**Managing Diversity in the Workplace**

Managing diversity in the workplace is associated with effective organizational performance. As a result it is every managers responsibility to effectively manage diversity and capitalize on the opportunity to build effective interpersonal and intercultural functioning among diverse employees. Maximizing the use of a diverse employee pool can result in increased innovation and add to the development of an inclusionary environment where employees of varying ethnic groups are acknowledged for their contributions. The literature indicates that the costs associated with poor intercultural functioning of employees results in lost time, opportunities, revenue and the good will of organizations.

Beyond managers understanding the benefits of using diversity as a strength, employees themselves must recognize and be aware of their own responses to diversity and “otherness.” Diversity refers to differences in culture, ethnicity, race, gender, able-bodiness, age, lifestyle, educational background, geographic origin, and religion/spirituality.

In organizations experiencing tension and in-fighting among diverse employees, a host of potential problems can emerge in delivering the company’s service or products. The quality of the service or product may also be compromised.

Organizational problems associated with poorly managing cultural diversity in the workplace include:

* 1. Due to high employee turnover revenue is spent on recruiting and training new employees
  2. Absenteeism may increase
  3. Discrimination reports may be filed
  4. Employees may sabotage the socially marginalized employee who is different

The Inevitability of Diversity

Diversity will emerge in your organization and it is here to stay. You must remember to treat diversity as an asset and not a problem. It becomes a problem when employee attitudes toward diversity arise from their ignorance and fear of interacting with others who look, speak and dress differently than the majority population of employees in the organization.

In general, employees who hold unfavorable attitudes toward different culture and ethnic group employees often display behaviors which are prejudicial, discriminatory or stereotypical.

Definitions:

* 1. Prejudice is a preconceived bias originating from interactions with our family, friends and other sources such as the media. All human beings harbor biases, some of which we are

unaware of in daily life. Prejudicial behavior may be driven by one’s ethnocentric attitude whereby he/she feels culturally and personally superior to another culture/minority group.

* 1. Stereotyping refers to overgeneralizing from one experience with a member of a certain culture/ethnic group to the entire population of the culture/ethnic group. The individual doing the stereotyping may be doing so from a lack of knowledge. Usually, stereotypes represent cultural assumptions which lack support.
  2. Discrimination refers to treating individuals differently or unequally resulting in a negative outcome.

Strategies for Managing Diverse Relationships in the Work Setting

Before we can effectively recognize, accommodate and treat diversity in healthy ways we must acknowledge the diversity present in each of us. By acknowledging to ourselves that we possess multiple identities it will be easier to observe the multiple identities in others.

* 1. Be observant of changes that occur around you and the workplace; and attempt to accommodate and adapt to these changes.
  2. Recognize, accept and respect others who look, dress and behave differently than you. Remember that tolerance means allowing others to be who they want to be without penalizing them in an unfavorable way.
  3. Remember to always think before you speak
  4. Attempt to be aware of your own counterproductive biases and how they may affect your interactions with others who are different at work. This does not necessarily mean you need to like or agree with everyone—but that you treat others with respect and fairness.
  5. Listen—especially active listening where you listen with the result of increasing the likelihood of developing trust and confidence in the person you are listening to. Usually, the person you are listening to will cooperate more with you and become less defensive.
  6. Take time to expose yourself to other cultures by visiting cultural centers and educating yourself about the culture bound values of different cultures.

So, How Do You Know if Your Organization is Managing Diversity Well?

The following behaviors generally emerge in organizations that manage diversity effectively:

* 1. Employees from all culture and ethnic groups voluntarily offer feedback to management
  2. Work teams composed of diverse individuals effectively cooperate to achieve goals
  3. Diverse work teams perform at high levels
  4. Employee policies related to vacation, leave and absenteeism are flexible and fair for all employees.
  5. At all levels of the organization there exists a diverse staff composition
  6. Employees from diverse backgrounds are friends
  7. Employee turnover from all diverse groups is proportionate