Different Like You

Appreciating
Diversity in the
21st Century

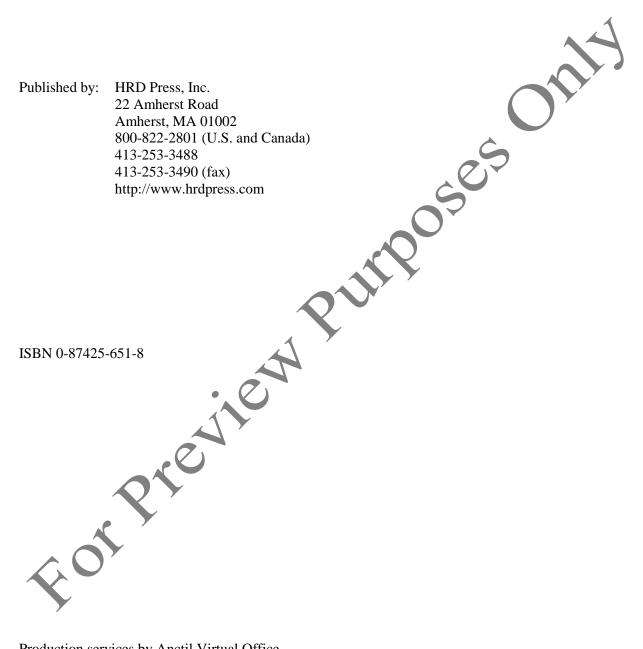**Participant's Workbook**

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Introduction

Most of us have heard a lot about workforce diversity lately; we may even have attended a diversity training program of some sort. Despite all the talk and commotion, many of us still are wondering what diversity means to our organization, and why we should care. What will workforce diversity mean to each of us, individually, in the 21st century?

What Is Diversity Training?

Let begin our exploration into workforce diversity by answering this question, "What exactly is diversity training?" Take a moment to think about your answer(s).

Now, here are a couple of answers that past training participants have given to this question that might be similar to your answers:

- "Diversity training is where I learn to like people who are from different cultures."
- "Diversity training teaches us about the differences between us. We then learn how to get along with those who are different."
- "Diversity training categorizes people."

For some diversity training programs these answers are accurate, but we must consider that in the 21st century "diversity training" will mean much more than learning about differences and finding ways to like those who are different. Our definitions of workforce diversity in recent years have often centered around classifications of race, ethnicity, and gender. Statisticians segmented employees into broad categories of white, black, Asian, and Hispanic. We were simply grouped by gender, and measured by minority status.

In the 21st century our idea of diversity has expanded to encompass many other aspects of individual uniqueness such as age or generational group, religion, economic status, education, disability, cultural differences, and family make-up. But even these externally measured factors are becoming inadequate to define diversity. The concept of diversity must further evolve to encompass all of the talents, preferences, affiliations, intelligence, and experiences that make each one of us unique as individuals.

Workforce diversity in the 21st century will focus less on what a group of people can be identified with, and focus more on the unique diversity of each individual as our organization's most valuable resource: its human capital.

Here are a few more answers participants have given about diversity training:

- "Diversity training is something I have to do if I want to move up in my organization."
- "Diversity training is something my organization is doing to look good."
- "Diversity training is something my organization is doing to prevent lawsuits."

Diversity training is critical for every type and size of organization. All kinds of changes have come to the workplace in recent years, and you can be certain that more change is coming. Today, some organizations are losing huge amounts of money due to loss of productivity, inability to retain employees, and even lawsuits. This is happening because these organizations have not updated their ways of working to meet new realities. They have therefore not created work environments that value and respect each employee. These unsuccessful organizations have failed to change and will likely fall by the wayside.

Therefore, it is essential that the work environment in our organization is one that has updated its ways of working to meet new realities, resulting in an organization that values and respects each employee. But our organization cannot have this type of respectful environment if each employee does not behave in a way that fosters respect and values the ideas and contributions of fellow employees. It is for this reason that diversity training should be something that each of us does in order to move up in our organization. Diversity training will help us to behave appropriately and professionally in our relationships at work. In addition, diversity training will help us create a more productive work environment where employees feel valued and want to stay. If we increase productivity and job retention in our organization, and even possibly help to prevent lawsuits, we will be far more valuable to our organization, and our organization is far more likely to succeed.

Here are some final answers to the diversity-training question:

- "Diversity training is touchy-feely training where white men are usually made to look bad."
- "Diversity training is a big waste of time. People feel the way they feel, and no training session is going to change that."

Diversity training can be, in fact, a little touchy-feely. However, diversity training should never be training that makes any group of people, or individual, look bad. Participants often feel that diversity training is training to make us like all minority groups and dislike white men. People who feel this way either have not been to a good diversity training session or are missing the point. Diversity training is not about liking or disliking people; it is not about having to learn about each person's cultural differences; and it is not about assigning blame. Diversity training is about accepting and appreciating differences in others, and about behaving in a way that creates a workplace where employees can communicate professionally and resolve conflict respectfully.

Secondly, for the reasons already stated, diversity training is never a waste of time. Yes, diversity training will probably not change the way people feel, but let me suggest to you that it does not have to. So long as we use diversity training to learn to behave, despite any feelings we may have, in ways that make our organization a comfortable place to work for all employees, then diversity training has been time well spent.

