

DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE... FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Since the middle of the last century, our world has been steadily growing "smaller".**
- **Advances in transportation, communication and technology have made people everywhere more mobile.**
 - Increasingly, they travel to make their homes and livelihoods in new places.
The variety of people in the workforce has been increasing as a result.
- **Our workplaces now include men and women of all descriptions... different ages, races, faiths, sexual orientations... the unique features that make them who they are.**
- **This "variety" is called "diversity".**
 - While a diverse workforce offers significant benefits, it can also bring its own challenges.
 - Employers depend on managers and supervisors like you to avoid the Potential pitfalls, while making the most of each employee's potential.
- **Until recently "diversity" referred mostly to the variation among plants and animals.**
 - But these days it's usually applied to the "variety" among people.
- **"Diversity" doesn't just refer to the variation in people's race, color or ethnicity.**
 - It also includes 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 a hot topic these days, because it's having a significant impact on our society.**
 - Any group of Americans now includes people of many backgrounds, who can live, dress, think, speak, eat, worship, work and even play differently from one another.

- **But "change" tends to make people uncomfortable, and large-scale changes like increasing diversity can be even more alarming.**
 - Resistance to change is natural, but resistance to diversity can often cause serious difficulties, especially in employment.
- **Numerous laws now prohibit unfair and prejudicial treatment of people because of who they are.**
- **The U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 made discrimination based on a person's sex, color, religion or national origin illegal.**
 - Other legislation also protects the rights of women, minorities, older persons and disabled individuals.
 - Recent regulations also prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation and genetic information as well.
- **Violations of these laws can lead to employee grievances, even lawsuits, which can result in significant legal expenses.**
 - It's important for employers to establish pro-diversity policies in their workplaces, and for managers like you to implement them.
- **At one time, the goal in society was to have people "conform", to shape themselves so that everyone would be more alike.**
 - Working hard at being the same can stifle imagination and creativity.
 - It can also make employees less effective on the job, by limiting the ways that they can contribute to their company's success.
 - Employers today recognize that's not a winning strategy.
- **The goal now is to cultivate the diversity of a company's workers and turn their varied ideas, talents, abilities and perspectives into a competitive advantage.**
- **Diversity can help a company to:**
 - Respond more flexibly to a changing marketplace.
 - Improve customer and client relations.
 - Boost revenues.
 - Attract the best employees.
- **All of these can help to build a stronger future for the organization.**
 - It's important to remember that these "big-picture" benefits are born at the departmental level.
 - This is where managers and supervisors like you help cultivate the employee diversity that makes them possible.

- **Under your guidance, employees of all backgrounds can:**
 - Build more effective professional relationships.
 - Exchange ideas more freely.
 - Work more strongly as a team.
- **And since customers and clients have become more varied as well, your diverse team can:**
 - Engage with them more effectively.
 - Have better insight into their thinking.
 - Better anticipate their needs.
- **These capabilities enable the team to improve service and build stronger business relationships.**
- **Employees can benefit personally and professionally from workplace diversity as well. An inclusive work environment:**
 - Boosts their morale.
 - Creates greater job satisfaction.
 - Encourages them to invest themselves more in their work.
 - Helps them develop a stronger connection to their jobs.
- **These "engaged employees" are more productive and do better quality work.**
 - They're more willing to learn and grow within the organization.
- **Even though workplace diversity 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 employees relate to others.
- **Stereotyping can make us jump to conclusions about people because it seems like they fit into a certain "category".**
 - Stereotyping "pigeonholes" are usually based on people's color, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, or some other attribute that catches our attention.
- **"Bias" is a preconceived idea or opinion that we have about the people that we put in these pigeonholes.**
 - Biased beliefs tend to be unfavorable and demeaning to others.
- **Stereotyping and biases can lead people to treat each other in unfair and prejudicial ways.**

