

Script

Diversity: Embracing Diversity in the Workplace

Instructor: Welcome to this course on Embracing Diversity. Come on in and find a seat. We'll get started in just a few minutes.

VIGNETTE 1

Kylie: Hey, guys! Over here! We can sit together.

George: I don't know why we have to take this course every year. I don't think things have changed all that much.

Sharon: I think that's the reason. Things haven't changed enough in our culture.

Dwight: I remember last year's class. Remember that guy that got offended by MOST of what the instructor said? He was really angry.

Kylie: Yeah, even though the instructor told us that might happen. This class touches on lots of sensitive subjects and it's important not to take things personally.

George: I just don't understand all this Politically Correct stuff. I think its gone way too far. I don't want to be afraid to open my mouth...that I might offend someone.

Sharon: Seriously George...You don't see any value in learning about diversity?

George: No. Everyone's skin is just too thin. I thought since we elected a black man President, we could move on.

Kylie: Sorry George, that's just a good step in the right direction.

George: (sarcastic) Great.....

Instructor: Thank you all for joining me today. Let's get started. In the past this class has been called many different names but this year I decided to go the next step. So welcome to "Embracing Diversity."

I want to take you to the next step beyond tolerating or just accepting diversity to embracing our differences and understanding what each person can bring to a company to make it even better.

So what is “Embracing Diversity”? ‘Embracing diversity’ is an environment wherein differences are valued and integrated into every part of an organization’s operation.

Our differences can make a company more creative, more productive and more innovative. Each person brings a unique perspective to a task and by looking at a problem from different viewpoints we can find the best and most cost-efficient way to solve a variety of issues. Therefore, it’s important that we see our differences as adding to the solution rather than being a problem.

The main goal of this course is to help you understand the importance of diversity in the workplace and how a diverse workplace benefits everyone. By the end of the session, you should be able to:

- Identify the ways in which we are diverse
- Identify both the challenges and the opportunities of having a diverse workforce
- Identify ways to avoid discrimination in the workplace
- Identify ways to embrace diversity, *and*
- Identify interpersonal diversity skills

When we think about diversity we normally just think about race and gender but I want to expand your definition. Diversity means any way that we are different.

It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It’s about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual. The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance, understanding and respect.

Let’s look at some of the ways in which we are diverse:

- By *race*— keep in mind that members of the same race can be very different from one another
- By *gender*—gender differences are particularly noticeable in jobs that traditionally have been all male or all female, but now increasingly include both males and females

- By *physical appearance*—such as height, weight or hair color
- By *age*—age and generational differences are likely to be more noticeable as the number of older Americans in the workforce increases
- By *education*—educational differences can affect the way different people approach the same job

Continued...

- By *cultural background*—this may reflect race or country of origin or what language is spoken at home
- By *religion* – our values and ethics may be effected by our religion but it may also reflect how we celebrate different holidays
- By *sexual orientation* – this often becomes a moral issue so we are unwilling to look at our biases
- And finally, by *physical abilities*—these take into account both special talents and special needs, including physical disabilities

VIGNETTE 2

Instructor: Now I want you to think about the ways in which our workplace is diverse. Please break into small groups and discuss the different kinds of diversity you see every day in your workplace. See if you can find some types of diversity I haven't even mentioned.

George: Wow, I didn't realize that there were so many different kinds of diversity. I just thought it was race and gender.

Dwight: We've a lot of diversity here at this table...let alone in the office as a whole. And then take a look at our customers. I think we easily cover all of those categories and more.

Sharon: It's amazing how subtle some of our differences can be but what a big difference they can make. My parents grew up in the North and then moved to the South for a job. They had a really hard time making friends. Most of their friends were other Northerners that had moved south like them. In this day and age you wouldn't think that would matter.

Kylie: No, but I understand the subtle differences. My husband is very educated and good at his job but he has a bunch of tattoos. People look at him strange. There's still an

“image” people expect you to fit into in the workplace and tattoos aren’t normally a part of that image.

George: Yeah, but you can’t expect me not to notice those differences.

Sharon: The key is not about being blind but about accepting our difference and finding out about the “person” underneath.

Instructor: OK, let’s come back to the group now. I hope you were able to see the large variety of diversity in your workplace and your life.