Why Diversity Training:
The Building Blocks of the Respectful Workplace

Whether we like it or not, our world is changing. The demographics of our country are changing; buying power among groups of people is changing; and our workplaces are looking much different than they did even twenty years ago. It is not news to anyone that our white-collar workplaces no longer consist of all white men, yet in some cases our organizations are still operating as if they did. The problem with not keeping up with the times is that organizations that don't are losing money, jobs are being lost, and there is always someone to take over when they fail. Diversity training helps to avoid this failure by helping organizations create a respectful workplace—a harassment-free workplace where each employee is valued and respected. This respectful workplace is built on a foundation of very important principles.

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Equality

The foundation of a respectful workplace, and essential to every successful workplace, is the concept of equality. Equality is required by law and is ethically what is right. Equality requires that each person should have an equal opportunity to work, and in that work to make the best use of his or her abilities regardless of race, sex, religion, national origin, or any other characteristic. A lack of equality in an organization is discrimination, and discrimination not only is illegal, but negatively affects the work environment as well.

Think about instances of inequality or discrimination in your workplace. What are the effects of this inequality?

Accepting Differences

While it is important to realize that all people should be given an equal right to make the best use of their skills in their workplace, diversity training is not just about avoiding lawsuits and doing what is morally right. It is better for our organizations if they can avoid lawsuits, and workplaces are more pleasant places to work if we do what is morally right, but we must go beyond what is required of us by law and ethics. We must learn to expand our ideas and thoughts about our workplace and the people in it. We must begin to accept differences between ourselves and others so that we can be better, more productive employees. When we do our part to create a workplace that accepts differences, we become more valuable employees to our organization.

Different from What?

In order to truly accept differences we must ask ourselves exactly what these differences are. To do this, please do the following exercise:

In this program we are talking about differences in people for diversity training purposes. Right now, take a moment to imagine people who have these differences. Please answer this question: "These people who are different are different from what?"

The answer most likely is, "Different from me." (The answer might also be, "Different from the norm," in which case you must ask yourself what this norm is.)

Now, thinking about these people who are different from you, please describe yourself below in detail. In this description please include values and beliefs that you have.

Example: While thinking, "People who are different from me are male," write, "I am female."

Example: While thinking, "People who are different from me are not Christian," write, "I am Christian."

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Now, consider the importance of each of these characteristics, values, and beliefs. For example, if you wrote, "I am very liberal politically," consider how important that is to you.

Go back to your list of characteristics, values, and beliefs and put one star by characteristics that are somewhat important to you, two stars for moderately important characteristics, and three stars for very important characteristics.

       *   Somewhat Important

     **   Moderately Important

  ***   Very Important

The more important a characteristic, especially a value or belief, is to you, the more difficult it will be for you to accept those who are different from that characteristic. Characteristics that describe us externally, such as gender, age, race, or cultural background, are usually important to us, and it may be difficult for us to work with others who are different from that characteristic. But differences in internal values and beliefs that we have rated very important more often than not create conflict in the working environment. Again, if you are very liberal politically, and that is very important to you, it will be difficult for you to accept someone who is extremely conservative politically. Take a look at the characteristics you rated "very important." Think about people who are very different from you in those characteristics. How do you feel about those people? How do you get along with those people?

We all feel that we get along better with people like us. Consider this: When you are choosing a person to work with you, who would you rather have—someone similar to you or someone different from you?

So what is the problem with choosing similar people to work with? In the past, in the white-collar workplace, white men chose other white men to work with. This worked out fine when the vast majority of the white-collar workforce were white males, when the vast majority of qualified candidates for jobs were white males, and when white men represented the vast majority of the buying power. Our country and our workforce have changed drastically since that time. For example, the Hispanic population is expected to nearly triple in the first half of the 21st century. The Asian population continues to increase rapidly. Almost 30 million Americans are foreign-born—the highest number in history. Over the next decade the percentage of white males in the workforce will decrease from almost one-half of the workforce to just over one-third of the workforce.

Despite the fact that we may be more comfortable working with people who are similar to us, in the 21st century we will frequently be working with people who are different from us, with a variety of experiences and backgrounds. Since the workforce is changing so drastically, it is important that we consider that those who are different from us may be valuable to our organization. If we want our organization to be successful, we must learn to accept differences and consider the merits of different ideas, opinions, and ways of doing things.

Liking Differences versus Accepting Differences

In our workplaces it would be great if we liked all of the people we worked with. When we like people we work with our jobs are much more pleasant, and even fun. However, it is not necessary that we like all of our co-workers. It is necessary that we treat our co-workers, including our bosses and subordinates, with respect—that we accept that all of us are different, and that each and every one of us has value. We may not like some of the differences between us, but we must be able to accept them, and behave in a manner that does not harass or demean others. For example, for a devout Christian, it may be very difficult to like a co-worker who is an atheist, but the devout Christian must accept that this person is entitled to work in an environment that is free from harassment and that this person has value to the organization. Whether we like others or not, we must accept the differences between us and work in a productive, rather than destructive, manner. Our jobs do not require that we like our co-workers, they require that we get the job done without causing problems for the organization.

