



# Insights

## Supporting a Diverse Workforce

# EAP Toolkit: Resources to Promote and Support a Diverse Workforce

In today's diverse work environment, it is important to embrace individual differences by recognizing everyone's unique contribution to the organization. That requires sensitivity to the cultural backgrounds, native languages and social practices of those around us. Your ComPsych® GuidanceResources® Employee Assistance Program (EAP) understands this and is available to help, not just in the workplace, but also at home or in your community. Benefits of creating a more inclusive organization include lower turnover, higher employee morale, increased engagement amongst co-workers and more. This resource guide explains how the EAP can assist with the challenges of building, supporting and being a part of a diverse work environment and offers materials to help supervisors and employees understand and embrace these challenges.

## Resources Available Through Your ComPsych® GuidanceResources® Program

Your GuidanceResources® program has been designed to give you and your colleagues simple, fast, direct access to confidential services 24 hours a day, seven days a week by phone, online or via our mobile site. To help you better understand how your Employee Assistance Program works, here is an overview of typical services offered by an EAP:

### Confidential Counseling

Life can be stressful. The EAP offers relief with short-term counseling services for you and your dependents to help handle concerns constructively, before they become issues. You can call anytime about marital, relationship and family problems; stress, anxiety and depression; grief and loss; job pressures or substance abuse. Your call will be answered by our highly trained GuidanceConsultants<sup>SM</sup>, clinicians who will listen to your concerns and guide you to the resources you need.

### Work-Life Solutions

Too much to do, and too little time to get it all done? Work-life specialists at ComPsych® do the research and provide qualified referrals and customized resources for child and elder care, moving, pet care, college planning, home repair, buying a car, planning an event, selling a house and more.

### Legal Support

With GuidanceResources®, you have an attorney on call. You can speak with an expert about divorce, custody, adoption, real estate, debt and bankruptcy, landlord/tenant issues, civil and criminal actions and other legal issues. If you require representation, you can be referred to a qualified attorney for a free 30-minute consultation and will be given a 25 percent reduction in customary legal fees thereafter.

### Financial Information

Everyone has financial questions. With GuidanceResources®, you can get answers about budgeting, debt management, tax issues and other money concerns from on-staff CPAs, Certified Financial Planners® and other financial experts, simply by calling the toll-free number.

### GuidanceResources® Online

Guidanceresources.com and the mobile app, GuidanceNow<sup>SM</sup>, allow anytime, anywhere access to expert information on thousands of topics, including relationships, work, school, children, wellness, legal, financial and free time. You can search for qualified child and elder care, attorneys and financial planners, as well as ask questions, take self-assessments and more.

GuidanceResources® benefits are strictly confidential. To view the ComPsych HIPAA privacy notice, please go to [www.guidanceresources.com/privacy](http://www.guidanceresources.com/privacy). If you have questions regarding your company's program, please contact your internal benefits manager or ComPsych account manager.

## How the ComPsych® GuidanceResources® Program Can Help

### Career Support Tools:

- Getting along with others on the job
- Improving interpersonal communication
- Dealing with work-related stress
- Becoming a better manager or colleague

### Work-Life Balance

- Vacation planning
- Wedding and event planning
- Pet-sitting services
- College planning

### Legal Concerns

- Divorce and child custody
- Wills and estate planning
- Real estate/landlord-tenant relations

### Financial Issues

- Credit card debt and liability
- Identity theft
- Retirement planning
- Income tax questions
- Budgeting help
- Insurance issues

### Counseling Assistance

- Grief or depression
- Chronic illness
- Substance abuse/addictions
- Domestic violence
- Parenting or relationship issues
- Finding community support groups

## Encouraging a Healthier, Happier, Better-educated Workforce

Your EAP is more than a response to crises or personal issues. It is a tool to promote a healthier, more productive and more cohesive workforce. As such, we regularly provide educational materials on thousands of health, well-being and workplace topics. These materials, along with the GuidanceResources® Online website and GuidanceNow<sup>SM</sup> mobile app, are designed to encourage easy distribution. The following diversity-related materials are examples of what is provided and can be used to educate and inform your colleagues. The first section is directed at helping managers promote and sustain a diverse workforce. The second section can help employees understand and embrace diversity.

New materials are produced regularly, so talk with your internal benefits manager about what else may be available to you.

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.

