

Creating a Welcoming Workplace



How do you help those who are ethnically diverse feel more comfortable and welcomed at your workplace? What can you do so they experience more inclusion, despite a work environment foreign to their own?

Establishing a Welcoming Environment Is Everyone's Job.

If your fear of saying or doing something improper is holding you back from welcoming a new worker, relax. Creating a welcoming workplace is a lot easier than you think.

Educate yourself about the native culture of your new employee (a five-minute trip to Wikipedia is all it takes), become self-aware, and decide that you want your co-worker to feel safe so they can be themselves in their new home—your shared workplace.

Pursuing these goals will help you overcome your fears and biases, model how others can do the same, and allow you to move beyond tolerance to being excited about diversity and inclusion. You will witness a positive force that propels your workplace upward so everyone succeeds.

7 Simple Ways You Can Embrace Workplace Diversity

Here are seven tips on how you can create a welcoming workplace for everyone.

1) Understand how cultural differences impact work behavior. People from different cultures may respond differently to everyday work situations. Understanding these differences will help you increase your curiosity and interest and decrease feeling puzzled by what you observe. Educate yourself about the culture of your colleagues. Observe your colleagues to

learn of their traditions and beliefs. You're likely to see differences in how one expresses joy, stress, grief, thankfulness, and spiritual awareness.

2) It's okay to ask. Some cultural differences can be hard to understand. For instance, employees from certain Asian cultures find it difficult to openly disagree with a superior. Similarly, some people are not receptive to a confrontation in the workplace; they would rather discuss matters in a non-office setting such as a restaurant. Never hesitate to ask your colleague what is the best way to communicate with them without violating their cultural norms.

3) Check your biases. Creating a welcoming workplace includes a good dose of self-awareness. Are you quick to make assumptions about someone based on their dress or accent? Everyone has biases. The trick is recognizing them, and turning off the "autopilot" response you may experience.

4) Communicate effectively. Ensure that your colleagues clearly understand the expectations you have of them. Here are some tips on communicating effectively with a culturally diverse group:

- Display positive body language.
- Be patient and polite.
- Be assertive without being aggressive.
- Use verbal responses such as "yes" and "okay" to show your involvement in the conversation.
- Go over the discussion by summarizing the information as well as asking questions.
- While you may use industry terminology, keep the language simple. Consider avoiding slang. Employees from outside the U.S. may struggle to understand American metaphors, many of which can be enormously abstract. Others may be fascinated with the roots of American slang.

5) Focus on individual strengths, not ethnicity. Assess the strengths, weaknesses, and preferences of each individual on your team; use this knowledge when assigning tasks. For example, because of a language barrier an individual may lack confidence in dealing with customers, but could be a dynamo with troubleshooting or analyzing data. Appreciating these differences can increase the chances of employee and team success.

6) Become a mentor. Mentor your new colleague to help them feel comfortable with the change, and help them understand the politics and interrelationships within the company, its policies, and its organizational structure.

Be open to being "the go-to person" they can turn to for help when things become confusing, especially if your organization does not have a formal mentoring policy to integrate new employees from diverse cultures.

7) Stand up to discrimination. All of us lose when discrimination reigns. Be a change agent and recognize it when it appears. Don't stay silent if you witness discriminatory behavior, or if you hear a culturally biased statement made about a colleague.

Stand up for the rights of colleagues who may fear or resist openly objecting to discrimination, and prepare to help those who struggle with understanding how a culturally diverse workforce creates a workplace where everyone wins.