

DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE... **FOR EMPLOYEES**

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Since the mid-1900s, our world has been steadily growing "smaller".**
 - Advances in transportation, communication and technology have made people everywhere more mobile.
- **Increasingly, we live and work somewhere different than where we grew up.**
 - When we look around our workplace today, what we see is a great variety in our coworkers.
 - It includes men and women of all descriptions... different ages, races, faiths, sexual orientations, the unique features that make us who we are.
- **This "variety" among people is called "diversity".**
- **Embracing diversity can lead to significant benefits, both for people and the companies they work for.**
 - But being uncomfortable with diversity can result in real problems.
- **Until recently "diversity" referred mostly to the variation among plants and animals.**
 - These days it's usually applied to the "variety" among people.
- **While the idea of "diversity" can be based on people's race, color or ethnicity, it is not limited to only those attributes.**
 - What makes us diverse can include our age, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, and mental or physical disability, as well as the languages we speak, our socio-economic status, cultural background, education, and political beliefs.
- **"Diversity" is an important topic these days, because our society is more diverse than it has ever been.**
 - This diversity is having a significant impact on every facet of our lives.

- **For instance, in the United States:**
 - White people used to make up 75% of the population, but today more than 30% of us are persons of color.
 - At least 20% of us are Latino.
 - More than 5% of us are Asian.
- **The largest religious group in the U.S. used to be white Christians, but they now make up less than half of the population.**
- **Age demographics are changing as well:**
 - The fastest-growing age group in the U.S. is people who are 75 and older.
 - Americans increasingly live in multi-generational households, with ages ranging from new-borns to people in their 80s and 90s.
- **Our lifestyles have diversified as well, with increasing numbers of people now identifying themselves as gay, lesbian or transgender.**
- **In truth, any group of "Americans" that you might encounter is likely to include people of many backgrounds, who live, dress, think, speak, eat, worship, work and play differently from one another.**
- **Any type of change can make people uncomfortable, so they can be slow to accept it.**
 - But resistance to diversity can cause real trouble in a workplace.
- **In fact, numerous laws now prohibit the unfair and prejudicial treatment of people because of who they are.**
- **The Civil Rights Act of 1964 has made discrimination based on a person's sex, color, religion, or national origin illegal.**
 - Legislation has also been passed to protect the rights of women, minorities, older persons and disabled individuals in the workplace.
 - Recent regulations also prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation and genetic information as well.
- **At one time, the goal in society was for people to conform, to "shape" themselves so that everyone would be more alike.**
 - Working so hard at being alike often stifled people's imaginations and creativity.
 - It actually made them less effective at their jobs.

- **In business today, the goal is to celebrate the diversity of the workforce.**
 - To turn the ideas, talents, abilities and perspectives of its varied members into a competitive advantage.
- **For example, consider two project teams assigned to solve a problem.**
 - While the members of Team A are more "alike", those on Team B are more diverse.
- **The members of Team B bring a broader range of life experiences, knowledge, training and perceptions to the table than the people on Team A.**
 - By sharing their ideas freely, and utilizing the best of each person's thinking, Team B can often come up with more innovative solutions than Team A.
 - In today's business world, Team B is a clear winner.
- **Customers' and clients' workforces are becoming more diverse as well.**
 - If a company's employees also have varied backgrounds, they can often engage with customers better.
 - They will be more likely to be able to "speak the customer's language", sometimes literally!
- **These employees are also likely to have better insight into customers' thinking.**
 - This lets them anticipate their needs, improve service and build much stronger customer relationships.
- **Embracing workplace diversity is good for us and our coworkers too.**
 - We all feel better working in an inclusive environment.
- **Knowing that we appreciate, and value our coworkers' unique personal attributes helps to:**
 - Boost their confidence.
 - Strengthen their morale.
 - Increase their job satisfaction.
- **Diversity in the workplace can improve work quality and increase productivity as well.**
- **While a diverse workforce can bring significant benefits to today's workplace, it's not always easy for people to adjust to the change.**
 - All too often, traits such as "stereotyping", "bias" and "discrimination" can interfere with how we relate to our coworkers.

- **Stereotyping leads us to make assumptions and jump to conclusions about people because they seem to fit into a certain "category" or belong to a particular "group".**
 - These "pigeonholes" are often based on people's color, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, or some other attribute that catches our attention.
- **Once stereotyping has caused us to jump to conclusions about people, then bias can kick in.**
 - "Bias" is a preconceived idea or opinion that we have about people who belong to the stereotyped categories we've put them in.
- **Examples of biased beliefs include:**
 - "Women are the weaker sex".
 - "All foreigners are lazy".
 - "Older people don't work well with computers".
- **In addition to being factually incorrect, biased beliefs also tend to be unfavorable as well as demeaning to someone or a group.**
- **The combination of stereotyping and biases can lead us to treat people in unfair and prejudicial ways... to "discriminate" against others.**
- **Discrimination in a workplace can have a number of adverse effects.**
 - It can lower morale, stifle teamwork and reduce productivity.
 - It can also create such a hostile work environment that it drives good employees out of a company.
 - On top of all this, discrimination is illegal.
- **As you can see, there are a lot of good reasons that each of us should make a personal commitment to support diversity in our workplace.**
 - For a workplace to function smoothly and most productively, we all need to accept each other's differences, ages, appearances, lifestyles, languages... all of our individual attributes.
- **There are a number of "good diversity practices" that you can follow to help with this.**
 - First, you need to recognize and understand any stereotypes and biases that you might have regarding your coworkers.

- **One way to approach this is to consider things that you think you "know" about someone because they seem to fit into a particular group or "category".**
 - Once you identify these preconceptions, you can work on overcoming any stereotypes and biases you've attached to them.
- **The next step is to replace any biased assumptions with a real understanding of the people you work with.**
- **This requires reaching out to coworkers and really communicating with them.**
 - This can be a challenge if you each have a different native language, but making that extra effort to relate to each other is important.
- **And remember, even people who do speak the same language can sometimes have trouble communicating.**
 - So being a good listener is essential as well.
- **You should also make a habit of encouraging a free exchange of everyone's ideas and opinions.**
 - This not only builds teamwork but also establishes mutual respect.

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- **"Diversity" among people has been increasing for decades.**
- **Workplace diversity can enhance creativity, sharpen problem-solving skills and increase productivity.**
- **Stereotyping, bias and discrimination can create serious obstacles to working productively with coworkers.**
- **Reaching out to coworkers and getting to know them as people is key to overcoming discrimination.**
- **An inclusive workplace can increase employee morale and job satisfaction for everyone.**
- **Now that you understand the benefits that come from having a diverse workforce, you can help to build a respectful and inclusive workplace for everyone in your company... every day!**