



DIVERSITY

A Definition in Change

Would you visit a restaurant that only served peanut butter & jelly sandwiches, or just oatmeal, and nothing else?

Sure there would be some who can live on peanut butter alone, but most people need variety in their lives. Variety is what entices us to want differently, feel differently, and most importantly, think differently. Ten years ago, diversity used to be viewed as a restaurant that only served one item, ethnicity. Today, diversity deals with a variety of items served; cultural diversity, thought diversity, age diversity, team diversity, educational diversity, gender diversity, personality diversity, and motivational diversity (Guy, 2011). Diversity today is served more like a grocery store, not a one themed restaurant.

Human Resource Professionals need to realize that the modern workforce is comprised of many different, or diversified, types of employees. Employees today are more varied than ever before in the history of the workforce. Examples include a wide range in the age of the work force, from entry level school to career workers, to seniors who are working past their retirement age. Also included in today's workforce is the wide range of ethnicities, with a larger Hispanic and African American population in the workforce than ever before (Burns, Barton & Kerby, 2012). But diversity is much broader than just age, ethnicity or even gender. Human Resource professionals also have to appreciate that with this change in the make-up of the workforce, there comes a new definition of diversity; diversity of thought, culture, understanding, beliefs, and desires, in addition to the historical definition of diversity. It is when an HR professional incorporates these additional factors into their diversity comprehension, that they will be able to successfully meet the holistic necessities of their workforce.

So, what is the thinking around this broadening definition of diversity? With the expansion of ethnic diversity in the workforce, there come new cultures,

beliefs, thoughts, and desires that, though not expected, are brought to work every day. Not too long ago, it was taboo to bring your beliefs, cultural habitat, or personal desires to the workplace. That is not the case today. For whatever reason, home and work are not as separate as they used to be just a few short years ago (Lynn, 2011). In response, HR professionals need to realize that they will have to not only deal with the Affirmative Action elements of diversity, but with the emotional ones that are now a part of the workforce as well.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs may be a good analogy to the new definition of diversity. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that "One must satisfy lower level basic needs before progressing on to meet higher level growth needs. Once these needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization" (McLeod, 2012). Using this analogy as related to the expanded definition of diversity, those in the workforce may find their thoughts around the work environment to focus on their most "basic needs", while their beliefs and culture focus on their "belonging needs", and lastly, their desires to succeed in the workplace as connecting to their "self-actualization needs". It is the role of the HR professional to empower their workforce to achieve these needs, as related to diversity, and not hinder their progression through these stages. As the workforce changes in its diversity, HR professionals may desire to invoke this changing definition of diversity into their cultural competency development as well. As Barbara Sher (Heathfield, 2013) said: "Change is not only likely, it's inevitable". This includes the changing workforce and the changing definition of diversity.



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