

Diversity Training Do's and Don'ts

By David Tulin, President – © Tulin DiversiTeam Associates

1. DO NOT expect it to change the system (policies & practices) and culture of the organization

DO expect it to reduce change-resistance & backlash, increase professional skills, & heighten commitment to an organization's comprehensive strategy of 21st century "Excellence Through Diversity" systems and culture transformation.

2. DO NOT make it the central element of an organization's "Excellence Through Diversity" change.

DO make it a necessary, but insufficient component of organization-wide systems & culture change.

3. DO NOT have Diversity Training sponsored & championed by HR, Training, or EEO/Affirmative Action professionals who report to middle or senior management.

DO have it sponsored & championed by professionals from Operations & HR, reflecting the crucial "people-productivity" linkage, who are Senior Executives or who report directly to the CEO.

4. DO NOT market it as "risk management" (legal compliance) or "sensitivity" (You're not currently, but we will make you sensitive), or "morale boosting," (touchy feely/feel good).

DO market it as but one of a number of planned vehicles to help drive the CEO & organization's values, the company's business mission & its ability to achieve the strategic competitive advantage.

5. DO NOT start from the bottom up.

DO start from the top down.

6. DO NOT combine it with EEO/Affirmative Action Training, focusing on regulations & legal compliance.

DO focus on actual work-based Diversity scenarios, problems, & opportunities, & demonstrate that with systems & culture change driven by business ethics & the competitive market, the EEO & Affirmative Action function will shrink, limited to dealing with those rare exceptions.

7. DO NOT schedule it as one of a series of elective courses for employees to select to fulfill their annual minimum number of training hours.

DO schedule it as a required, professional development competency program - - Ethics, Quality, Sales & Safety Training are not voluntary.

8. DO NOT include participants who have arbitrarily chosen or been selected for that session's date, regardless of their job location, job level, or job function.

DO consciously populate each session with participants who work, & can grow & practice their new skills together.

9. DO NOT select only women or so-called "minorities" to lead the training.

DO select as leaders (either as partners or in alternating sessions) an inter-racial, inter-gender team, including white Anglo men.

10. DO NOT use it to "fix" discriminatory behaviors or practices.

DO use it to impart knowledge & skills to help prevent future unprofessional behaviors & practices and generate systems & culture change recommendations.

11. DO NOT argue that Diversity is the sensitive and right thing to do.

DO argue that Diversity is the necessary business survival & growth thing to do, as well as the right thing to do.

12. DO NOT solely focus on awareness &/or skills training.

DO begin with raising awareness, move to skills training, build to systems & culture assessment, and conclude with participant-initiated organizational improvement action recommendations.

13. DO NOT focus primarily on gender and race differences.

DO focus on those "obvious" (i.e., race, gender, national origin) and "less obvious" (i.e., job function, job level, social style, credentials, military service)

differences that the organization may unfairly & unproductively use to distort merit-based judgments about talent, skills & contributions.

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14. DO NOT equate race & sex-based stereotypes & treatment with personality function, and education-based stereotypes and treatment.

DO confirm that everyone may experience unfair or unprofessional treatment resulting from one or more of their differences, but that all differences are not created equal, with some "melting away" after time, while others are harder to eliminate.

15. DO NOT teach that differences such as race, age, disability, gender, Vietnam Vet status, sexual orientation, & national origin do not matter & must be ignored.

DO teach that differences such as age, gender, social style, race credentials, job function & religion should not disproportionately matter, but in workplace relationships & decision-making, often do. Provide analytic & behavioral skills to prevent, identify, intervene, & overcome behaviors, practices & policies when Diversity incompetency is, or may be perceived as, an issue.

16. DO NOT teach anthropological or sociological "truths" & "culture-specific" competencies as a guide for dealing with diverse groups.

DO affirm that there is Diversity within as well as between diverse groups, & effective communication & managing techniques must be based on our cross-cultural knowledge & our own personal & professional experiences with specific colleagues.

17. DO NOT teach that everyone must be treated the same.

DO teach that everyone must be treated "equal/different but fair."

18. DO NOT teach people how to psychologize, intuit, or analyze the probable motives & biases behind their & their colleagues' behaviors.

DO raise participants' awareness that biases from the outside & inside culture are inherited and often present, but at work they must be held, & must hold others accountable for professional behaviors, not for assumed motives.

19. DO NOT teach people what not to do, or advocate Politically Correct ("PC") language & behavior based on current taboos or the newest fads.

DO move from what not to do, to what to do, encouraging employees to behave in a Professionally Competent ("PC") manner based upon principles of respect & its impact on professional & organizational business performance.

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20. DO NOT advocate using kid gloves or "walking on egg shells" in giving performance feedback to women & people of color, & justify lowering the bar of expectations and performance standards for "them."

DO advocate giving ongoing & honest praise & criticism to everyone, including women & people of color without compromising or lowering the standards of performance excellence.

21. DO NOT put the guilt or blame on the "oppressors," & instill sympathy for the "victims."

DO empower every employee, regardless of background, to hold & be held accountable for demonstrating behaviors that advance a merit-based work climate that judges the merits of the contribution, rather than the merits of who the contributor is.

22. DO NOT blame white Anglo men for the racism & sexism that exists in society and in the organization.

DO hold women, people of color, & white Anglo men accountable not for biases that have existed long before they were born, but for demonstrating skills to counter-act unprofessional practices & for demonstrating commitment to 21st century, domestic & global Diversity Best Practices.

23. DO NOT assume that Diversity's best allies are always women or people of color.

DO prepare participants to look for surprising Diversity allies, many of whom may be white Anglo men, & a few of whom may not be some women & people of color.

24. DO NOT evaluate success of the sessions in response to the "scores" participants give to the session or to the facilitators.

DO evaluate the success of the sessions not only by participant "scores," but also by real time follow-up interviews & the monitoring of the subsequent workplace behavior & climate improvements.

25. DO NOT stop after the session is over.

DO provide follow-up mechanisms to reinforce the spirit, content & skills of the session, hold people accountable for the new policies & practices taught, & channel each session's change recommendations to a "Z-sliced" Diversity Council that includes & reports to Senior Executives.

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