

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

Supporting Diversity as a Manager: The culture of your team

Today's workforce is more diverse than ever, and colleagues may be a mix of ages, races, religions, and sexual orientations. Your team may also have different lifestyles, work styles, physical and cognative abilities, levels of education, and ways of seeing the world. Your success as a manager depends on your ability to promote a work environment that is inclusive of every person you manage; discourages racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination; and that allows every employee the opportunity to reach their full potential.

➤ This is the second in a three-part series on supporting diversity as a manager. Read the first article "Your attitude toward diversity."

The culture of your team

To what extent do people in your team feel they are treated equally and are respected by both co-workers and management? In a work group where people are not collaborating and partnering fully with their co-workers, you might see the following behaviour:

- little interaction among people of different backgrounds or cultures
- conflict or tension between people of different races, ethnicities, or ages
- insensitive comments or interactions among people, such as mimicking someone's accent or making jokes based on race, gender, age, disability, or sexual orientation
- individuals feeling (or appearing) isolated from the group
- signs of non-involvement in teamwork, such as lack of input during discussions from members of particular groups
- gossip, whispering, or negative communication focused on those perceived as different

If there is friction in your team or you are having problems with an individual employee, talk with your supervisor or your employee assistance program (EAP) about ways to handle the problem.

Contact your human resources (HR) department immediately if an employee:

- makes direct or indirect threats
- exhibits intimidating, harassing, or aggressive behaviour
- displays racist, sexist, or inappropriate behaviours, including comments and jokes or displaying inappropriate images, calendars, or other pieces in their work space
- has conflicts with co-workers or management that appear to be based on demographics rather than on work-relevant opinions

Your actions, interactions, and words

In a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) article on retaining young, diverse workers, Catherine Dixon-Kheir recommends key ways managers can support all of their employees:

Introduce employees to the organization, co-workers, and other managers with whom they will come in contact. Help employees learn about and be part of your organization's professional groups and informal networks.

Help employees advance their ideas. This will make them feel valued and recognized throughout the organization.

Be open and fair in your communications with employees. Share information with the people you manage consistently and across the board.

Be an advocate for and support all employees, especially in difficult situations. Be willing to go to bat on an employee's behalf.

Here are more recommendations from other experts:

Acknowledge differences. You might say to employees, "We may have different values, but as team members we have the same team objectives, and we respect each person's right to their opinions."

Be an advocate for diversity, and get involved in diversity efforts in your organization. Push for minority and gender representation on committees and teams. Seek out and interview diverse candidates for job openings. Talk to your HR department about volunteering for campus recruiting at high schools, colleges, and other training institutions with high minority populations or at diversity job fairs.

Create celebrations around diversity. Invite involvement from your employees, and find out where their interests are and what areas they would like to explore.

Begin a mentoring relationship with a minority employee in another department. (This is different from the coaching you do for your own employees.)

If your company sponsors community volunteer activities that serve a diverse population, encourage employees to participate. Maybe your department could spend a few hours each month involved in such an activity, with people participating as workload allows. Make a point of learning about initiatives in the community where you work or consider adopting a school within your work area.

Make an effort to be inclusive of all employees at meetings, social events, and on- and off-site get-togethers.

Make sure all employees are aware of the programs your organization offers. Be sure employees know about the EAP or work-life program. Encourage them to use the program for assistance with parenting concerns, stress management, finding child care and services for older relatives, budgeting and debt issues, work-related questions and concerns, and many other issues.

Play an active role in your company's employee affinity or networking groups.

Promote and support companywide diversity efforts or awards.

Manage to each individual's unique talents and strengths

By following these measures, you can work to make sure everyone on your team feels included and valued.

➤ **This is the second in a three-part series on supporting diversity as a manager. Read the next article, "Ongoing learning and mentoring."**
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