
50 Activities for Diversity Training

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and
Selma Myers**

**Human Resource Development Press, Inc.
Amherst, Massachusetts**

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Published by HRD Press
22 Amherst Road
Amherst, MA 01002
1-800-822-2801

ISBN 0-87425-980-0

Production services by Clark Riley

Cover design by Old Mill Graphics

Editorial work by Lisa Wood

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The book is intended only as a general guide to diversity training, is not to be construed as written in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws, and is not intended to serve as a substitute for legal advice. The practices of the user organization should be tailored to accommodate to the particular need. In case of any uncertainty with respect to specific organization policy, competent legal counsel should be sought.

The individuals portrayed in this book are completely fictional. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Preface

By now, most organizations are aware that changes in the general population will profoundly affect the make-up of their work force in the next century. This book is therefore designed to meet the needs of professionals who are expected to address the implications of cultural diversity through training, facilitating and other developmental programs.

The underlying philosophy in “50 Activities for Diversity Training” is to train workshop participants to deal constructively with the changing workforce, and to do so in a non-threatening environment. A new awareness, coupled with matching skills, can build bridges of understanding and cooperation which will influence daily performance.

Individuals participating in the activities offered in this guide will first examine their own cultural backgrounds. They will then recognize how cultural differences may impact behavior. They will also learn skills to help them work effectively in a multicultural environment. Ultimately, their organizations will benefit through improved communication, reduced conflict and more productive relationships.

The activities contained in this guide are equally useful in industrial, service, government and not-for-profit organizations, as well as health care, educational, financial and other institutions.

Certain assumptions form the basis for the activities in this book:

- Culture is not good or bad. It just “is”.
- Often what may be considered “just the way it is” is culturally influenced.
- One’s view of the world is shaped by values, perceptions, assumptions, and expectations.
- The more people know about their own culture, and the more they know about other cultures, the better the communication will be.
- The way one does or sees things, when coupled with the way others do and see things, can lead to new improved ways of doing and seeing things.
- Being different is “OK” and differences can be recognized, acknowledged and cherished.
- The responsibility for intellectual communication is not solely that of any one of the parties, but shared by all.

Furthermore, the authors assume that those who are conducting this training have conducted training before. Therefore, this book does not include basic information on how to design needs assessments, lesson plans or the steps necessary for handling logistics.

This book provides a series of activities which are carefully constructed to:

- Introduce the topic of diversity
- Increase awareness of the impact of culture in the workplace
- Demonstrate skills for managing a culturally diverse workplace
- Address the matter of gender in the workplace

Each activity is presented in the following format:

- **NAME**, to identify the exercise
- Brief description of the **PURPOSE** of the exercise
- Normal **TIME** allotment
- **EQUIPMENT** required
- Consumable **MATERIALS** needed
- **PROCEDURES** suggesting how the exercise should be conducted
- Short **CONCLUSION** section
- Helpful **TRAINER'S NOTES**

Our approach is to use participative exercises, lecturettes, mini-case studies and roleplays in which participants will become actively involved in situations that help them deal with diversity and gender-related issues in the workplace. Also included are many exercises in master form, available for use either as handouts or as material for transparencies. The guide is separated into five sections.

DIVERSITY ICEBREAKERS

Our experience has shown that training sessions which open with so-called "fun" activities, simple and to the point, lead to greater participation by the attendees and encourage a willingness on their part to be open-minded.

Therefore, this guide begins with a series of "icebreaker" activities which we have found helpful in introducing the diversity topic, warming up a group, setting a positive climate and leading to more in-depth discussions. These activities are short, simple, effective and ready-to-use. For the most part, they require very little preparation by the leader.

In addition, many of the Diversity Icebreaker activities can also be used in training programs which are not exclusively dedicated to diversity training.

MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Trainers will face many challenges because diversity training requires more than simply following a trainer's guide. A trainer needs to be able to bring out each participant's knowledge about his or her own organization, its culture and how it views diversity issues. It is also helpful if the participants are aware of the organization's demographics and realize that there may be specific issues that arise due to these factors.

The activities in this guide were designed so that trainers could aid participants to gain knowledge about themselves and others, while increasing their grasp of the entire concept of culture.

Towards this end, we believe that, in the development of diversity training, awareness is always the first step. One cannot deal effectively across cultures without understanding cultural values and beliefs. Many of the activities in this section help participants become aware of their own stereotypes, values, and beliefs. Other activities explore the concept of culture and some of the most fundamental (but often unperceived) cultural differences, such as:

1. Language and Communication
2. Appearance and Dress
3. Food and Eating Habits
4. Time and Time-Consciousness
5. Rewards and Recognition
6. Roles and Responsibilities
7. Values and Norms
8. Sense of Self and of Space
9. Mental Processes and Learning Styles
10. Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes

The more that people become more aware of the components of culture and learn about their own beliefs, attitudes, and styles, the more competent they can eventually become in dealing with, and working alongside, people from other cultures.

CHANGE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

After awareness has been raised and knowledge acquired, the next step is to develop the appropriate skills to manage diversity. The activities in this section are designed so that participants will develop competency in these skills. The participants are made aware of how important it is to be sensitive to situations that occur as a result of culture and learn how to deal with them.

As part of the approach, this section provides activities designed to help build communication skills that will prove useful in a variety of situations. In general, getting the participants involved in identifying cultural incidents is a good start. The more participants see the value of this type of training, the more effective the training will be.

The skill-building activities offer a variety of opportunities and situations in which cultural factors, sometimes overlooked, can be brought to the forefront. For example, how one coaches or provides feedback to various employees may differ, depending on those individuals' cultural communication styles, expectations and values. Additionally, managers, supervisors, and employees as well, may need to be trained to deal with culture clashes; in this guide there are helpful activities based on conflict and dispute resolution.