- **When discriminatory behavior like this occurs in a workplace, it can stifle teamwork, reduce productivity and create a hostile work environment.**
 - It can also lower employee morale, causing them to become "disengaged".
 - Disengaged employees accomplish less than engaged workers, so they "cost" more.
- **Disengaged employees are also more likely to leave their jobs, which requires a manager to begin the interview and hiring process all over again.**
 - High turnover can damage a company's reputation and make it harder to attract and retain top-quality talent.
- **These problems are serious enough, but remember that discrimination is also against the law.**
 - It can expose companies to complex and time-consuming legal problems as well as significant expenses.
- **You can see that there are a lot of good reasons for companies and their managers to do everything possible to support workplace diversity.**
- **Because of the position you hold within your company, you need to make a personal commitment to supporting diversity.**
 - You have an obligation to understand the problems caused by stereotyping, bias and discrimination in a diverse workplace and make sure to avoid them.
 - Your behavior is under even greater scrutiny than that of other employees because you are in a supervisory position.
- **You also represent your company.**
 - Any "slip of the tongue" or inappropriate action that you make reflects directly on your employer.
 - So think before you speak or act.
 - Never behave in a way that others might feel is discriminatory.
- **To avoid problems, it helps to recognize the ways that stereotypes and biases can affect our thinking.**
 - The better we understand them, the easier it is to take them "out of play" in our relations with others.

- **Watch out for things you think you "know" about someone because they seem to fit into a particular group or "category".**
 - Consider how this can affect how you relate to your coworkers.
- **Once you've identified any biases you may have, the next step is to replace them with an authentic understanding of the people instead. This requires:**
 - Reaching out to workers who are different from you.
 - Really communicating with them (even those who speak a different language).
 - Taking the time to listen.
- **These are skills every manager should develop.**
- **Making a personal commitment to diversity doesn't only help you in your daily interactions with coworkers, it lets you identify talented job candidates and "promotable" employees more easily.**
 - Stereotyping and bias usually cause us to make bad decisions, and that's bad for your department and the company.
- **Biased promotion and hiring decisions can also lead to complaints about job discrimination from the candidates who don't get promoted or hired.**
 - These can lead to lawsuits, fines and other problems.
 - Always assess, manage and motivate your people as individuals, based on their ability and job performance.
- **For a workplace to function smoothly, employees need to accept each other's diversity... their ages, appearances, lifestyles, languages... all of the unique attributes that make them who they are.**
 - To accomplish this, a manager needs to build their workers' understanding of diversity, how it can improve the department's performance and how they can help with it.
- **You need to be specific about the types of behavior that you expect. Let employees know that they need to:**
 - Treat each other with respect and dignity.
 - Value and celebrate each other's differences.
 - Work to build effective relationships.
 - Encourage each other to contribute their own ideas and perspectives.

- **Make sure everyone understands that these are the goals and policies of the company as well as the department.**
 - Keep the topic of diversity fresh, by encouraging discussion of these issues on an ongoing basis.
- **You should also establish an "open door policy", that allows employees to share diversity-related problems or concerns at any time.**
- **Any report of discrimination within the department must be taken seriously.**
 - The person making the report should be treated with respect and compassion.
 - Making someone feel as if they are being punished for coming forward is not only bad managing, it is against the law.
- **When responding to a report of potential discrimination, you need to follow your company's standard grievance procedures.**
 - Remain impartial.
 - Keep the matter confidential.
 - Document everything.
 - Follow through.
- **Dealing fairly with complaints will go a long way toward repairing any damage an act of discrimination may have caused.**
 - It can even strengthen relationships within the department and the company.

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- **"Diversity" in the workplace has been increasing in our society for decades.**
- **Workplace diversity can enhance creativity, sharpen problem-solving skills and raise productivity.**
- **Stereotyping, bias and discrimination can pose serious problems in a diverse workforce.**
- **Managers and supervisors like you have a responsibility to implement, as well as follow, their company's diversity policies.**
- **Now that you understand the benefits that diversity can bring to a company, and what you can do to support and encourage inclusiveness in your department... you can help to build both a more respectful and inclusive workplace for everyone in your company!**