



## The Accepting Manager

Managers and organizations alike know that finding the right talent is becoming more of a challenge each day. The Bureau of Labor Statistics states that by 2006, two workers will exit the workforce for every one entering. These hurdles in talent acquisition are causing organizations to study closely the way they recruit, who they recruit and the organizational values that are used to retain talent.

So what can managers do to prepare for a more diverse workforce? How can we ensure that the hard work of senior management and human resources is not just lip service on the front end but actually is part of the organization's culture? The first step in answering these and other questions is to become more aware of the level of diversity around us.

Managers can and are creating inclusive work environments that value diversity. These environments are proven to be more relaxed, productive and enjoyable. By becoming more of an accepting manager, you can reduce costs and increase performance for your organization and yourself.

Diversity is not a singular issue; black/white, male/female, gay/straight, older/younger, disabled/non-disabled, it is all of these differences and then some. Let us not forget cultural and religious differences. In fact, there are so many diversity realms, many people get confused or uncomfortable discussing these issues. However, the sooner you become aware of the differences present, or not, within your organization you can begin to explore ways to make your organization more inclusive.

Once you have explored your department take a look at your organizations diversity policy. This is a good place to get grounded and see what your organization values as a diverse work environment. If you see a category missing that you think should be there you may want to bring it up in a staff meeting, to your human resources department or to senior management. The most radical changes occur when senior management actually hears the request from the staff. If you happen to be in senior management, you most likely are already thinking of ways to make your organizations more inclusive because you realize the positive financial rewards or you have come to a place in your own development that tells you it is just the right thing to do.

Diversity studies show that if individuals cannot fully express who they are, their level of productivity is reduced by about 20 percent. The inability to self express and be accepted are top reasons for employees to leave an organization. Lost performance and employees directly affect the bottom line of any organization. To curb this adverse affect on organizational performance, managers can move beyond understanding of diversity by putting into place a plan of action for inclusiveness.

This action plan involves a policy of acceptance, tolerance and a willingness to dialogue. Acceptance cannot just be talked about. If you are unsure of how to create an open and inclusive work environment, consider getting a coach to talk out your unique situation.

Some simple starting points would be to bring up the topic at your staff meetings. Express your desire to create this inclusive environment and ask for suggestions from your team about how to do it. You also can create an open-door policy where team members can come in and discuss issues related to diversity. Additionally, you can bring in guest speakers or offer diversity training on various minority segments to facilitate conversations and demonstrate to your team that the policy is not just on paper, but actually is a company value that you wish to adopt.

Before long, your team will be able to address the tougher topics surrounding diversity. It takes a strong conviction and courage to embark on the creation of a diverse and inclusive work environment. True leaders often stand alone as they make their mark and reap the benefits of their efforts when others are just beginning to realize what the pay-off could be.

Your openness and willingness to engage a topic like diversity says something about your leadership style and how you value those that work with you. If managers take the lead and stand up for those who are unable to express themselves, they will affirm their employees' unique qualities and reinforce the concept that intolerance is not an acceptable value in the work environment.

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