

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Diversity in the workplace

As the work world continues to become more and more diverse, the role of a people leader is that much more challenging. With such a broad range of backgrounds, beliefs and experiences all coming together, it can be difficult for people to work together effectively. But, with a little extra understanding and some added insight, it doesn't have to be hard.

To lead a diverse team you have to understand why an inclusive workplace is so important, recognize what you can do to learn more about the many cultures of your team, and make sure you're sensitive to the complexities of cultural diversity.

Why is Inclusiveness so Important?

Managing diversity means acknowledging people's differences and seeing these differences as valuable. Supporting and encouraging a diverse business will help you recruit the best talent, keep your prized employees on board and deliver a better product, service or final outcome. A work culture that supports diversity will encourage employees to develop their strengths, think outside of the box, take risks and share innovative ideas. Ignoring diversity issues will not only cost you and your organization time and money, but can leave you with employees who are less productive because they feel unsupported.

Bringing People Together

As a leader, you need to learn more about and be sensitive to the many cultures of your teammates. It's tempting to look for a one-size-fits-all solution for diversity issues in the workplace. Unfortunately, because diversity is so complex, there's no step-by-step process to follow. Advice and strategies for one situation may not work for a similar problem in a different context. To encourage and support inclusiveness in your workplace make sure to:

Set an example. The single most important way to create a more inclusive work environment is to lead the way. Workplace attitudes usually start from the top and trickle down—recognize the value of diversity and support it in every way possible. Look for workshops or courses to help you lead a diverse workplace and, if possible, organize a seminar for your team to improve their understanding of each other.

Ask for input. If you want to create a more inclusive work environment why not look to your diverse team for help? Kick-start the discussion with a suggestion box, brainstorming session or online survey to examine what works and what areas need to be improved. Consider creating a "diversity team" that meets each month to talk about your progress and suggests new initiatives. This will help you identify problem areas, point out the source of diversity challenges and suggest solutions as a team.

Recognize fair isn't equal. Many leaders make the mistake of assuming that being fair means treating every employee exactly the same. The "golden rule" to treat others as you "would like to be treated" is a dated philosophy that doesn't necessarily apply to our diverse workforce. You need to look at each member of your team as an individual with unique needs and make adjustments along the way.

Be accommodating. As an intercultural manager you will have to be flexible if you're going to support the many cultures in your workplace. Show respect and courtesy by modifying your vacation policies to accommodate cultural requests, or booking meetings around faith-based event dates. If there are language barriers in the office, pair your employee with another team member who speaks their

language and make sure your communication methods are reaching everyone effectively. Also, make sure you consider things like cultural food requirements at your lunch meetings and dress codes that support different backgrounds.

Celebrate your differences. As a leader, you need to help your staff open their eyes and come to terms with any of their own biases. Find ways for employees to share their culture with the rest of the team while getting to know each other a little better. Organize a “global” potluck lunch or celebrate a different cultural event in the workplace each quarter or month. This will help you break down any barriers that can divide your employees, learn more about unique cultures and send a welcoming and supportive message to your staff.

Inclusive businesses enjoy the benefits of getting the most out of their employees and creating a more committed and loyal team. Create a culture of inclusion and diversity by being flexible, respectful and taking action to bring your team together. Treating diversity in the workplace as an asset to you and your business will allow you to boost your bottom line and establish your organization as a dynamic, welcoming place to work.

If you require support to deal with a sensitive employee situation, contact LifeWorks·fgi to find out more about the consultation and training services your Employee Assistance Program provides.

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