



A Professional's Guide for the Diversity Perplexed

Developed By

David P. Tulin

Tulin DiversiTeam Associates

1. A good manager must use **Emotional Intelligence** – “**The ability to make quality decisions while experiencing feelings.**” Professional competence means managing, suspending or directing our feelings, (whether due to work or personal stress; jealousy; gender-race-culture discomfort; biases or phobias; work-family pressures; sexual attraction; or personality differences,) so that our conduct is respectful, fair, productive and professional.
2. Be alert that our **feelings**, if not intelligently understood and managed, **can lead to us committing either “professional suicide”** (to ourselves and our careers), **or “professional homicide”** (to our colleagues, direct reports, managers, customers and our own organization).
3. Most unprofessional conduct, harassment or discrimination is done without negative or malicious intent; yet, **if a reasonable person experiences our behavior as unprofessional or disrespectful or discriminatory, that behavior must be stopped.** This is necessary even though we may feel uncomfortable, surprised, hurt or shocked at how our (hopefully) positively intended behavior was interpreted or experienced by others.
4. **It is not our intent, but our behavior, and its impact on our colleagues and customers that is the key. Remember: “We Judge Ourselves By Our Intent – Others Judge Us By Our Behavior”**

Leveraging Diversity to Advance
Individual and Organizational Excellence

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5. If we or a colleague treat another colleague or customer in a way that is unprofessional, unwelcomed and which has a negative impact, **pay attention to the merits of the negative feedback and change our behavior to remedy the mistake and to have a more positive impact.** **Caution:** It is human that when we receive negative feedback from someone about our unwelcomed behavior, we often feel uncomfortable and even defensive. Even so --**focus on the *merits of the feedback*, not on the *merits of the feedback-giver*.** Blaming the “messenger” is a natural but immature, uncourageous and unprofessional way of avoiding “failure analysis” & admitting that we aren’t yet perfect. (Also -- Don’t use any imperfections the “complainant” may have as an excuse to avoid learning important professional improvement lessons).
6. **“I didn’t mean it” is meaningless.** If we didn’t mean it, we can say that to others, but the true test of whether we didn’t mean it is if we take the feedback seriously, stop doing “it”, and repair the damage as best we can.
7. It is admirable that many of us relate to new people by using the **Golden Rule: “Treat others the way I would want to be treated if I were they.”** But if our **“Golden Rule” behavior backfires**, (judging from others’ feedback), take a deep breath and **switch to the “Platinum Rule” of Diversity: “Treat others the way they want to be treated”**
8. **When in doubt, don’t say it – don’t do it.** If we say aloud or to ourselves, **“I wonder if anyone might be offended by this...”** (a joke, comment, reference, touch, etc.), then assume that someone will, and restrain or redirect yourself.

9. **“Its not what you do, it’s the way that you do it”** reminds us that up to 80% of all human communication has no necessary relationship to **what**, but rather **how it is said or done**.
10. **“Little Things Mean A Lot.”** To best determine if your conduct is professional and welcomed by others, understand and focus on your and their *small but crucial* –
- 4 Key “Micro-Messages”:**
- **Verbal** - (What is said);
 - **Para-Verbal** - (How it is said –i.e. tone, volume and cadence);
 - **Non-Verbal** - (i.e. body language, eye contact, facial expression);
 - **Contextual** - (i.e. who else is there, previous trust or distrust relationship, gender and cultures of the parties & the setting, and any power imbalances that may exist.
11. **When in doubt, ask if it’s O.K. But – remember that power differential, peer pressure, or fear** of being labeled a “bad sport-hypersensitive-militant or a troublemaker”, **may cause someone to say “O.K.” when it may not be**. Pay attention to the Micro-Messages surrounding that person’s “O.K.” to help better understand how to evaluate and respond.
12. **Though someone** with whom you work may have previously **welcomed your behavior, your are still at risk if: a)** others who witness it are offended, intimidated or consider it hostile (3rd party harassment); **b)** that colleague changes her/his mind. Once we know it’s no longer welcomed, we are then responsible.

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13. **Our goal is to create a “nip it in the bud”, respectful work climate so that professional blunders do not escalate or approach illegality.** In responding to a complaint, then, **the two worst reactions are:**
a) Treat it too lightly, (laugh it off, blame the complainant, slap perpetrator’s wrist), or **b) Treat it too harshly** (turn every mistake into a “federal case”, regardless of the seriousness or frequency of the offense or the power of the parties). Both of these extreme responses, (besides often being unfair), create fear about speaking up or intervening or asking for coaching when others see or experience a manageable problem. **The result? The previously “small” problem, if it’s not acknowledged, reported or dealt with, can dangerously escalate.**
14. **It is both wrong to say “Almost Everything Can Be Discrimination or Harassment”, or “Hardly Anything Is Really Discrimination or Harassment.”** The **best equation** to judge the nature of any incident is the following: **> Power of the perpetrator \pm > Seriousness of the action \pm > Frequency of the behavior \equiv > Probability it is Harassment or Discrimination.** (Conversely, **<Power + < Seriousness + < Frequency = < Probability it is Harassment or Discrimination.**)