# Section 1

## Management Resources to Promote and Support a Diverse Workforce

- Diversity and Inclusion, What Does It Mean?
- Building a Diverse Workforce
- Maintaining a Diverse Workforce
- Flyer: Identifying Our Hidden Biases
- Poster: The ASK Model for Valuing Diversity

## Diversity and Inclusion: What does it mean?

Diversity is defined as the state of having people of different races or cultures in an organization or group. Recent events have made the push for diversity and inclusion in workplaces and school systems even greater. In order for improvement to continue, people must understand the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Exposure to diversity expands knowledge of the world and those who occupy it. There are many factors that contribute to diversity. These include differences in culture, age, race, political and religious beliefs, disability, socio-economic status, gender and sexual orientation. Diverse environments promote empathy and understanding among people who share differing experiences and thoughts. Exposure to diversity also increases knowledge of the world and builds respect among people of different backgrounds.

Inclusion is one way that people can experience diversity in the classroom, at work and elsewhere. Inclusion is defined as the act of including or the state of being included. In other words, inclusion is the opposite of discrimination, where people are treated differently or barred from certain experiences because of race, sex, age or other personal characteristics. The concept of inclusion focuses on allowing people of all backgrounds the ability to access and experience the same situations and resources. Inclusion promotes friendship, teamwork and equality while strengthening a group's sense of community.

### Resources

- Diversity Council Toolkit: [www.diversitycouncil.org/toolkit](http://www.diversitycouncil.org/toolkit)
- U.S. Office of Personnel Management: [www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/diversity-and-inclusion](http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/diversity-and-inclusion)
- The National Diversity Council: [www.nationaldiversitycouncil.org](http://www.nationaldiversitycouncil.org)
- Society for Human Resource Management: [www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/pages/diversity-and-inclusion.aspx](http://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/pages/diversity-and-inclusion.aspx)

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# Building a Diverse Workforce

The key to successfully building a diverse, high-quality workforce begins with a strong leadership commitment and knowledge of where the organization is today. Once a business is positioned to embrace change, a diversity program can be designed and implemented. The company must then show a sustained commitment to the goals and objectives of the plan once it is in place.

## Positioning the Company

Positioning a company has several aspects. One is ensuring strong commitment to the diversity program. This includes the critical components of top-level leadership support and the commitment of resources necessary to make new initiatives a reality. Next, it is important to have a realistic picture of the company's readiness to move forward, based both on current company demographics and on the cultural atmosphere and potential impediments that may exist. Finally, the information from each of these assessments should be integrated into the existing corporate workforce planning models and used to target opportunities for recruitment, hiring and retention.

With this commitment and information in hand, a company can be confident that it has positioned itself for success in designing and implementing an effective diversity program. The following sections examine the core components of the positioning process.

## Commitment

Commitment is the foundation of a successful effort to build and maintain a diverse, high-quality workforce. It should be clearly stated and communicated from the top leadership to employees at all levels. In addition, businesses need to take action to ensure that resources and staff are available for each stage of the diversity initiative.

Commitment can be demonstrated by:

- Encouraging leadership that creates an environment of inclusion and that values differences
- Assigning adequate resources to support diversity activities
- Ensuring that all employees are an integral part of the company's efforts to plan and conduct diversity activities
- Training employees in intercultural communication
- Encouraging managers to conduct targeted recruitment in support of stated diversity goals

## Assessing the Current Situation

Businesses must understand their current demographic situation. This can be achieved by developing a workforce profile. A workforce profile is a complete picture of the workforce and how it reflects diversity at all levels and in all areas of the organization.

## Environmental Assessment

Positioning also includes assessing the company's readiness to create and support a complete diversity management program. Many businesses already have active programs; others are less established. To design their programs to their best advantage, companies should develop a good understanding of their individual strengths and weaknesses.

One useful tool for assessing readiness is a survey that documents and measures the company's strengths and weaknesses in promoting diversity. Often called a cultural audit or an organizational assessment, these surveys examine such questions as:

- What structures are in place to support strong diversity management?
- What impediments do employees see that may affect the design of the program?
- Are company values present to sustain commitment to the program?

## Workforce Planning

Analyzing workforce trends and projections, determining skill gaps and needs, and devising succession planning strategies are critical steps for strategic business planning. These activities provide the facts managers need so they know where to assign resources, how to plan for the future work of the organization, and where to focus energy to cultivate and maintain a high-performance organization.

This information is used to assess whether the current workforce will assist in meeting tomorrow's goals. It will also help employers understand where the recruitment or retention focus should lie and what other actions are needed to create a supportive work environment.

