



# CONNECTIONS

*Communicating in Culturally Diverse Settings*



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As a consultant, I have helped many organizations facilitate performance-focused diversity activities and interventions. To ensure success, I have found that the most important step to take is to communicate the “business case” for diversity throughout the organization. You can do this by taking the following steps:

1. **Clarify the benefits of empowering diversity for YOUR organization.** Your first step is to make yourself aware of the research-demonstrated benefits of diversity. These benefits can be summarized into three areas. The first is **Improved Individual and Organizational Performance.** When we do a good job of recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce, AND we help employees develop the skills they need to communicate, resolve conflict and solve problems in culturally diverse settings, we improve the overall quality of the

workforce. We increase our ability to attract and retain top performers. We increase productivity on both an individual and group basis. We improve communication, reduce conflict and enhance trust between staff members. And we increase the likelihood that every individual, regardless of his or her background, will have an opportunity to be successful. The second benefit is **Enhanced Internal and External Service.** Simply stated, when we increase the diversity of our staff, we increase our ability to understand, connect with and satisfy a diverse customer base. Our third and final benefit is **Improved Bottom-Line.** When we do a good job of creating culturally inclusive environments, we reap bottom-line benefits such as reduced turnover, increased retention, reduced hiring costs, and improved revenues.

2. **Identify the KEY leaders in your organization.** To do this, answer three questions: First, who are the people that have the greatest influence? Keep in mind that these may not be the people at the top of the organizational chart, or the people with ‘manager’ in their title (but you will need to include some top managers). It’s the people that others listen to. Second, who are the people that make the decisions? And finally, who are the people that will be most supportive? Try to identify two or three people that meet all three criteria and start the diversity communication process with them.

3. **Describe instances where empowering diversity will help achieve SPECIFIC organizational goals.** The biggest mistake I have found with most diversity initiatives is a failure to connect the diversity program with the organization’s strategic objectives. Your third step

COMMUNICATING IN  
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## How to Communicate the Importance of Diversity (continued)

is to clarify how a commitment to diversity will help to achieve organizational goals. For example, if you are a business and you want your sales people to be more effective, help them understand the multicultural market, and how to effectively connect with those markets. If you want your customer service to improve, help your customer contact people better understand the needs of culturally different clients, and how to best meet those needs. If you are a school and you want your teachers to be more effective, help them understand learning style differences and their impact on the learning process. If you want diverse individuals to interact more effectively, help them understand cultural differences and identify strategies for overcoming those differences. The key is, no matter what you are trying to accomplish as an organization, department, team or individual, if you can describe how empowering diversity will increase the chances of accomplishing your goals, you will be successful in communicating the importance of diversity.

4. **LIVE your commitment to diversity.** If you are going to Talk-the-Talk, then you must Walk-the-Walk. It doesn't help to take the first

### How to Communicate the Importance of Diversity (continued)

three steps to communicate the importance of diversity if you are not living it yourself on a daily basis. You can live your commitment by increasing your diversity knowledge, facilitating diversity conversations, improving your multicultural communication skills, reducing your biases, challenging inappropriate comments or behavior, providing diversity information to others, and much more. But no matter what you choose, always remember this. The extent to which you LIVE your commitment to diversity, more than any other step you take, will have the greatest impact on your ability to successfully communicate the importance and value of diversity.

### TIPS Booklets

Using a concise, easily scannable format, these affordable 20-page guides offer detailed tips, tools and techniques you can use to immediately improve your performance. The following booklets are available:

- **50 Ways to Reduce Bias and Create a Climate for Diversity.**
- **50 Tips for Improving Communication in Culturally Diverse Settings.**
- **50 Tips for Managing and Resolving Conflict**
- **50 Ways to Lose Weight Without Dieting.**

Each booklet costs only \$5 plus \$1 shipping and handling. Visit [www.doctorholmes.net](http://www.doctorholmes.net) for ordering information.

### About the Author

Dr. Tyrone A. Holmes, Ed.D., LPC, CPT is a speaker, trainer, consultant, fitness coach, author and competitive cyclist.