Stereotypes and Prejudices

Stereotypes

Most stereotypes have some basis in fact. Therefore, stereotypes continue to exist. The obvious problem with stereotypes is that they attempt to assign each person in a class, or group, with the same characteristics. The not-so-obvious problem with stereotypes is that they close our minds to the possibility that a person might be in the same cultural, ethnic, religious, social, etc., group with others, but may be very different.

Think of identical twins as an example of this problem. These two people look exactly alike, but are they interchangeable? If someone wants to ask one of the twins out on a date and that twin is unavailable, would the other twin do? If someone wants to hire one twin who is a chemical engineer, would the twin who is a plumber do just as well? If one twin likes vanilla ice cream, does the other one like it too?

This example may seem absurd, but the point is that people with the same external characteristics are not the same people. Therefore, we must remember, despite any stereotypes we may have, or even despite our past experiences, each person is different, and deserves the chance to be thought of as an individual instead of as simply another one of "those" people.

Prejudices

All of us, whether we want to or not, have prejudices. It is very difficult for some of us to admit that this is true, but we all have some negative beliefs about one or several groups of people. Prejudice is learned and comes from our backgrounds and our experiences. The way we have been raised, and our family's beliefs, will greatly influence our beliefs about people. Prejudice also comes from our experiences that validate these beliefs. For example, if you have been raised in a family that believes all Mideastern persons are violent, and you go to school where a Mideastern classmate gets in a lot of fights with other children, your learned prejudice will be validated by your experiences.

Take a moment to think about your family's beliefs and about your environment growing up. Was your family accepting of differences or fairly closed-minded? Did your family consist of a mother, father, and biological children, or did you have a different type of family make-up? Did you hear a lot of racial or prejudicial remarks as a child? Was your neighborhood diverse, or were the people in it very similar? What about your school? Think about your relationships. Who do you choose as friends or romantic partners? These factors will greatly influence how you think and how you behave towards others.

As we examine our past experiences and backgrounds, what we must do is to become aware of our prejudices that result from our experiences and backgrounds. Instead of asking yourself whether or not you have prejudices, ask yourself what your prejudices are. Now you certainly don't need to share them with others unless you want to, but do consider those who are different from you and honestly examine any negative beliefs about groups of people.

Realize that prejudice in and of itself does not make us bad people. We all have some prejudices, and when we become aware of them we can begin to make sure that these prejudices are not exhibited in our behaviors and our actions towards those who are different. We can examine how our prejudice affects our behavior towards those who are different and put a halt to any behavior that might be considered offensive or cause harm to others or our organization. We must also realize that behavior that stems from prejudice, i.e., jokes that we tell and words that we use, can do a lot of harm to our organizations, to others that are harassed or demoralized by them, and to ourselves. We can be held personally liable if our actions that stem from prejudice create a hostile environment for a co-worker. Therefore, we must make sure that, despite negative feelings that we may have about those who are different, our actions do not harass or demean others.

Finally, we must also accept that these prejudices are simply that—negative beliefs that we have learned. These beliefs are not true about each individual with these different characteristics any more than you are exactly like each person in your racial, social, ethnic, or religious group. When we let our prejudices control us, then we do a great injustice to ourselves and to others. We must remember to give each person a chance to be who he or she truly is—to get to know each person as the individual he or she is rather than as a person we already have feelings, beliefs, and ideas about before we even meet him or her. We must also bear in mind that prejudice often leads to hate—and hate is not healthy for anyone.

Assimilation Takes a Lot of Energy

Accepting differences means allowing differences. Sometimes when we see people with the same external characteristics, such as race or ethnic background, sitting together in the cafeteria, hanging out together on breaks, or spending time together after work, we feel that this is not OK—that somehow their behavior is discriminating against other groups of people. It is difficult for us to accept that there is nothing wrong with this behavior so long as it does not exclude others. It is when this behavior crosses the line between hanging out with those similar to us and excluding people different from us that the problems arise. But ask yourself this, "Why shouldn't people who are similar choose to be together socially?" Allowing differences is often difficult to do, but necessary when we are accepting differences.

Also, in the past many people believed that our organizations needed to be "melting pots" where all people were assimilated into one homogenous group. While it is true that people with similarities tend to get along better, having similarities does not mean that we all have to be the same. Despite the fact that many organizations have become aware of problems with the "melting pot" image, many organizations still attempt to have employees assimilate. The problem with assimilation, or requiring employees to be essentially the same, is that it takes a lot of energy. This energy could be used much more productively.

To help understand this concept, think about a time when you were trying to fit into a group in which you had to act differently from how you naturally would act. How did it feel? For most of us it felt very uncomfortable, and it took a lot of energy to keep acting in a manner that did not come naturally to us. Now, think about a group that you could act naturally with. How did that feel?

Because it takes so much energy to act in a way that does not come naturally to us, we often seek situations and workplaces where we can be ourselves. If our organization is going to retain its workers and survive in the 21st century, it must allow each of us to be ourselves, and we must allow others to be themselves so that we all can be productive and successful in our workplace.

Finding Similarities

In addition to understanding the differences between us and our feelings about those differences, it is also important when accepting differences to find similarities between yourself and others who we perceive as being different from us.

Think about the exercise above where you described yourself. Now think about a person in your workplace who is very different from this description. What similarities do you have?