GENDER AT WORK

The issue of gender at work is indeed a diversity issue. Women already account for 44% of the workforce, and the percentage of women as new entrants into the workforce is projected to be 64% by the year 2000.

The workplace is no longer simply divided into occupational groups based on gender, but rather men and women are working alongside each other, sharing responsibility and decision-making. Unquestionably, women are beginning to have greater influence.

Even so, stereotypes and assumptions about female employees create a climate in which women's resources are often underutilized. Many employers still have doubts about a woman's commitment and loyalty to an organization and are concerned about issues related to attendance, punctuality, and priorities involving family concerns.

Behavior style is still another area where there is confusion and misunderstanding. The same behavior that is acceptable for men is often interpreted differently when exhibited by women. For example, if a man exhibits enthusiasm and drive in a management meeting, he appears ambitious. If a woman demonstrates similar behavior, she may be perceived as overly aggressive. These perceptions stem from outdated sex roles and socialization.

We feel that addressing gender issues is a joint responsibility on the part of men as well as women. Each has specific concerns and questions about what is appropriate in the business world, and each must learn how to articulate concerns when they arise.

The activities in this section deal with the above issues.

CULTURE AND CAREER TRANSITIONS

In this section, there are several career transition activities which can be used with individuals or with groups in a workshop setting. These activities assist trainers and career counselors to help individuals who are exploring new career positions.

The purpose of these activities is to help participants understand the influence of culture on career choices, recognize some of the obstacles they face and begin to develop strategies to overcome them.

* * * * *

This book is based on methods and techniques developed through numerous seminars and workshops which the authors have presented throughout North America. Participants as well as trainers have expressed appreciation for this

type of material because they gained additional familiarity with the subject of culture, experienced an exchange of ideas about culturally-related problems and learned to understand and deal with them more effectively.

Although the activities in this guide are designed to explore many different diversity issues, the emphasis throughout is understanding more about oneself and becoming more comfortable with the differences that we all bring to the workplace. The guide is comprehensive in that it includes enough material to design a workshop that could be as short as three hours or as long as three days. It is user-friendly with complete trainer instructions and materials that can be modified or used as the trainer sees fit.

Selma Myers
July 1, 1994

Symbols

? Exercises

☐ Overhead transparencies

✍ Handouts

Introduction

Multicultural Issues in the Workplace

The illustration on the first overhead transparency lends itself to introducing the topics shown. Examples of each are given below:

1. Language problems leading to miscommunication and misinterpretation

One of the most obvious issues is the language problem, which leads to miscommunication and misinterpretation. Standard English speakers have a tendency to equate accents or dialects with ignorance, and become frustrated when they come across unusual word usage, garbled telephone messages, unexpected responses of silence, or the word “Yes” when it does not mean “affirmative.” Further exacerbating the situation, standard English speakers often assume that conversations overheard in a foreign language are personally derogatory. Why should language differences trigger such negative responses?

2. Incorrect assumptions about diverse cultures

A second issue is incorrect assumptions about diverse cultures. Mainstream Americans are often quick to assume that certain groups are either hard working, or lazy and easily satisfied with entry level jobs. Speaking of assumptions, a telephone operator in one office assumed that every one of the many Vietnamese employees named “Nguyen” was related. Would she also assume that everyone named “Smith” was related?

3. Expectations that others will conform

Still another issue is the expectation that employees from other cultures will conform. They are expected to dress according to the norm, speak up in groups, accept public praise, or show initiative no matter what their own cultures dictate. Why is it that everyone is expected to be “just like us?”

50 Activities for Diversity Training

4. Biases against the unfamiliar

In general, people are uncomfortable with the unfamiliar, and their biases show. From mainstream Americans, one can hear phrases such as: “How can they live with so many in the same household?” “They smile at everything and even giggle at serious matters.” “They won’t look you in the eye.” “Their food smells up the place.” Again, why is it that everyone is expected to behave in exactly the same way?

5. Traditional American values in conflict with values of others

The final issue is a conflict of values. People from other cultures often have values that differ from traditional American values. Mainstream Americans believe in individualism, egalitarianism, privacy, mobility and materialism, some or all of which are not common to all cultures, and lead to cultural clashes. Mainstream Americans also value direct communication. Many are conditioned by cowboy movies and are comfortable with phrases such as “Speak your piece,” “Don’t beat around the bush,” “Get to the point,” and “Tell it like it is.” However, many other cultures prefer different communication styles. Who is to say that one set of values is better than another?

Trainer’s Notes

Since the issues here are quite general, a discussion may follow with participants presenting some of the specific situations they face. The questions at the end of each paragraph can form the basis of the discussion. Another question could be, “Whose responsibility is it to raise the level of awareness of the impact of culture on the job?” These comments can be noted on a flipchart and referred to as the workshop progresses.

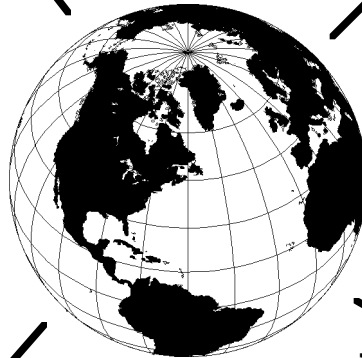
A broader perspective on diversity in the U.S. work force is shown by the Department of Labor’s outline of seven demographic trends, in the second overhead transparency.



Multicultural Issues in the Workplace

**Incorrect assumptions
about diverse cultures**

**Expectations that
others will conform**



**Language problems
leading to miscom-
munication and
misinterpretation**

**Biases against
the unfamiliar**

**Traditional American
values in conflict with
values of other cultures**

