

Career Rx

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Diversity and Inclusion – Your Influence

In reflecting on my own career and careers of many clients I have worked with, I find myself thinking about our approach, influence and impact on the organizations we work with. As a Human Resources professional, learning the company's policies and understanding the programs and initiatives were critical early in my career. As I continued to grow professionally, I began to understand where I could influence and have an impact on an organization. My approach to the organization and their readiness were critical factors in determining whether certain initiatives would succeed or fail.

When considering your influence on an organization you work with, how do you measure your success? Is it in making a difference for the client or customer? Impacting the bottom line? Introducing a new product or process? Increasing efficiency? Is it some or all of these?

This is an exciting time in the marketplace because we are experiencing intergenerational and multicultural individuals working side by side with different attitudes for work and life, different values, and different events that have shaped their world view. Each style begs us to raise our own awareness of alternative approaches that may not be intuitively consonant with our own. This may cause potential friction in the workplace.

These differences can affect recruiting, engaging and developing employees, building and managing teams, dealing with change, communication and productivity. Think of how people communicate, and what causes misunderstanding. These disagreements can lead to high employee turnover. A manager's reputation can cause difficulty in attracting and retaining employees as well as gaining their commitment once they are hired.

When you work with people of all cultures and generations, you need to be aware of conflicting perspectives. These differing world views can generate workplace conflict because one approach does not necessarily fit all personalities. Companies can market, shape and communicate their organizational paradigms, business objectives, and the composition of teams to better connect with multiple generational and cultural perspectives.

As companies speak of diversity and inclusion, what most are trying to address is how to leverage the strengths of employee's talent, skills, and abilities. A study conducted on teams of medical scientists showed that "on-going working relationships with colleagues having a wide assortment of values, experiences and disciplines performed better than teams of colleagues similar to themselves." This study was conducted in 1956 and still holds true today. (D. Pelz, "Some Social Factors Related to Performance in a Research Organization," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 1, 1956.)

The key to building connections across the workforce is to create learning environments. These allow diverse individuals to engage, question and develop relationships over time. The value each employee brings to the table is based on their personal perspective. Properly applied, this kind of environment promotes synergy and lifts the overall performance and satisfaction of the group. Organizations that wish to engage the diversity of the workforce will have to understand the differences that influence how process and programs, such as recruitment, compensation, benefits, employee development, and management, are designed and delivered. For example, recruiting online is great for the tech savvy generations and personal networking may be the preferred style for the traditionalist generation.

For individuals to accept change, they have to be ready to receive it. Changes in perspective are quantum in nature. A substantial personal investment is required to overcome inertia. Once the culture of an organization is open to change, a great deal of progress can be made. NASA discovered what is required to change one's perspective. In order to reach orbit, most of the fuel required is burned in the first few minutes of flight:

"Launching a rocket requires generating thrust to overcome the rocket's inertia and gravity, which acts as a constant drag on the rocket as it climbs. Analogously, sustainable transformational change can only be achieved by overcoming persistent conservative forces such as personal and group inertia and old behavior patterns."

P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Eight Ways Organizational Transformations Fail,"

When individuals on a team are able to share their cultural and generational differences, they are working in an inclusive manner, allowing the sum to be greater than its parts. This is very powerful for the individual team members and the organization overall.

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Lisa's extensive human resources and coaching experience with Fortune 500 companies, small enterprises, medium-sized firms, and non-profit organizations gives her the unique ability to bring together wide-ranging perspectives on career transitions, executive and leadership development. She has consulted with a wide variety of sectors — consumer goods, financial services, healthcare, media and entertainment, pharmaceutical and life sciences, publishing, professional services, technology, and non-profit. Lisa has a passion for motivational speaking, conducts career forums, and provides executive and career coaching.

Lisa's greatest strength is that she enables individuals and organizations to see themselves in new ways, freeing them to achieve their goals. Lisa can be reached at Lisa@ChenofskySinger.com.