Finding similarities and commonalities between ourselves and those we consider different will often help us to accept those differences and to work more effectively with those who are different from us. Who knows—we may even find a new friend in our workplace.

Appreciating Diversity

Beyond merely accepting differences between ourselves and our co-workers is the ability to appreciate the diversity that exists in our workplace.

But what does appreciating diversity mean?

Appreciating diversity means learning to accept the fact that because the workplace and country demographics are rapidly changing, that people with different experiences, ideas, and thoughts that they bring to the workplace are very valuable to the organization.

Many organizations have become aware of this and are actually advertising for people with differences. Some examples of these advertisements are:

- "Unique ideas don't make you different—they make you part of our team."
- "Diversity: being different, thinking differently."
- "Be you—be a part of a diverse workforce. Your uniqueness is an asset."

Let's take a closer look at why these organizations are using these advertisements to attract a diverse workforce.

Changes in Our Country and Our Workforce

To start this section, please turn to page 17 and take the "Diversity Quiz."

Next, look on page 19 and check your answers to the quiz questions.

Are you surprised by some of the answers? This quiz was designed simply to make us aware of the major changes that are taking place in our country today. Many of these changes will greatly influence the way we work in the future. If we are to be successful, we must keep up with the times.

Here is some more information about our changing country.

Changes in Buying Power

Along with the changes in the demographics of our country are the changes in buying power in the United States. In the past, the vast majority of buying power has belonged to white males. The University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth examined minority buying power and found that it was increasing tremendously.

Minority buying power was $647 billion in 1990. By 2001 that number is estimated to be $1.3 trillion. This number has nearly doubled, and is increasing at a much faster rate than overall U.S. buying power.

Of all of the minority groups, African Americans have the highest increase in buying power of anyone.

Losing Talent and Ideas

So what is the worst that could happen if we don't change? Our organization may lose a little money, but so what. Right?

If we don't learn to appreciate diversity and prevent discrimination in our organization, our organization may lose a little money—or it may lose a lot of money.

If our organization, and each one of us, do not change to keep up with the changes in demographics and in buying power, we will all pay the price. If we don't appreciate diversity, we lose the opportunity to have a workforce with a variety of ideas and experiences. We, instead, will have a workforce that loses valuable talents and ideas, and subjects itself to high turnover rates, low productivity, loss of business, and even possible lawsuits. Our organization may eventually go out of business, and we, personally, could even be sued for creating a hostile environment for another employee.

Lawsuits

In the past couple of years there have been major lawsuits that were initiated as a result of a discriminatory work environment. One beverage company was successfully sued for $192.5 million because of discrimination in their workplace. This company now has a diversity institution to train each employee on diversity issues. A major trucking company had to pay $450,000 to six female employees. A major technical company is being sued for $97 million for discriminating against minority employees. The nation's largest utility company is being sued for having hangman's nooses at their place of business along with other harassing behavior. So what does this mean for you? If your organization is successfully sued because of discrimination, employees could lose their jobs or the organization could simply go out of business.

Loss of Business

Another way that organizations are losing money is by not taking changing demographics into account when marketing. Currently, many computer companies are losing a lot of money by not marketing to African Americans. As we saw above, African-American buying power is increasing faster than in any other group of people. If our organizations lose market share, they, again, may go out of business or have to cut back their number of employees.

Loss of Productivity and Employees

Organizations that don't appreciate diversity are losing money due to high turnover and loss of productivity. When there is high turnover, organizations lose valuable talent and ideas. Everyone wants to work in an organization where he or she feels valued and where he or she feels that he or she has a chance at moving up in the organization. Organizations that do not make all employees feel valued often have very high turnover, and it takes a lot of money to continuously train new employees. Also, productivity in those organizations is often low when compared to organizations that value diverse employees. Finally, if employees feel that there is no chance that they will be promoted or be able to move up in the organization, they are not likely to stay in that organization, and if they do, they are not likely to give their best to that job.

Appreciating Diversity Is a Necessary Job Skill

Because organizations that do not appreciate diversity lose money and employees, appreciating diversity is a necessary job skill. Appreciating diversity has many benefits to our organizations. When we appreciate diversity we create an environment where employees want to work and stay and customers want to come. Since the work environment is more pleasant when employees appreciate diversity, their work is often more productive and innovative. Also, organizations in which diversity is appreciated are able to provide richer and stronger solutions for clients. These organizations make money, keep employees, and set an example for other organizations. This is the type of organization that people actually want to work in.

The Respectful Workplace

On the foundation of equality, accepting our differences, and appreciating our diversity, we build the respectful workplace. We all need to do what it takes to strive for "the respectful workplace" so that all employees have a place to work that enhances their skills, and simply makes them feel good.

Barriers to Accepting Diversity

Too often in our workplaces there is still much discrimination and harassment because the fears about accepting diversity keep people from doing so. Organizations and their employees pay the price of letting their fears about accepting diversity prevent them from operating effectively in the 21st century.

Fear of Change

One of the major barriers to accepting diversity is the fear of change. Change makes us uncomfortable. This is true whether the change is for the better or for the worse. People are simply creatures of habit, and once our routine is disrupted in any way, we get a little antsy.

