates and peers
- Accountability for meeting diversity goals tied to compensation
- Attentiveness to issues which concern people about work
- Commitment to resolve all issues about perceived inequality
- Forums to address areas of internal erosion
- Strong relationships and strategic alliances with community outreach organizations
- Public support for diversity.

We conclude with a few ingredients for creating an enabling organizational environment;

- **Don't judge appearance – listen to what is said, evaluate what is done.** Search for similarities in work ethic and integrity, not social history. We are more alike than we are different. Sharing values and attributes like integrity, honest, commitment and reliability are because of what we do, not how we look.
- **Don't confuse social comfort for workplace performance.** Similarities in color, ethnic background or other social norms are unimportant for workplace performance. The competence to meet organizational goals is most important.
- **Lead by example: a zero-tolerance for comments, behaviors and attitudes that berate, offend or harm others.** Have sanctions to punish offensive behavior, immediately and publicly reprimand poor behavior.
- **Establish safe havens to field and resolve disputes.** Ideally, these should be managed by an external source such as an EAP or consultant to ensure absolute confidentiality.
- **Embrace new realities as the only course of action,** even if that means new rules, adapting to a new playing field and performing in a different manner.
- **Offer training in a variety of skills.** Ensure all employees have the skills to succeed.

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organizations. The firm specializes in enterprise management, executive coaching and organization development.