One example of a workforce plan is a succession-planning program. Succession-planning programs are deliberate and systematic efforts to ensure continuity of leadership and critical staff skills in mission-critical positions, as well as encourage individual development. They are designed to ensure the continued effective performance of a business by identifying, developing and replacing key people over time. Succession planning provides an opportunity to align diversity management programs with the larger company objectives.

## Designing and Implementing a Diversity Program

When a business is positioned for success, it can proceed to design and implement its diversity program. Assessments of the workforce profile, the company's environment and future workforce needs should have identified strengths, weaknesses and targets of opportunity. Those will be important to factor into the specific activities that comprise the diversity program itself.

In general, a diversity program must include elements that build diversity through recruitment, outreach and hiring. There must also be elements that maintain diversity through the use of learning and development opportunities, rewards, recognition, and a supportive work environment.

Based on assessments of the current situation and environment and on workforce planning, a company can identify the type and number of positions to be filled, as well as any targeted needs. The company can then design a strategy to find and hire the diverse, high-quality workforce needed to achieve its mission.

## Recruitment

To build a diverse workforce, employers should incorporate tailored approaches to recruit and hire these individuals into their overall business strategies. The purpose of effective recruiting is to attract strong candidates who are prepared to meet a company's strategic goals and priorities and who will work well in the company's environment. Here are some examples of effective recruitment techniques:

- Ensure that recruiters and selection officials work closely with human resources staff.
- Maintain close relationships with HR professionals to facilitate a smooth and easy recruiting process.
- Know the competition and their recruiting needs.
- Current employees can provide recommendations regarding good sources of diverse candidates (their alma maters, professional organizations, etc.).
- Candidates must feel there is a match between their personal goals and the company's goals. To create and foster a positive image, state the company's mission and goals clearly and include an inspiring vision.
- Develop a theme for the recruiting message, and craft it to fit each audience.
- When developing a recruitment plan, consider campus visits and job fairs.
- Design a long-term recruitment plan with input from managers, supervisors and employees, as well as specialists in the areas of human resources management.
- Develop and maintain long-term partnerships with academia and professional associations for the purpose of recruiting high-quality candidates. The goal of partnering is to start the recruitment process ahead of the actual recruitment schedule.

Issuing one vacancy announcement is no longer an effective method of finding potential employees. Consider using a variety of common job search locations, such as:

- College placement centers
- Minority student associations
- College organizations for students with disabilities
- High schools
- Websites
- Newspapers and magazines
- Community newsletters
- Radio announcements
- Community centers
- Professional organizations
- Minority organizations
- Libraries

Make sure vacancy announcements provide a realistic preview of the jobs and highlight points of interest. Think about whether the job description would make an exceptional person want to work for the company.

Select a diverse group of recruiters that includes representatives from program areas, as well as human resources staff. Recruiters should have the ability to deliver the recruiting message effectively. This is an essential step in achieving quality results in recruiting for diversity.

Ensure that senior managers are directly involved in planning and conducting recruitment activities. Managers are often most familiar with a company's culture and needs.

Design a recruiter training program that includes information about internal hiring procedures, personnel flexibilities, effective interview techniques, affirmative employment goals and appropriate interview questions and behaviors.

Interviewers should make sure to follow-up with potential candidates. Send letters or make phone calls to candidates who were met on the recruitment trips. It is important to make sure that candidates have access to someone knowledgeable after the recruiting contact is over.

## Hiring

After finding high-quality candidates, companies must then hire them. When implementing a diversity program, several aspects of hiring are important to consider:

- Be quick to offer a qualified applicant the position. Often, if companies are unable to make quick job offers, good candidates are lost to competitors who are able to move quickly.
- Hire for part-time, intermittent and seasonal work (or use temporary and term appointments) where appropriate. This may attract a group of candidates who are not currently interested in full-time or permanent jobs.
- Consider using the authority to pay recruitment and relocation bonuses to increase the company's ability to compete with other employers.

## Resource

- U.S. Office of Personnel Management: [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)

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# Maintaining a Diverse Workforce

Achieving a diverse, high-quality workforce by successfully attracting and hiring the desired employee mix is only the first step. Having made investments to recruit and hire high-quality employees, companies risk wasting those efforts if they do not have a strong retention strategy. The company's next objective should be to ensure that valuable employees stay with the company.

Companies can provide a flexible and supportive work environment and emphasize employee learning and development to help retain a qualified and diverse workforce. Providing useful, supportive and appropriate leadership to employees and implementing effective rewards and recognition systems are also useful tools for aiding employee retention.

