Diversity. What it is…
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Still quite possibly the most poorly understood, misunderstood dynamic in the world of business (and education, politics, human resources, leadership development, etc.).
Diversity means difference. Difference shows up in many different forms…but before we even take a look at that, I think having a better understanding of what difference actually means can be helpful. Here are some of what I consider to be the fundamental characteristics of difference:

Diversity is RELATIONAL

Diversity (difference) is relational in nature…if someone is "different", they have to be different from someone or something. Relationship is inherent. Diveristy is an attribute of relationships…all relationships…there is diversity in every single relationship / interaction / transaction you have with another human being. There is no such thing as a "diverse person", diversity exists between people not in them. This is but one of the reasons why the
diversity vs. talent conversation is almost always fundamentally misinformed. One is an individual attribute and the other is a social attribute.

Diversity is PARADOXICAL

There is a paradoxical nature to our social identities that carries over to diversity as well.
• On one level we are each completely unique and unlike everyone else on the planet.

- On another level, there are groups of people that we have a great deal in common with. Social groups (race, age, gender, profession, geography, parental status, military experience) all have some shared culture, language and norms.
- On yet another level we are all alike. We are all human beings spinning through space on a giant rock and at the end of the day we all want the same basic things. Regardless of age, religion, geography, culture, language, etc., we want the same basic things from life.

So diversity is paradoxical to some degree, as I believe all the really important stuff is. We are all different, we are like some and we are all alike…these are all true.

Diversity is CONTEXTUAL

Diversity is a very contextual thing. For starters, we are, as indivduals much more contextual, fluid and dynamic than we tend to think. I am a slightly different person on Monday morning than I am on Friday afternoon. I am a slightly different

person at work than I am at home. I am a slightly different person in my relationship with my daughters than I am in my relationship with my mother. In each of these settings I am a slightly different version of Joe and I contribute and share different aspects of myself. Not only are we as individuals very contextual, but the aspects of our identities are contexutal also. There are a lot of things, stories, issues, etc. within the categories of race, gender, faith, sexual orientation. We must take great care to not overlook the width and depth of human experience and perspective. There is, for example, no one single woman's experience in this country...there is some commonality there for sure, but the experience has to some degree been different for every single member of that group.

Diversity is GENERATIVE

Diversity (difference) is the key ingredient for learning, change, creativity, growth and development. When people are able to explore difference in a healthy and functional way, there is always the opportunity for learning and / or creation of something new. Diversity is also the key ingredient for tension, so people and groups of people must have the capacity to deal with healthy tension in order to tap into the power of difference. This is part of why a reactive stance towards diversity (which is today the norm in most organizations and communities) is wasteful, dishonest and does not deliver results. When the capacity to live with healthy tension is not present we end up politely avoiding and ignoring all differences (so we do not benefit from them) or we end up doing violence to one another. The world is full of examples of both.

-be good to each other