Instructor: Here are just a few interesting diversity trends to show you why this issue is important:

- Today’s American workforce includes nearly one-third who are minorities, nearly one-half who are women, and more than 10 percent who are aged 55 or older—so it’s already pretty diverse.
- By the year 2020, the percentage of minorities in the workforce is projected to go up to more than 40 percent, and the percentage of older workers is expected to go up, as well.
- Finally, by the year 2050, nearly half of the workforce is expected to be minorities, and the percentage of workers over the age of 55 will increase to almost 20 percent.

Diversity is not about being blind to our differences but instead it’s about seeing the differences and appreciating how these differences can work together so the “sum is greater than its parts.” Think about an orchestra or band. There needs to be many different types of instruments all playing in harmony to make beautiful music. If all you have are drummers they might do a nice solo but you need more variety to play a great piece of music. Corporations are like that as well. You need a variety of different types of people to make an organization function at its peak potential.

Now, with all this diversity in the workplace it’s important to look at your own biases, stereotypes and prejudices. We all have them. Where do they come from? Why do we believe what we believe? And, how can we move beyond them?

First, let's look at where our biases and prejudices come from. Consider your own history and how you have been influenced to think about people of diverse backgrounds.

There are many different ways that we are influenced. Some important influences for most of us are:

- Our parents, who are often the number one influence on how we think about people who are different
- Our teachers and coaches, who may be our mentors in early life
- Our peers—what our circle of friends think about people with different backgrounds, *and*
- The news and entertainment media, including radio, TV, movies and advertisements

All of these can influence what we think about other people.

Activity

VIGNETTE 3

Instructor: Think about the ways your own background and other influences in your life may have affected the way you view diverse people. Now take a moment in your small groups to discuss how you have learned your own biases, stereotypes and prejudices.

George: My father was very prejudiced. He used a slang word for every minority. I grew up thinking that those were the correct words when referring to different people. I didn't know they were derogatory until I was in high school and got beat up for using them. I have worked hard to overcome his influence but I know I still have a lot of biases and stereotypical beliefs. It seems to me that stereotypes are there for a reason – often people fit their stereotype. My humor is a little off color and can be offensive to some people. I think we're too concerned about being politically correct. People just can't take a joke these days. I think all these "sensitivity" classes are a waste of time. We should be grateful for how far we have come and not keep beating a dead horse. Let's move on. I don't think you can teach an old dog new tricks.

Sharon: (sarcastic) That's an interesting take on things George.

I'll go next. I'm older than you guys. When I was little I remember separate bathrooms and drinking fountains for whites and blacks. Segregation was the norm. When I was first working in a corporation as a secretary I made friends with a young man who worked in the mail room – he was black. My boss warned me to not be friends with him if I wanted to move up in the company. It was **not** OK for a young white women to be friends with a young black male. I knew skin color didn't matter but society didn't agree with me. I'm so glad we have moved as far forward as we have, even if we still have a long way to go.

Kylie: My mom is white and my dad is Asian. They're the 60s hippies type, so I grew up with "Peace & Love". They taught me to accept everyone for who they are and not what they look like. I grew up with integration so that's all I know. It's funny...when I was in high school I dated a guy from the Middle East who went to my school. My parents were so excited to embrace him into our family....until we started talking about getting married. Then they did some back peddling. Telling me how hard it is for a mixed marriage to succeed especially with different religions. It didn't matter, because when I went off to college we broke up, but I found it to be **extremely** hypocritical of them. I know our society has a long way to go but I hope in some small way I can help usher in a new level of acceptance for everyone no matter our differences.

Dwight: I'll share. As a black man I understand racial struggles. I grew up in a black neighborhood and I saw firsthand the difficulties my family and friends faced. I knew I wanted to make a better life for myself and my family. I was the first person in my family to go to college and my parents were very proud of me but I had a hard time finding a job. When I did find a job, I remember my new boss didn't expect much of me. People seem to underestimate my abilities because of my skin color. I always have to work harder and longer than my coworkers to prove myself and gain their respect. I don't want a free ride. I just want the opportunity to show my talents just like everyone else. When my wife and I moved into a white upper middle class neighborhood, you should have seen the looks we got but now that they know us we've made some great friends. I just always feel like I have to work harder to prove myself.