These aspects of work and working conditions are clearly becoming as important to employees' decisions to stay with an organization as their direct pay and benefits levels. A company that commits to cultivating these broader rewards will be far better positioned to retain the diverse workforce it builds.

## Supportive Work Environments

A supportive work environment is one that provides employees with the direction and tools they need to perform their work to the very best of their ability. Actions to support employees include:

- Ensuring that supervisors and managers receive leadership and diversity training. Their understanding of the benefits and rewards of a diverse workforce helps create a supportive work environment that enhances the potential of all employees.
- Emphasizing existing quality of work-life initiatives as effective policies that advance the interests of a diverse workforce. These initiatives include programs such as:
  - Alternative work schedules
  - Family-friendly leave programs
  - Part-time employment and job-sharing
  - Telecommuting
  - Dependent care support programs
  - Employee Assistance Programs
- Developing a process to provide reasonable accommodation to job applicants and employees with disabilities. Companies are required to make reasonable accommodations to the physical and mental limitations of an applicant or employee who is a qualified person with a disability, unless the accommodation would impose undue hardship on the business.
- Ensuring that businesses offer a safe and productive work environment. Employees spend a significant portion of their lives in their workplaces. Maintaining a clean, safe and pleasant work environment conveys a sense of pride and respect that helps keep employees on board.
- Fostering a community spirit and a sense of belonging by offering employees a vehicle for becoming involved outside the formal workplace in a variety of recreational and volunteer activities.

## Learning and Development

Professional development and training opportunities are important reasons valued employees choose to stay with an organization. Companies can use a variety of approaches to establish a climate that supports continuous learning and development, including:

- Establishing clear paths for acquiring the skills, knowledge and experience that employees need for their continual learning and career development.
- Using a variety of ways to provide training and development experiences for employees, such as mentoring programs, online training technology, and internal and external training courses.
- Providing training opportunities for all employees. Through investments in training, companies can reflect the value they place on employees and support employees in their own interest in keeping their skills updated in order to remain competitive.

- Encouraging employees to become mentors. In particular, senior managers should be strongly encouraged to mentor individuals from different cultural, racial or academic backgrounds.
- Using tuition reimbursement programs.
- Publicizing developmental opportunities for employees, such as detail assignments and leadership training, to give everyone interested a chance to participate in assignments that prepare them for higher-level positions.

## Rewards and Recognition

The systems that reward and engage employees are key to maintaining a diverse, high-quality workforce. All people desire to see their efforts acknowledged. Companies must be vigilant about ensuring that merit and results serve as the drivers of differences in rewards. Businesses should use all aspects of pay flexibilities and awards to retain top employees.

Companies can use awards to recognize significant contributions. These can be lump sum awards or accelerated pay provided through quality step increases. Businesses should continually monitor their use of awards, incentives and recognition to ensure that individuals and groups all receive their fair share based on transparent criteria and well-understood processes for nominating and granting awards.

Companies can also consider paying retention allowances when challenged to keep particular skills available. Businesses should continually monitor the use of such allowances to check for any evidence of discrimination and act quickly in the event any is detected. Such internal accountability will help preserve the credibility of such tools and their utility for dealing with retention problems.

## Sustaining Commitment

The mark of a truly successful diversity program is one that becomes ingrained in the culture and the business processes of a company and is sustained over time. Employers can take several steps to facilitate this continuity:

**Monitor results:** Companies should develop systems of measurement to continually monitor the effectiveness of their diversity initiatives and make adjustments as needed. The results should be shared and discussed with senior managers and supervisors.

**Regularly monitor** the agency workforce profile: Periodic analysis of the resulting data will help determine progress and successes. In turn, the data may be used to adjust recruiting strategies and other workforce planning initiatives as needed.

**Emphasize accountability:** To succeed in developing and sustaining strong diversity initiatives, businesses should hold their executives, managers and supervisors accountable for achieving results. Businesses can include accountability for hiring, retaining and developing a diverse, high-quality workforce into the performance management systems for managers and supervisors.

**Celebrate success:** In addition to holding managers and supervisors accountable for building and maintaining a diverse, high-quality workforce, companies should also remember to recognize successes. Identify and reward employees who successfully implement aspects of the diversity program.

**Maintain communication and development:** To sustain the successes of expanding the diversity of the workforce, businesses should ensure that they have effective communications strategies and diversity training in place for managers, supervisors and employees.

**Make training ongoing:** All staff and managers can take part in regularly scheduled trainings about the ways that having a diverse workforce is a strength for an entire company. Trainings can be on topics like the value of understanding differences, identifying a company's culture and cross-cultural communication.