I'll give you a personal example to illustrate this point. When my husband and I were about to have our second child, we decided that it would be better for us if we moved into a bigger house. We looked at houses for months and finally found a house that we really loved. It had most of the features we wanted and enough room for a growing family. There were many things about the house we were living in that we didn't like, so moving into this new house was a very positive experience for us. However, although we were very happy about the move, and loved our new house, it still was very difficult to adjust to the change. I did mourn the loss of our old house, even though I had no desire to go back, and it took a lot of time to get used to the new house. Little things would throw us off like the location of the light switches in each room. We bumped into walls in the dark for a while before we finally figured out where the light switches were. We have now been in our house for three years and we love it, but the point is that the change, even though it was a good change, was difficult for us.

The same is true for accepting diversity in our organizations. In the past most organizations had very nondiverse workforces and clients. The changes that are occurring in our world and our workplaces are happening very fast, and our organizations are having to change quickly to keep up. What this means for us is that we need to also keep up and make the necessary changes to accept and appreciate diversity in our workplace so that we can keep being valuable to our organization. We need to realize that feeling uncomfortable or feeling fear associated with these changes is normal and healthy. But, because these changes are essential to a productive and healthy workplace, we must acknowledge our fears about the changes and not let them be a barrier to making these necessary changes.

Part of accepting change is accepting the fact that there may be different, and even better ways of doing things. We often will hear people say, "We've never done it that way before," or "Don't rock the boat." It may be unnerving when someone new comes along with a different way of doing things. Again, routine is often a source of comfort and security for us. However, we must be willing to leave our "comfort zone" and explore new ideas and new ways of doing things that will allow our organizations to keep up with the changes in the workforce and the country.

Fear of Loss or Inconvenience

Another fear that people often have when it comes to accepting diversity is the fear of loss or inconvenience. As our country's demographics and our workplaces are rapidly changing, we may begin to feel that some of the changes that are taking place are not for the better. If we are inconvenienced or experience loss in any way because of diversity issues, we may not feel very open to accepting diversity.

Inconvenience due to the changing workplace can come in many forms. For example, a friend of mine is a very liberal person. He also has characteristics that most would consider diverse. However, when this person goes to an ATM machine and has to take the extra step of choosing English as the language he will use, he feels annoyed. He feels annoyed because he is being inconvenienced by having to take that extra step in a country that has English as its main language.

Take a moment and think of any inconveniences you have experienced that are a result of our changing workforce. Did those inconveniences make you feel angry or annoyed?

Along with the fear of inconvenience is the fear of loss. We often fear that we will lose status or importance because of the changing workforce. For example, if the buying power of Hispanic Americans is increasing rapidly, if we are not Hispanic we may fear that our organization will hire and promote Hispanics rather than us regardless of our qualifications. This may make us resent the changes in our workforce, and prevent us from accepting people who are Hispanic. We must realize that the problem is not with people who are Hispanic; the problem is that we fear we will experience loss due to the changes in the workforce. It is important, then, that we acknowledge this fear and that we do not act in a way that would be discriminatory towards Hispanic persons.

Wars have been fought over the need to assign blame for losses. Our organization should not and cannot be a battle zone. Accept that these changes bother you, and that you are afraid of loss, but be aware of and stop negative behavior that might result from this fear.

Fear of Embarrassment

How many times have you avoided talking to someone who was different from you because you were afraid of embarrassing yourself? You might have been afraid that you would not be able to understand his or her accent, or that you would unintentionally insult him or her in some way. Because we often don't know or understand about people's differences, we avoid them rather than take a chance of looking silly or foolish due to our ignorance. The problem with this comes when we have to work with that person who is different.

We need to consider the feelings of those who have strong accents or other differences that may make us avoid them rather than face embarrassment. We need to be creative in coming up with solutions to the problem. Avoidance will solve nothing, and may hurt feelings. Also, asking questions is always a good way to find out what might be insulting to others. Take a chance—acknowledge and overcome your fears.

Professional Communication

By looking at the building blocks to a respectful workplace we have examined our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Accepting and appreciating diversity is often difficult for most of us, and can make us feel a bit uncomfortable at times. In fact, when learning about diversity we are often told to "leave our comfort zone," making us feel even more uncomfortable. So what do we do to make it easier?

The first, and probably most important thing we need to do, is to look at the way we communicate at work.

Listening

In study after study on communication people who are considered the best conversationalists are the people who talk less than the people they are conversing with. This may not seem surprising to many of us since it seems logical that we would give someone a better conversationalist rating if he or she listened intently to what we had to say. Being listened to feels good. Listening to others not only makes them feel like they are being heard, but also ensures that we hear information correctly.

When we were young, many of us played a game called "telephone," in which someone started off thinking of a phrase or two and whispered it to the person next to him or her. The person next to him or her then whispered it to the next person, and so on, until the last person received the whispered message. The last person would then say out loud what he or she had heard. The vast majority of time the message would have been distorted in such a way as to invoke much snickering and giggling from all of the message passers. The point of the game was to show how much information can change when passed from one person to another.

In situations in which communication styles are often significantly different, it is very difficult for messages, information, and instruction to get passed clearly from one person to the other. Listening carefully to what a co-worker is telling us is critical to doing our job correctly and professionally. But what if we still don't understand?