Instructor: OK, let's come back to the group now. It was interesting listening to your conversations. It's good that you understand where your biases come from so that you can address them and not pass them on to the next generation.

Instructor: It's important that we be aware of these differences, even though they may not come through in a workplace every day.

There are challenges in being part of a diverse workforce if you're prepared for it:

- Differences among people are OK. Keep in mind that being "different" doesn't mean "better" or "worse"—it just means "different."
- Coordinating different styles of working can be challenging, because not everyone approaches a task exactly the same way.
- Learning to communicate across cultural and language differences can also be a real challenge. Clear and open communication is the key to working successfully in a diverse group.
- Developing flexibility is another important ingredient to dealing with diversity. It's important not only to listen to new ideas but also to implement different approaches.
- Finally, we should be willing to adapt to change. This includes both changes in the workforce itself and changes in the way we approach our daily tasks.

But along with the challenges of diversity, there are plenty of positive opportunities:

- A diverse workplace can help attract and retain high-quality people from various backgrounds.
- Morale increases when everyone feels that he or she is welcome and appreciated, regardless of background.
- Productivity improves as morale increases.
- Accepting and encouraging diversity reduces discrimination and the risk of lawsuits.
- Decision making improves when there's a diversity of approaches present in the workplace.
- And finally, our organization's profile and reputation in the marketplace improves when the workplace becomes known for encouraging diversity and treating all employees fairly.

Now let's turn to the issue of discrimination in a diverse workplace.

First and foremost, it's illegal to discriminate against someone in any aspect of employment, including:

- Recruitment, hiring and firing
- Salary and benefits

- Promotions, transfers and layoffs
- Opportunities for training or apprenticeships, and
- Retirement plans and disability leave policies

Another form of discrimination is harassment of a person or group of persons because of their differences. Harassment can include:

- Making offensive comments or actions, slurs or jokes based on someone's race, national origin, religion, gender or age
- Segregating a person or group of people from others on the basis of these characteristics
- Stereotyping or making judgments about the ability of a person based on these characteristics
- Making unwanted and unwelcome sexual advances of any kind or sexually offensive remarks or actions directed at another person, *or*
- Making derogatory comments about another person's cultural or religious practices

VIGNETTE 4

Instructor: I want us to look at how subtle discrimination can be. Sometimes our biases are so subtle we don't even see them ourselves until someone points them out. Can anyone think of a story they have from their own life or about someone they know that has faced subtle discrimination?

Sharon: I can.

Instructor: Yes, Sharon.

Sharon: A friend of mine got his Masters degree from MIT in Engineering. He's Haitian and his name is Patrice. He sent out his resume and all the interview offers he got were for secretarial positions in engineering companies. He decided to change his name on his resume to Patrick and then the offers were pouring in for top engineering positions. It was the exact same resume! As a woman, I was appalled. That means that a woman with the exact same education would be offered a secretarial position not an engineering position! I know salaries are still not the same for men and women but I wouldn't think in this day and age that job opportunities were still gender related.

Instructor: Thank you Sharon for sharing. That is a good example of subtle biases because I bet if you asked those potential bosses they probably didn't even realize what

they did. They just read the name at the top of the resume and made an assumption about what job the person was applying for.

Instructor: Any other examples of subtle discrimination?

Dwight: Yes, I have one.

Instructor: OK Dwight. Go ahead.

Dwight: A friend of mine is in a wheelchair. She's a paraplegic. She was in a car accident a few years ago. She's well educated and worked as a corporate middle manager before the accident. After the accident, she had a hard time finding a job that would accept her with her disability. Everywhere she went, there were stairs! Even if it was just one step, she couldn't get into a building. I remember driving around with her and she would show me all the places she used to go and now she couldn't get in because they didn't have a ramp. As a non-disabled person, I don't even think about one step here or there but for her it's a nightmare. I think most people are like me and don't even think about it but for her it's a subtle form of discrimination.

Instructor: Thanks Dwight. I agree. Most of us don't even think about a "step" being a form of discrimination but it can be. I'm sure your friend had a lot to offer a company but most of them didn't want to bother to make way for a disabled person.

