

Key Lessons from a Diversity Mishap – and One Store That Got It Right

By Stan Kimer



Expert Forum

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Recently a Facebook friend of mine provided the following disturbing account on his Facebook Page:

“It’s such a small thing nowadays, but the AM/PM (convenience store / gas station prevalent in Southern California) attendant told a gentleman in front of me to “Speak English” three times. I can’t believe this is how we greet people now!

The customer did not speak English. He was pointing at the glass display on the counter at some lottery scratchers, and saying “Two,” while handing money over. Brian, the gas station attendant, asked, “Do you want two of those?” The customer nodded his head. Brian then proceeded to say “Speak English” three times, each time getting louder and slower. The customer paid and left. He looked so embarrassed. I took his photo (yes, from the safety of the energy bar counter) and drove to Chevron.

This gas station is the closest to my dad’s stroke rehabilitation facility, so I have encountered this guy before. He’s not the nicest person. His customer service skills could use some brushing up.”

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My friend took the time to provide this information to AM/PM headquarters and got no reply. Meanwhile several dozen people saw and commented on this account.

Perhaps the customer did not speak English. Maybe he was deaf and mute. Maybe he recently had a stroke which left his speaking ability partially incapacitated. It does not matter – this interaction is totally disrespectful and highlights three important lessons from this diversity misstep.

1) **In today’s world of quickly proliferating social media, diversity mishaps can be frequently and quickly captured, and spread like wildfire.** We see more and more capturing of public missteps in dealing with others via cellphones and quickly posted on various social media. It can be a matter of 30 minutes where soon millions of people are aware of some awful occurrence by a company’s or organization’s personnel.

2) **All employees, not just managers and executives, need diversity and inclusion training.** So many companies believe that diversity and inclusion can be addressed

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simply via management training. But in reality, it is often the lower-wage, non-management employees that are on the front line interacting with customers and clients.

In my Workforce Diversity Network Forum Expert Panel resource titled, [“Components of and Audience for Corporate Diversity and Inclusion Training.”](#) I wrote, “It is important that all employees within an enterprise receive diversity and inclusion training. Co-workers are most often the frequent cause of employees not feeling welcomed and becoming unhappy at work, and most often it is the non-management employees on the front lines who interact with your diverse customers.”

3) When diversity missteps occur, corporate leadership must be extremely quick to react. So often these diversity errors get captured and communicated to corporate leaders and then the matter is dropped and the person who reported the incident never contacted. Organizations, especially those with public expression for the diversity and inclusion commitments need to back up these statements with real action.

Diversity and inclusion is increasingly becoming a key strategic initiative for organizations to succeed, and mishaps in this area can so quickly undo years of hard work. Be vigilant and diligent! And I thanked my Facebook friend for speaking out and taking action in this situation.

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Incidentally, I could not find any diversity and inclusion statements on the AM/PM corporate website, but parent company BP has a very visible and robust diversity and inclusion business strategy.

And now a store which got it right!

Please do read this heartwarming story of how two employees of a men's suit store addressed the needs of a gender fluid young woman who preferred to wear a man's suit instead of a dress at her graduation. It is somewhat long, but very worthwhile.

Recently I found an inspirational story on Facebook of how a customer service representative and store manager for a men's suit store “got it right” when addressing the needs of a gender fluid young woman preferring to wear a nice suit to her graduation instead of a dress. I reached out to the Facebook contact so I

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could get more of the story

Here is the story as told by the mother Innes Clodd:

“The time came to talk about my child Carolyn’s high school graduation, something I was secretly not looking forward to. Then the words came out of her mouth, as I knew they would, “I want to wear a suit to grad, Mum”. Oh god I thought, where am I going to get a suit that will fit her and look nice? I thought a lot, I looked around a lot, and saw nothing. Then it came to me ... Moores, they’re the suit people! I believed that they had to have made some kind of accommodations for the transgender movement.

(NOTE – Moores is a Men’s Clothier Chain in Canada.)