## Resources

- U.S. Office of Personnel Management: [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)



# Identifying Our Hidden Biases

Diversity is a word that refers to differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, physical health and other differences in backgrounds or lifestyles. The opportunity at work and in our daily lives is to see others as individuals and to not judge them based on appearances or other aspects of their lives. Recognizing and accepting our differences can lead to more understanding and a better, more productive environment for everyone.

Discrimination based on appearance or other factors can be both blatant and subtle. A hidden form of bias occurs when people unintentionally stereotype. The best way to combat this is to be more aware of how we communicate, act and react toward others.

- Be aware of and avoid words, images and situations that suggest people of one type of group are all the same or even hold the same opinions. These kinds of words and gestures cause harm, even if they are unintended.
- Use race, ethnic origin or other identity only when relevant. In most cases, it is not necessary.
- Avoid clichés, qualifiers and connotations that reinforce stereotypes. They are often interpreted as ignorant, superior or offensive.
- Realize that patronizing remarks and tokenism aimed at specific groups can be offensive not only to those about whom the remarks are being made, but to others as well.

Resources such as Project Implicit help educate the public about hidden biases. Their assessments can help provide employees insight into their own biases. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

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# The ASK Model for Valuing Diversity

With so many personalities, cultures and backgrounds, there is great potential for miscommunication and false impressions to disrupt workflow and create bad feelings among co-workers. Of course everyone has the right to express his or her opinion and needs to respect the opinions of others, even if disagreed with. But work is not the place for controversial or potentially inflammatory comments. When in doubt about whether what you have to say may be insensitive to others, keep the ASK model of valuing diversity in mind:

**A is for awareness of self and others.** Be aware of how your words and behaviors affect others, as well as how their words and behaviors affect you. Also be aware of your own assumptions and prejudices.

**S is for sensitivity and skills.** Being sensitive and empathetic toward and willing to understand other people's needs, views and feelings is the key to developing effective, multicultural communication skills. Develop ways to communicate that reflect an understanding of and response to other people's views, as opposed to telling them your view and how they should behave as a result.

**K is for knowledge.** Seek to learn about cultures, experiences and values different from your own. Offer to share knowledge of your experience with others. The more knowledge we have of each other, the more we can truly embrace and value the diversity around us.

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# Section 2

## Workforce Resources for Supporting Diversity

- Workplace Diversity Standing Together
- How to Be an Inclusive Co-Worker
- Cross-Cultural Communication

## Workplace Diversity: Standing Together

Whether you are employed at an office, farm, restaurant, manufacturing facility or store, odds are you are surrounded by people from different cultures and backgrounds. Being employed in such a diverse and inclusive workforce requires sensitivity to the cultural backgrounds, native languages and social practices of those around you. This is particularly true at times of heightened racial or ethnic tensions.

We all know the importance of embracing the differences between individuals by recognizing everyone's unique contribution to the organization. Employees who work well together and treat each other equally and with respect are the foundation for any successful enterprise. But during anxious times for any minority or ethnic group, it is important that we be extra sensitive to outside tensions to ensure that they do not spill over into the workplace. Often, that means taking the extra step to head off misunderstandings before they happen, as well as being understanding and patient with others who may make a mistake that offends you in some way.

The following suggestions can help anyone ensure that their workplace is a more inclusive, productive and accepting environment for everyone, even during difficult times.

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**K is for knowledge.** Seek to learn about cultures, experiences and values different from your own. Offer to share knowledge of your experience with others. The more knowledge we have of each other, the more we can truly embrace and value the diversity around us.



## The New Golden Rule

Another step you can take is to use the New Golden Rule: Treat others the way they would like to be treated. If you're confused about what that means, ask them. Your question will help avoid misunderstandings and can open a valuable exchange of information. Some other tips to keep in mind:

- Understand and respect individual differences. Remember that not everyone sees things the same way you do and keep an open mind toward others.
- Be assertive. Let other people know how you want to be treated, and don't be afraid to speak up if something makes you uncomfortable. How will people know that you find a particular expression or behavior offensive unless you tell them?
- Be thankful if someone has the courage and sensitivity to tell you how you've offended them. Don't get defensive; the only way you can correct the situation is through honest communication.