Activity

Instructor: This is a good time to mention that there are a number of legal protections from discrimination and harassment that help support a diverse workplace. These laws include:

- Title VII (seven) of the Civil Rights Act, prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of race, color, gender or national origin. The only exception is if one of these characteristics is absolutely necessary to perform a job, such as hiring a female to monitor the female restroom.
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act, or ADEA, prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of age; employees who are age 40 or older are protected by this law.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, prohibits discrimination on the basis of physical disability and requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for disabled persons who are otherwise qualified.
- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits the federal government from discriminating against qualified, disabled persons.
- Finally, the Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from having different pay practices on the basis of gender.

VIGNETTE 5

Instructor: Now let's take a look at some actions and you tell me if they are illegal and what law protects against each action? ... Not hiring someone for a position because he or she is Mexican.

George: Yes, that's illegal under Title VII (seven) of the Civil Rights Act.

Instructor: You're right George. Here's the next one, repeatedly telling ethnic jokes in the workplace even though the jokes offend certain people.

Kylie: That's also illegal based on Title VII (seven) of the Civil Rights Act.

Instructor: Correct Kylie.

Instructor: How about...Failing to promote an employee because he or she is over the age of 50.

Dwight: That's illegal based on the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

Instructor: You got it Dwight. What about...Paying a woman less money to do the same job as a man.

Sharon: That's illegal based on the Equal Pay Act.

Instructor: Thank you Sharon. And last but not least...what about...Firing an employee because he or she needs special accommodation, such as a ramp, to do his or her job.

George: Yes, that's illegal based on the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Instructor: That's right George.

VIGNETTE 6

Instructor: Can you think of any other overt or covert forms of discrimination?

Kylie: I can.

Instructor: Go ahead, Kylie.

Kylie: One of my friends is an older gay male. He's been in a committed relationship for the last 20 years. I never thought about the subtle ways that he's discriminated against until we had a long talk the other day. He told me that even though his co-workers can have pictures of their partners and families on their desks he can't. He's still very "in the closet" at his office. He's afraid he might get fired if his boss found out he was gay. His boss is a conservative religious man and thinks homosexuality is immoral. So when they have office parties and everyone else brings their spouse or partner he can't. He either goes alone or brings a "cover girlfriend" so he can fit in. Also, when he comes back from a vacation, he can't show the pictures to his co-workers because they all include his partner, Scott. He doesn't invite anyone from work to his house and he's always looking over his shoulder when he goes out, like to the grocery store. He lives in fear because of who he loves. I just think that's wrong.

Instructor: That's a great story Kylie. You're right...we don't think about things like that on a regular basis but discrimination is alive and well....

Instructor: Yes, George?

George: Growing up in a very biased family, I never thought about discrimination and prejudice this way. Now that I think about it, I haven't been very sensitive to other people's situations. I've been so focused on me and my career I haven't stopped to understand how my biases and stereotypes can hurt someone. I just realized... I need to learn some new ways of thinking and dealing with people who are different from me. I don't want to keep offending people. I really am a nice guy.

Instructor: Thanks for sharing, George. I'm glad you're gaining some insight.

Instructor: So, now that we understand some of the problems...let's look at some solutions.

How can we keep moving our society and our workplace forward in this effort to Embrace Diversity?

With changing demographics in the workplace, diversity offers many challenges to companies and employers. But in the wake of these changes a new paradigm is emerging that places the focus of diversity on integration. Today, leading companies are seeing that workplace diversity is important to organizations that focus on human capital. These companies see their job as talent management and leadership development. They look for the qualities and talents they want in an employee and focus on bringing those out rather than on the differences of each person.

Think about it like this: Your 'Beliefs' determine your 'Attitude' and your 'Attitude' determines your 'Actions'.

Belief = Attitude = Actions

So it's important to look at your long held beliefs and make some changes, otherwise you can't change your actions. Once you truly believe that all people are created equal, each with their own gift to share – your attitude will shift and your actions will follow. Changing your beliefs about our differences is where you start – changing your behaviors is where you end up.

The process of taking action to create change begins within you and then extends to influence others. We all have beliefs and attitudes about culture, race, gender and ethnicity which include or exclude others. By taking a hard look at these we can each begin to make the much needed changes within our lives, our workplace and our society as a whole.

Working with people in a diverse workplace also requires different interpersonal skills. It could be said that certain communication competencies promote good communication in a diverse workplace.

