

Diversity is a word that refers to differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, physical health and other differences in backgrounds or lifestyles. The challenge at work and in our daily lives is to see others as individuals and to not judge a person based on appearance or other aspects of their life. Recognizing and accepting our differences can lead to more understanding and a better, more productive environment for everyone.

Identifying Our Hidden Biases

Discrimination based on appearance or other factors can be both blatant and subtle. A hidden form of bias occurs when people unintentionally stereotype. The best way to combat this is to be more aware of how we communicate, act and react toward others.

- > Be aware of and avoid words, images and situations that suggest people of one type of group are all the same. These kinds of words and gestures cause harm, even if they are unintended.
- > Use race, ethnic origin or other identity only when relevant. In most cases, it is not necessary.
- > Avoid clichés, qualifiers and connotations that reinforce stereotypes. They are often interpreted as ignorant, superior or offensive.
- > Realize that patronizing remarks and tokenism aimed at specific groups can be offensive not only to those about whom the remarks are being made, but to others as well.

What You Can Do

Ellen Bettman's *Without Bias: A Guidebook for Nondiscriminatory Communication* offers some ideas on positive ways to experience diversity:

- > Make a list of things unique to your culture and ask a coworker of a different nationality to do the same. By sharing the lists you will discover interesting differences and, likely, some similarities.
- > Experience a new viewpoint, by tasting food from a different culture, volunteering for an organization whose members are different from you or attending a religious service of a different faith or culture.
- > If your coworkers tell bigoted jokes or use racist/sexist/homophobic language, ask them to stop. At the very least, they should alter their behavior in your presence.
- > If approached with care, most people welcome questions about their heritage and culture. It is a way for them to inform you of their preferences and experiences, and a way for you to learn more about human differences.

Additional Information

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