## What Else You Can Do

Ellen Bettman's *Without Bias: A Guidebook for Nondiscriminatory Communication* offers some ideas on positive ways to experience diversity:

- Make a list of things unique to your culture and ask a co-worker of a different nationality to do the same. By sharing the lists you will discover interesting differences and, likely, some similarities.
- Experience a new viewpoint, by tasting food from a different culture, volunteering for an organization whose members are different from you or attending a religious service of a different faith or culture.
- If your co-workers tell bigoted jokes or use racist/sexist/homophobic language, ask them to stop. At the very least, they should alter their behavior in your presence.
- If approached with care, most people welcome questions about their heritage and culture. It is a way for them to inform you of their preferences and experiences, and a way for you to learn more about human differences.

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## How to Be an Inclusive Co-Worker

A recent report on recruiting trends stated “If diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance”. While employers are responsible for organizing efforts in diversity and inclusion, such effort need to be reinforced by employees. Developing good work relationships can be difficult because everyone has different personalities, working styles, goals, attitudes and moods. Working well with others involves understanding human nature, being willing to compromise, and looking beyond the surface to understand people and the reasons for their actions.

Employees who get along with different types of people in the workplace show off their flexibility and adaptability, two traits that are highly sought after by employers. For a company to be successful, employees need to respect each other and work together. An acute awareness of personal biases and an openness to listen to your co-workers are key ingredients in the recipe for success. The most important thing to remember when communicating with co-workers, especially those who might be victims of microaggressions in the workplace, is to listen with an open heart. Here’s how:

- **Stand up for your peers.** If you witness repeated behavior between co-workers that is causing undue stress on one of them, let the affected co-worker know in private you see the behavior and support them. Spotting the problem and putting a name to it helps empower change.
- **Educate yourself.** Take the time to research inclusion so that you come off as authentic in your efforts. Just as learning any new skill, don’t put off on practicing inclusion because you don’t feel as if you know enough. The focus is on progress, not perfection.
- **Identify your hidden biases.** Do you open the door for one co-worker but do not even consider another? It’s easy to be biased without knowing it. For instance, assuming gender with a pronoun based on a name, appearance, or job title can send a harmful message.
- **Engage new employees.** New hires have a particularly difficult time building confidence and rapport in the work place. Being the first to initiate a conversation with a new employee empowers them to feel confident in their new environment. Check in on new co-workers thirty days into their new role to see if you can be of help.
- **Follow your companies lead.** If your employer offers diversity and inclusion training, always participate.

Learning how to be inclusive at work is key to developing the relationships needed to work productively and to feel connected to the people you work with.

### Resources

- Workplace Solutions ‘6 Tips on How to Be Inclusive at Work’  
<https://www.wseap.com/how-to-be-inclusive-at-work/>

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## Cross-Cultural Communication

We live in an interconnected world, a fact that has given rise to many changes in the ways that businesses and organizations operate. Workplaces are more diverse, employees on a team might be scattered or around the world, and businesses might expand their audience base to include consumers around the world. All of these factors have converged to make cross-cultural communication a vital part of organizational success.

Cross-cultural communication is the process of recognizing both differences and similarities among cultural groups in order to effectively engage within a given context. In other words, cross-cultural communication refers to the ways in which people from different cultural backgrounds adjust to improve communication with one another.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reports that cultural diversity contributes to success that “multi-cultural work forces also contribute to creativity and innovation thanks to diverse perspectives and experiences. The following tips can help one improve their communication across cultures:

- **Check your bias:** Take the time to develop self-awareness. Acknowledge your own implicit bias and analyze your interactions with others. Make a conscious effort to empathize with your peers.
- **Be as clear as possible:** Whether it is an expectation, emotion, question or other message, be very specific about what you are trying to express, especially when working in a situation where the team might be working virtually.
- **Step outside of your comfort zone:** Trying new methods to understand other perspectives can help you overcome fear of saying the wrong thing.
- **Be open minded:** On a personal and organizational level, close mindedness can be a barrier to cross-cultural communication. Exposure to new ideas and concepts and the effort in understanding them can inform your growth moving forward.
- **Engage meaningfully:** Connect with someone who has a different perspective than you and ask questions. Gain a deeper understanding through active listening and thank them for their time.
- **Refrain from judging or disagreeing:** When listening, aim to understand and don't interrupt.
- **Avoid criticizing, ridiculing, embarrassing, whining at or nagging:** Demonstrate that fair, constructive and open dialogue is the best way to settle differences.
- **Give each person in the discussion an equal say:** Be sure to include everyone and respect those who do not want to participate.
- **Avoid speaking on behalf of a co-worker unless asked to:** Let that person indicate his or her own preferences and opinions.

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