So we went in. I don’t think we were there for 5 minutes when we left. The staff was not unpleasant, but they just said no, there has been no changes, accommodations, nothing to assist the female form, identifying as the male gender in looking the way they want. I mean sure, we could get a suit tailored, but I’m not a wealthy (money wise) woman.

We left Moores and checked out a few other stores in the area, basically looking for a woman’s pant suit, the ones that went out in the early 90’s? Suffice it to say, nothing was to be found. We went back to the car and just sat for a moment. We ended up arguing a bit, and crying, and giving each other the silent treatment, and eventually calming enough to apologize to each other. I was frustrated for her, but it came out in the form of anger with her. She was frustrated because she thought I was angry with her and disappointed that she did not want to wear a dress.

We drove home, pretty much in silence, then all of a sudden I said, out loud, “Nope, this is unacceptable.” Of course Carolyn looked confused. I said no one should feel like they are ‘wrong’ because of who they are, which is how she felt. I said no parent should have to feel helpless, and watch their child’s heart break, or question who or what they are. I said Carolyn, trust me, you will have your suit, and it will look fantastic.

I decided to write to Moores, honestly, not really expecting anything. Maybe an apology, or a discount of some sort, I really didn’t know. The representative who returned my email was actually very apologetic, and asked if we could work together to find a suit-able (I’m hilarious right?) solution. Of course I replied absolutely. But for some reason my emails would not go through. She included a phone number in her email, so I called and left a message, again not expecting anything in return.

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Once again I was wrong; she returned my call. We discussed at length the issues at hand, I explained my position, and offered some advice, that perhaps they need to have a few styles of jackets available for the female form, specifically for these occasions. She thanked me for bringing the LGBTQA community to their attention. I didn't really ask for anything, just that they consider all people, and that although they are 'Men's Clothiers' the word 'Men' has a new meaning in today's world.

She was very kind, she listened and she seemed to genuinely care about the situation. I was originally offered 50% off anything I wanted to purchase in the store, which I said was very kind and generous. She then asked me if there was anything else she could do for my daughter, I jokingly said (although we all know there is truth in jest) "free would be nice," and I laughed it off. Her reply made my jaw drop to the floor; "let me see what I can do about that for you".

Sure enough, she called me the next day and told me that she had arranged for a \$400 gift card at that particular store, and that the manager was at our disposal for when we wanted to go. I could not thank her enough. She said "if there is anything else you need, please contact me directly and I will take care of it."

When we returned to the store, we immediately saw the lady that spoke to us the first time, who just so happened to be the manager. Carolyn took a very deep breath and said "oh no." I asked her what was wrong. She said "what if they are mad at us for complaining, what if they are rude to us, I don't think I can handle that." I simply said, just relax and we will get through this. We will deal with whatever comes as it comes.

The manager of the store was so kind, and so apologetic. I explained that it wasn't her, it was the principle that nothing is available. She seemed to understand. She helped Carolyn with everything, right down to the socks, and we spent every penny. After the measurements and the transaction was complete, the manager said "you're going to look fabulous, not only did we give you a \$400 gift card, but we also gave you 50% off the amount above that. Once again my jaw dropped to the floor. My beautiful baby went to graduation in an \$800 outfit, looking like a million bucks.

I am absolutely in awe of the amazing customer service we received, and how seriously they took the concern and suggestion. I am absolutely over the moon, because at the end of the day, people do care. Thank you, Moores Clothing!

Carolyn also wanted to color her hair rainbow, in honor of who she is, and to

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honor those who choose to remain silent, at least for now. Everyone told her how great she looked, everyone loved the hair, the suit, which was pants, a dress shirt, vest, tie and of course matching socks. She felt so proud, so happy, and so confident. She had everything I wanted her to have and more. All of it because someone cared enough to make a wish come true on a very special day.”

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Just as the earlier friend shared the bad experience on Facebook, which was seen by thousands of people, Innes also shared this story on Facebook. Hopefully many people who value diversity and the inclusion of all people in our society will now patronize this forward-thinking store, whose employees took the time to listen with an open mind, showed a willingness to understand a diverse community, and took appropriate action.