Clarifying

How many times have you heard what someone told you, but were still not really clear about the details or what needed to be done? Too many times in our jobs we just go on and do what we think that person told us to do, or we pass on information as we think we heard it. It is crucial that we ask clarifying questions to avoid problems and misunderstandings in the workplace. This seems logical, but why doesn't it happen?

Many times our fears get in the way of clarifying. We don't want to seem stupid, like we don't know what's going on, so we don't ask clarifying questions. I have recently been working at a job where I have never been told how to fill out my time card. Now, this seems like something I should know how to do, but everyone does it differently. I feel stupid asking for instructions on a task that seems so ordinary, and now I have let several weeks go by. I needed to have overcome my fear of seeming silly and have asked the question right in the beginning.

Another situation that may prevent us from clarifying is a situation in which the person giving information or instruction has a strong accent. We often feel embarrassed about not understanding, or feel like we don't want to make the speaker embarrassed by having him or her repeat himself or herself. Either way, this situation frequently leads to problems when clarifying questions are not asked. Again, we must overcome this fear of embarrassment in order to communicate professionally.

Taking Time to Think before Speaking

There are several little blurb-like ads on TV these days about the power of words. One says something to the effect of, "Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can really hurt." Another talks about the language we use, and how we can teach hate by what we say. Both points are very well made. The words we use and the things we say can have a large impact on others in our workplace.

Take a moment to think about a time when someone said something really unfriendly or insulting to you. Think about the anger and hurt that resulted.

Even when we sometimes don't mean to say something discriminatory, the result may be. For example, a friend of mine was talking about a bad driver that almost ran into him the other day. When he was talking about this driver he described him by his ethnic background. The driver's ethnic background most likely had nothing to do with his driving, but the point it made, especially to my children, was that people with this particular ethnic background are poor drivers. By describing this driver by his ethic background he was not only using discriminatory language, but teaching discrimination. He was not purposely saying something mean or ugly, but the point it made was.

In our workplace, it is important that we do not create an unfriendly or hostile environment for other employees. Speaking in a harassing or disrespectful way to our fellow employees creates an unfriendly and hostile environment. By doing so we are not doing our jobs properly. If we speak in harassing or disrespectful ways we might suffer consequences. We could be reprimanded, lose our jobs, or even be the subject of a harassment lawsuit. But beyond getting into trouble, it is simply wrong to hurt others with the words we use or the jokes we tell.

Next time, before you make fun of someone's differences, tell a sexual, racial, or ethnic joke, or say something that discriminates against those who are different from you, stop. Think about the work environment that you want to create and be a part of. Avoid harassing and disrespectful behavior and be a part of a comfortable and happy work environment.

Conflict Resolution

A major part of communicating effectively is the ability to resolve conflicts. When we avoid conflict, or simply ignore it and complain about it to others, we do ourselves and our organization a disservice. When we deal with conflict in a respectful way, however, we forge new ideas and concepts in the workplace.

There is no doubt that diversity, in itself, has the potential for creating conflict. We all have different personalities and different styles of doing things. This makes us valuable to our organization. However, these differences in personalities and styles often create conflict when working with others. For example, if I believe that a task should be done the way it has been in the past, when a person tries to change how that task is done I might get angry or upset. I might even feel angry or upset towards that person.

Another common example is when an employee can't work on the weekend because she is a single parent. There is a big project that needs to be done and another employee, without small children at home, feels resentful about the fact the first employee can't work Saturday to finish it. The employee who can't work on Saturday cannot help the fact that she has no one to watch her kids, yet angry feelings toward her may still result. The fact that these two employees are different—have different family make-ups—causes conflict on the job.

So what do we do? One tool that we can use to deal with conflict when working within a diverse workforce is to **SORT** out conflict.

SORT

When conflict arises, look honestly at the **Source** of the conflict, without assigning blame or assuming the worst of the other person. Try to recognize the conflict as a professional misunderstanding of some sort, not a personal problem. This is very difficult to do since we often take conflict personally. Sometimes it is also easier to assume the source of the conflict is external differences or personal differences rather than a simple misunderstanding.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine the source of the conflict because we are trying to avoid confrontation. Most of us feel very uncomfortable confronting another person with a conflict. We often feel that he or she will get angry or upset about what we have to say. However, it is important, when there is a conflict, to deal with the conflict rather than simply avoiding it, allowing the problem to get worse. It is also not fair to others to talk about them to co-workers rather than addressing the issues that you have with them. So long as we deal with conflict in a respectful, polite manner, the results should be beneficial to all.

s**O**RT

Examine each person's understanding of the **<u>Objective</u>** you are trying to reach and ensure that you are all in agreement as to the goal you are working towards.

so**R**T

Make sure that you have a complete understanding of the **<u>Responsibility</u>** each of you has in regards to the objective. Are the roles you are playing on the team clear to each of you?

sor**T**

Finally, make sure there is no misunderstanding about the **<u>Tasks</u>** or methods each of you will employ to carry out the responsibility.

Take a minute to think about a conflict you have had recently at work. Answer the following questions:

- What was the true Source of the conflict?
- Did you each understand and agree on the Objective you were trying to accomplish?
- Did you each understand and agree on each person's Responsibilities regarding the objective?
- Did you each understand and agree on the Tasks or methods you would use?

