

12 Diversity Training Best Practices

A follow up to ‘Major Myths of Diversity and Inclusion’ in the April 2018 *HR News*

By *Mauricio Velásquez*

I have been in the diversity training field for more than 25 years, and I feel too many of my colleagues make the job more complicated than it really needs to be. At the Diversity Training Group, we have always tried to make diversity issues easier to comprehend and embrace.

Achieving this goal can be especially important when, as often happens, I am brought in to do “rescue” diversity training after another trainer blew the place apart. In such circumstances, which occur too often, I fall back on 12 best diversity practices that have been proven to work in hundreds of organizations.

To make diversity training stick, the workshop must:

- Make use of an actual workbook. What will people remember, and which skills will they develop, from freeform discussions and notes on an easel?
- Meet predetermined objectives. Workshops conducted without clear objectives are just embarrassing.
- Have objectives based on a formal training needs analysis. The trainer must speak with the target audience, identify the issues that participants need to address and clarify what participants wish to achieve. A focus group or quick survey will often do, but never rely on a client’s “gut feeling about this.” Usually, something happened to mark a moment of truth. Find out what that event was. If nothing else, proactively identifying training needs prevents retraining, which saves money.


- Be linked to the organization’s mission and core values. What do you call an organizational culture that is not controlled by a well-defined mission, vision, and some kind of core values or code of conduct that guides employees’ behavior, respect and treatment in the workplace? Anarchy.
- Reflect an acknowledgement by senior leadership that the status quo is not working. With the workplace and marketplace changing, doing the same things we have always done and expecting better results is tantamount to committing organizational suicide.
- Communicate a bias for action in dealing with diversity-related conflicts head on rather than pretending that problems do not exist and hoping they go away by themselves.
- Be just one part of a much broader organizationwide strategy and plan to make the organization more inclusive, open and welcoming to talent from all backgrounds and perspectives. The most progressive organizations review all of their policies and practices on a regular basis to ensure they are not unintentionally exclusionary.
- Acknowledge that most organizations have done a poor job of preparing supervisors and managers to serve as leaders, particularly on matters of diversity. Remember: Most people can barely manage people like themselves, let alone people who are different.

- Impart skills, tools, tips and techniques for dealing with diversity issues and conflicts. The best diversity training programs are skills- and knowledge-based, requiring participants to apply what they learn.
- Be just the first step. No organization should expect immediate and uniformly positive results from a single diversity training session. Behavioral changes of any kind take hold slowly. Helping employees, managers and supervisors build their diversity tool kits should be an ongoing process.
- Be linked to annual performance appraisals. Attending a diversity training session should not be enough, however. Being an inclusive supervisor or manager who seeks diversity for his or her team and values that diversity should be assessed as critical competencies.
- Deliver messages that are also woven into the organization's new employee orientation material and curricula for developing executives, supervisors and managers. The point is that diversity is not a stand-alone or set-aside endeavor, but part of the very fabric of the organization.

Halving Bias

One of the biggest issues I combat every day is the bias people have against an anti-bias workshop. No one seems to recognize the irony in what I have come to call bias to the second power. People who need diversity training the most do not attend or attend under mental protest and demonstrate a negative, counterproductive and, sometimes, confrontational attitude.

I deal with preconceived notions head on and as the first thing in each workshop. I recommend that every organization that schedules diversity training do the same kind of work beforehand.

Mauricio Velásquez, MBA, is president and CEO for the Diversity Training Group. He welcomes comments and more best practices for diversity training at mauriciov@diversitydtg.com. —

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

At the March 2018 meeting, the IPMA-HR Executive Council approved the following diversity and inclusion statement:

As an association representing the public sector human resource management profession, the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) embraces diversity and inclusiveness as a core value. IPMA-HR strives to be a culturally diverse organization that recognizes, supports, and values the inclusion of diverse groups and views in all parts of the association. IPMA-HR recognizes the strength and improved decisions that result from participation in association programs, leadership, committees/taskforces, and staff of diverse individuals from a wide range of organizations.

IPMA-HR will establish and support a diverse, inclusive community that welcomes the membership, active involvement and different perspectives that individuals bring, which include, but are not limited to:

- Age
- Gender
- National origin
- Race
- Religion

- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity or gender expression
- Physical ability
- Culture
- Socio-economic status

IPMA-HR programming and communications will include a diversity of thought, experience, and personal background. The association believes that the characteristics, attributes, and varied experiences that make people unique should be included in all aspects of the association's programming.

The association acknowledges that governments may restrict travel of its employees to certain locations. In the scheduling of events, IPMA-HR will consider as one of the selection factors the ability of public sector HR professionals to travel to a location.

Please contact Neil Reichenberg, IPMA-HR executive director, nreichenberg@ipma-hr.org with any questions concerning the statement. —