



CONNECTIONS

Communicating in Culturally Diverse Environments



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Creating a Climate for Diversity

As we enter the 21st century, America continues to transform itself into one of the most culturally diverse societies on earth. Whether it is based on race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation or physical ability, you are more likely than ever to find yourself in a culturally diverse organizational setting. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor predicts that by 2005, 85% of new entrants to the workforce will be women, people of color and immigrants. The other 15% will be white

men. Likewise, the fastest growing groups in America consist of Asian-Pacific Americans and Hispanics over the age of 50. So it is imperative that we strive to create work environments that maximize the likelihood of success for a diverse range of people. Managers, supervisors and employees can help to create such 'culturally empowered environments' by engaging in several activities:

1. **Create opportunities for culturally different individuals to interact with each**

other on a continuous basis. It is important to recognize that you cannot simply cluster people with significant cultural differences and expect that they will naturally connect on their own. Of course some will, but even more will not. You can proactively facilitate cross-cultural interaction through structured icebreakers and social events, teambuilding activities, and group projects and assignments. The key is to make sure that people have an opportunity to interact on an ongoing basis, and

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not just once or twice.

2. **Help employees develop the skills they need to effectively communicate, resolve conflicts and solve problems in culturally diverse environments.** Such skills include the ability to

communicate across cultural differences, the ability to resolve diversity-based conflicts, the ability to provide coaching and mentoring for a diverse range of employees, and the ability to contribute to the creation of culturally empowered environments.

Keep in mind that organizational members will not develop these skills overnight. However, with ongoing developmental opportunities and the chance to apply newly developed skills on the job, increased competency levels will become evident,

COMMUNICATING IN CULTURALLY
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and will have a positive impact on both individual and organizational performance.

3. **Develop, implement and enforce anti-harassment and discrimination policies.** This includes the provision of skills-based training that teaches managers and supervisors to effectively challenge inappropriate comments and behavior. It also includes a systematic process for communicating these policies to employees and letting them know what they should do if they feel they are the victim of harassing or discriminatory behavior. Of greatest importance is the creation of a specific process to handle such complaints in a timely and comprehensive fashion.

4. **Actively work to recruit a high quality, culturally diverse workforce.** This can create a significant competitive advantage for your organization. As a consultant, I have seen many organizations improve their performance and their ability to serve a diverse customer base by proactively focusing on the creation of high quality, culturally diverse candidate pools for their positions. By “enlarging the net” you use to recruit top

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candidates, and by improving the climate for diversity, you can significantly improve business performance.

5. **Ensure that organizational policies and practices support a diverse workforce.** For example, many top diversity practitioners reward managers for effective diversity management in the form of bonuses and merit increases. They also recognize the holidays and celebrations of various cultural groups, ensure that the physical environment (such as artwork, posters and other visual displays) reflects an appreciation for diversity, and develop compensation practices that fit the needs of diverse organizational members.

Dr. Holmes' Upcoming Presentations and Seminars

The Four P's of Indirect Marketing: A Primer for Consultants at the Consultants Network meeting on January 30, 2004 at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, MI. For more information, please contact us at (248) 669-5294.

The Empowered Career Professional at the Career Awareness Summit on February 5, 2004 at Cobo Hall in Detroit, MI. For more information, please contact us at (248) 669-5294.

Designing and Facilitating Performance Based Diversity Training at the International Society for Performance Improvement's annual conference in Tampa, FL from April 19-23. Please visit the ISPI website for more information at www.ispi.org.