You may want to take these answers back to your workplace and talk to the person you had the conflict with about them. Perhaps you will be able to clear up the misunderstanding and both do your jobs more effectively.

Video Scenarios

Below are scenarios from the video, *Different Like You,* followed by discussion questions. You may choose to answer these after you view the video.

That's Icky!

In this scenario, two women are talking about a man with dreadlocks. They are commenting and laughing about the way he dresses, his hairstyle, and even his possible cultural differences. When watching them and listening to their conversation, they seem very insulting and immature.

What stereotypes or prejudices are they portraying?

What fears are they portraying?

What might be the results of their comments?

If they simply speak about him to each other, is any harm done? If so, what?

They're All Alike

In this scenario a supervisor is expecting a new employee from Puerto Rico to work for him. He comments that he already feels that this employee is going to be a problem even though he hasn't even met him. He says that "they're all alike." He is also getting a shipment of computers from a different distributor than they normally use. He comments that each computer may look the same, but they are all different, and that you must work with them to get to know them.

What stereotypes or prejudices is this man portraying?

Why is it easier for him to accept that in a shipment of computers from the same factory there will be a lot of differences between computers than to accept that all Hispanics are not the same?

What could he do to help himself accept the new employee?

The Right One for the Job?

In this video scenario an African-American woman is interviewing candidates to work with her. There were several candidates, but she seemed to like the person with the external characteristics that were very similar to her own.

Why do we choose people to work with us who are like us?

What are the problems with only choosing employees to work with us that are a lot like us?

What could this woman have done differently?

She's a Jerk!

In this scenario there are two conversations going on. One woman is complaining about another employee to her co-workers. She claims that he messed up a project they were working on to make her look bad.

The other employee is also complaining about her to his co-worker. He says that she does not like to work with him, and it must be because he is gay. His co-worker says that she has never had a problem working with him (he is apparently gay, too), so it must be that she has trouble with him because he is black.

What was the actual source of the problem?

What should have happened instead of the employees talking about each other to their co-workers?

Say Again?

This scenario is one in which one employee sits down next to another employee with a strong accent. It is clear that the first employee cannot understand the other. It is also clear that the employee with the accent would like someone to talk to, but his communication skills get in the way. The first employee ends up making an excuse to leave rather than trying to understand the accent.

What fears do you think each employee had about talking to the other?

How do you think each employee felt?

What could each employee have done differently?

Diversity Quiz

1. Persons of Hispanic origin represent approximately what percentage of the U.S. population?

    A. 4%

    B. 11%

    C. 22%

    D. 30%

2. Between 2000 and 2050, the Hispanic population of the United States is projected to:

    A. Decrease by about 20%

    B. Remain about the same

    C. Increase by about 20%

    D. Triple in number

3. Which of the following racial / ethnic groups in the United States has the highest median income?

    A. Asians/Pacific Islanders

    B. Blacks

    C. Hispanics

    D. Whites

4. As measured in 1997, approximately what percentage of U.S. residents were foreign-born (that is, born outside the United States to non-American parents)?

    A. Less than 5%

    B. 10%

    C. 15%

    D. 25%

5. What U.S. city has the largest foreign-born population?

    A. Chicago

    B. Los Angeles

    C. Boston

    D. New York City

6. How many adults aged 25 and over are high school graduates?

    A. 2 out of 3
    B. 3 out of 4
    C. 4 out of 5
    D. 9 out of 10

7. What percentage of the American adult population are married and living in a household with their spouse?

    A. 26%
    B. 36%
    C. 56%
    D. 76%

8. What percentage of adults (18 and older) speak a language other than English in their home?

    A. 1%
    B. 5%
    C. 9%
    D. 14%

9. How many households in the United States own a home computer?

    A. 1 out of 4
    B. 1 out of 3
    C. 1 out of 2
    D. 7 out of 10

10. Which adult age group is projected to increase as a percentage of the population at the fastest rate between 2000 and 2050?

    A. Adults between the ages of 18 and 24
    B. Adults between the ages of 35 and 44
    C. Adults between the ages of 65 and 74
    D. Adults aged 85 and older

Answers to the Diversity Quiz

1. **B.** 11%

   At a projected population of 31 million in 2000, persons of Hispanic origin are approximately 11.4% of the U.S. population, up from 9% in 1990. These numbers are based on data collected in the fifty states and the District of Columbia, and does not include residents of Puerto Rico.

   Non-Hispanic whites represent about 72% of the population, blacks account for about 12%, and Asians and Pacific Islanders are approximately 4% of the U.S. population. American Indians number less than 1% of the population.

2. **D.** Triple in number

   The Hispanic population is one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population. Growing nearly 40% in the past ten years alone, the number of persons of Hispanic origin is expected to more than triple in the first half of the 21st century, nearing 100 million persons in 2050 (almost 25% of the U.S. population).

   This population growth is expected to be influenced more as a result of natural population increase than immigration in the coming years and will likely be the major element in the total population growth of the United States in the next fifty years.

   While the Asian population is also projected to grow rapidly as well, from 4% of U.S. population to 7% between 2000 and 2050, much of that growth will result from increased immigration.