If equations aren’t your thing: The *greater the power* of the perpetrator over the complainant, (i.e. boss to subordinate vs. same-level colleagues), and/or the *greater the seriousness* of the conduct, (i.e. “That’s a nice outfit” vs. inappropriately touching the outfit or the person), and the *greater the frequency* of the conduct (in spite of numerous indicators that it is unwelcomed) = the *greater the probability* that *it is unprofessional, and probably harassing and discriminatory.*

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15. **Executive and Manager *Power Alert*:** The greater your power, the more you are at risk of missing or not getting clear signs that your behavior toward a lower level person is unwelcomed. **Why?**

Many direct reports probably have some understandable fear that their reputation, performance appraisal or promotional opportunities could be hurt if they react to your unwelcomed behavior in an obvious, blunt or quick manner. This means that, **as a leader, you are less likely to hear obvious and candid feedback from others, making it even more important that you think before you act, not “let your hair down” in the mistaken belief that your power is no longer a factor, and keep your radar tuned to the subtle micro-message indicators that the impact of your conduct may be negative.**

16. Though Men and women of all backgrounds want and deserve the right to enjoy working together in a spirit of professional camaraderie, some work humor is just too risky. **Mom and Dad had it right when they warned us: “If you don’t know somebody well, don’t talk or joke with them about religion or politics”. Why?** Those subjects are so deeply held, private, sensitive and volatile, that regardless of our good intentions, we increase the risk that people will respond in an unpredictable and even negative way because of their own strong feelings about these subjects. Well, **in addition to politics and religion, you would probably agree that race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, and disability can also be pretty sensitive and volatile issues.** So, when we use humor about these diversity subjects, we all run the risk of it backfiring on ourselves, our colleagues, and our customers.
17. **Take the Workplace Humor Pledge: “I will only use humor that reduces stress and increases trust and camaraderie, and that has a good probability of making my colleagues and customers feel better about me, themselves, others, our organization, and the work that they do.”**

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18. **It’s Not Personal, It’s Professional -- Use the test of the *captive workplace*, not the *voluntary living room*.** When a joke, comment, touch, personal story or offensive language is shared in our homes, family barbecues or with our social friends, others who object are free

to act stupid, raise their voices, stop communicating, throw food, or just leave. Most laws permit some offensive behavior in our **voluntary, personal, social lives**. But, when we are at work or engaged in a work related activity, we are **legally considered to be in an involuntary, captive workplace** -- not free to react without fear of repercussions, not free to get up and walk out, and retaining the legal right to receive respectful treatment based on **our professional performance, not on our personal backgrounds**.

So -- Professional diversity competencies in the workplace are not about changing how we socialize, raise our families, or personally believe. It is about demonstrating professional skills that are essential in the work environment if we are to deal fairly & successfully with colleagues & customers from all backgrounds.

19. **Ask, “Is it professional?” not “Is it legal?”** Managers and employees need not act as mini-lawyers and make hourly judgments about what is or is not illegal. If you determine that your own or another’s behavior is unprofessional, that behavior should be stopped and changed. By applying the standard of *professionalism*, we protect ourselves and our colleagues from slipping into the danger zone of *illegal conduct*.
20. **When no “minorities” or women are present -- are sexist, racist or disrespectful comments or jokes made or condoned?**
If **“no”**, then you and your organization “get it” and “walk the talk”.
If **“yes”**, then race-gender-culture-based “in & out-group” inclusion and exclusion behaviors still exist. This contaminates the work climate, generates team conflict vs. collaboration and productivity, and exposes individuals and the organization to legal liability.

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21. **The “Gunsmoke Phenomena” helps. Managers who “draw a line in the sand”** by clearly, consistently and appropriately communicating “zero tolerance” for unprofessional conduct, help prevent harassment or discrimination before it ever occurs.

22. **“Friends don’t let friends harass!”** When we courageously take the leadership risk by appropriately interrupting or intervening when a friend treats a colleague unprofessionally, **we accomplish at least 6 goals. We: 1. Protect and support** targeted co-workers; **2. Prevent others** from joining in and putting themselves and others at risk; **3. Teach others** how to act professionally, responsibly and ethically; **4. Demonstrate leadership** courage of our convictions; **5. Protect our organization** from legal liability; and, **6. Protect our friend** from possible personal and professional trauma by giving early and honest feedback while she/he can still save face and repair the damage. **Better they should hear it from you now, than later from HR, Legal, or a plaintiff’s outside counsel.**
23. **We are all human, and will hopefully never stop learning and growing. Most of our biases,** (which were taught to us early by family, friends, teachers, & the media), **are not our fault. But, it is our responsibility to interrupt them at work** if we are to grow our own careers and advance the survival & growth of our organization.
24. Professional diversity competency is not only **the “right thing”**, but also the **“necessary business thing”** if your organization is to achieve the competitive, strategic advantage of being both the **“Employer of Choice” for the *best and brightest*** talent of all backgrounds, and the **“Provider of Choice”** for the increasingly diverse domestic and global market.

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