Some of these competencies include:

- Active/nonjudgmental listening
- Willingness to challenge your concepts about diversity
- Collaboration skills
- Conflict resolution and change management skills

- Sensitivity toward terms labeling groups regarding diversity
- Ability to identify diversity issues and understand related tensions
- Intercultural team-building
- Ability to express respect and appreciation
- Openness to learning about others who are different, and
- Ability to educate others on how to build diverse people skills

VIGNETTE 7

Instructor: Now, let's do some brainstorming. With these skills in mind, what are some practical things you can do in your office to Embrace Diversity?

Sharon: Learn the names of the people you work with, and use their names frequently. This shows that you recognize and respect them as individuals.

Kylie: Show interest in the lives of your co-workers beyond the workplace. Ask members of other groups about their cultures and traditions.

Dwight: Never assume stereotypes about people based on their backgrounds.

George: Encourage teamwork among co-workers from different backgrounds.

Kylie: Avoid making personal comments that are derogatory or offensive.

George: Always treat males and females equally, and avoid forming groups based on gender.

Sharon: Avoid making sexist comments, either to males or females.

Dwight: Don't make guesses about a person's race or background based on personal appearance. In fact, try to avoid categorizing people at all.

Sharon: Learn—and use—acceptable terms when discussing people who are different.

Kylie: Always show respect for differences in the cultures and traditions of others.

Dwight: Look at the abilities of your co-workers, not their disabilities. Don't make assumptions about persons with disabilities; instead, look at what they can do, not what they may not be able to do.

George: Don't go along with others who might make insensitive comments or offensive jokes about other groups.

Kylie: Maintain an attitude of including others, rather than finding reasons to exclude them.

Instructor: Great job! You've got the right idea.

Instructor: As I mentioned earlier, embracing diversity is not just a personal issue but it's also a legal one. So, both in conformance with the laws and also because we value a diverse workplace, most workplaces establish a Diversity Policy.

Here are the main goals of these policies:

- Make diversity a priority in the workplace.
- Make sure everyone in the organization is trained in diversity issues to understand the benefits of a diverse workplace.
- Make a commitment to diversity and to having a workplace in which we are comfortable discussing diversity issues. This includes openly and honestly dealing with any problems that might arise that are related to diversity.
- Also, provide a uniform, consistent set of expectations for everyone in the workplace when it comes to supporting diversity and eliminating unacceptable behavior.

A Diversity Policy must also:

- Promote an open-door policy on complaints related to discrimination and harassment.
- Protect the rights of employees to make legitimate complaints about discrimination or harassment; employees who make such complaints will be treated respectfully and confidentially.
- Promote both compliance with applicable laws and prevention of problems related to diversity. In other words, we want to be proactive in preventing problems rather than simply reacting to problems that have already occurred.
- And finally, create a respectful and dignified work environment that treats everyone equally.

Activity

I hope you have enjoyed this class and have learned more about Embracing Diversity. Here are the main points about diversity that we have discussed in this course. Please try to put them into practice in your workplace.

- Diversity respects the differences among other people.
- Diversity encourages new ideas and perspectives on doing your work.
- Diversity promotes fairness, and fairness allows everyone to contribute and share in success.
- And finally, diversity helps create a stronger, more unified, and more successful organization that will benefit everyone.

VIGNETTE 8

George: This really has been a great course. I learned so much. I never thought about all the ways people face discrimination. I didn't realize how my beliefs effect my actions and how often I probably offend people. This has been an eye opening experience.

Kylie: I'm so glad to hear that George. I really like you, but it's hard to be around you sometimes.

George: I'm really sorry if I've offended any of you. I never meant to.

Kylie: That's OK. I know that even though I'm open-minded it's good for me to be reminded of the things I can do to embrace our differences and work toward inclusion rather than exclusion in our office.

Dwight: To be honest... I understood the discrimination of minorities first hand but I didn't think about all the other ways we're different and how discrimination affects so many people. I'll definitely be more sensitive to other people's situations from now on.

Sharon: Now we can really make some changes in our office and truly Embrace Diversity. I look forward to seeing how far we've come by this time next year.

Credits: Voice Over Actors

- Instructor – Tricia Seymour, Ph.D.
- George – Jeff Chapin

- Sharon – Susan O’Gara
- Dwight – Ken Casebier
- Kylie – Janine Phan
- Audio Tech – Rusty Barrier, Ph.D.