3. **A.** Asians/Pacific Islanders

   Asians/Pacific Islanders as a group have the highest median income in the United States at a little over $46,000 per year. Whites have a median income of almost $41,000, blacks a little more than $25,000, and Hispanics show a median income level of just over $28,000.

   Median income is that level of income earned by the 50th percentile of the population group. It represents the midpoint of the group. In other words, half the people in the group make less than that income, and half the people in the group make more than that income.

4. **B.** 10%

   At approximately 25.8 million persons, the foreign-born population represents almost 10% of the U.S. population and is the largest recorded foreign-born population in U.S. history. Of these foreign-born residents, about 35% are naturalized U.S. citizens. The number of foreign-born U.S. residents has increased rapidly since 1970 from approximately 9.6 million to 25.8 million in 1997. This rapid increase in the foreign-born population reflects the high levels of immigration experienced in the past generation.

   As a percentage of population, however, the ratio of foreign-born to native-born residents is actually less than it was in 1910. In 1910, almost 15% of the population was foreign-born. The century's low point in foreign-born residents as a percentage of population was reached in 1970, when less than 5% of the population was foreign-born. In addition to the 25.8 million foreign-born residents, almost 29 million native-born residents have at least one foreign-born parent, meaning that almost 21% of the current U.S. population is of foreign birth or parentage.

5. **B.**   Los Angeles

   Los Angeles is home to more foreign-born residents than any other American city, with 4.8 million foreign-born residents, just barely passing New York's 4.6 million.

   In addition to having the largest number of foreign-born residents, Los Angeles also has the highest percentage of foreign-born residents, at 31% of its population.

   As of 1997, Mexico was the leading country of birth of foreign-born U.S. residents. Almost six times as many foreign-born residents were born in Mexico as were born in the next highest ranked country of birth.

6. **C.**   4 out of 5

   As of March 1997, over four-fifths (82.1%) of the adult population aged 25 or older reported completing at least high school. One out of five adults (23.9%) had attained at least a bachelor's degree. Almost 90% of young adults, aged 25 to 29, had completed high school.

   Differences in educational attainment between white and black young adults (age 25 to 29) had all but disappeared in 1997. Hispanic adults showed the lowest percentages of high school completion, with only slightly more than half (54.7%) having graduated high school. Asians showed the highest proportion of college graduates. One-half (50.5%) of the Asian young adult population had completed a college degree, compared to 1 in 3 whites (28.9%) and 1 in 7 blacks (14.4%) in the 25 to 29 age range.

   Nearly 1 out of 10 adults 18 years of age or older have no better than a 9th grade education.

7. **C.**   56%

   Over 110 million adults (56.6%) were married and living with their spouse according to 1998 data. About 10% were "currently divorced." Among those between 25 and 34 years old, about 35% had never been married.

   About 28% (20 million) of all children under 18 years of age in the United States lived with just one parent. The majority of children who lived with just one parent in 1998 lived with their mother (84%). No other adults were present in the household for 56% of children living with single parents. About 4 million children, nearly 6% of all children under 18, lived in their grandparents' household.

8. **D.**   14%

   Based on 1990 census data (the most current data available), almost 14% of the population use a language other than English within their home. Of these adults, almost half of them report that they speak English less than "very well." More than 1.6 million adults report that they speak English "not at all."

   Spanish is the most commonly used language other than English used in the home, followed by French, German, Italian, and Chinese.

   Of those adults reporting that they speak English less than "very well," Chinese is the second most common language spoken in the home, following Spanish.

9. **B.** 1 out of 3

As of October 1997, more than 1 out of 3 American homes (36.6%) contained a home computer. This is a substantial increase from 22.8% in 1994. This growth, however, has not occurred to an equal extent across all income levels, demographic groups, and geographic areas.

In fact, a "digital divide" exists between certain groups of Americans, and has even increased between 1994 and 1997 so that there is an even greater disparity in access to basic communication tools and services. Over 75% of homes with an annual income of $75,000 or more had home computers, while only 15% of homes earning less than $25,000 per year owned computers. Even though all racial groups own more computers now than they did in 1994, whites are twice as likely to own a PC as either blacks or Hispanics (40% versus 19%). Persons living in central cities and rural areas both lag behind their urban neighbors in PC ownership and online access. The more educated are more likely to own a computer than the less educated. Only 25% of households headed by a female single parent owned a computer.

10. **D.** Adults aged 85 and older

The population age 85 and over is projected to be the fastest growing age group, doubling in size between 1995 and the year 2030, and increasing fivefold by the year 2050. In 1995, an estimated 3.6 million people were 85 years old or older. By 2050, this number is projected to grow to 18.2 million. In fact, the population aged 100 and over, although small in number, will also increase dramatically. In 1995, about 54,000 people were aged 100 or greater. There are projected to be over 800,000 centenarians living by the year 2050. Increased life expectancy and the large number of people entering these age groups (especially as the Baby Boomer generation ages) contribute to these exploding populations of the eldest of the elderly.

The 18 to 24 age group, the primary ages of new entrants to the laborforce, peaked in the early 1980s at 30 million persons. Between then and now, the number of persons in that age group has shrunk to around 25 or 26 million currently. This age group is projected to climb back slowly toward 30 million by 2010. In contrast, adults aged 25 to 44 will actually decline both in total number and as a percentage of the population.