

## CANDID QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES ABOUT DIVERSITY

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*What is the definition for diversity and why is it important?*

Differences are obvious differences such as race and gender, sexual orientation, age, physical attributes and abilities, cultural differences that may mean different values, ethnic, regional, social, economic, educational, style, affiliations, function, occupation, talents, interests, etc. An organization that values differences fosters an environment of inclusion is one in which all individuals are valued for their differences and they have an opportunity to contribute their knowledge, skills, talents and abilities in the workplace.

*How do diversity issues differ for small and large companies?*

Generally smaller companies, especially very small companies, do not have the luxury of a dedicated human resource department. Sometimes staffs with significant responsibilities in other areas, take on the added role of the Human Resources function. When this is the case, these companies may find themselves more vulnerable when it comes to managing diversity because they simply don't have the time or expertise. Managing diversity includes a range of activities to attract, maintain, and develop a diverse workforce as well as respond to a diverse customer base. Activities companies may engage in with regard to diversity and inclusiveness include: recruiting, hiring and advancing a diverse workforce and developing or providing diversity training and development programs for employees.

Many family owned businesses and very small companies that fall beneath the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission thresholds may feel they do not need to focus on diversity issues. They also may avoid diversity training because they don't see a need, or they lack knowledge or training resources are limited. However, small businesses, and large alike, who fail to address employee development and training needs in the area of diversity, are at a disadvantage when it comes to dealing effectively with employees, suppliers and most importantly customers.

*Why should business owners care about diversity in their workplace? Is there also a bottom line benefit?*

Every day we hear from the media about the companies who fail to take into account cultural differences when dealing with customers and employees. Outright discrimination and violation of the laws in these areas carry legal as well as financial ramifications. Companies should ask:

- *How many customers have we lost because we failed to recognize a unique cultural difference?*
- *How many customers have we offended because we responded to them inappropriately?*

- *How many customers never approach our business, buy our product or service because they do not perceive us as a company that welcomes different cultures?*

Employers have the challenge of engaging their workforces so that all employees have the opportunity to fully contribute their skills, knowledge, abilities and talents. Companies that fail to recognize the full diversity and value of each individual for the unique differences they bring to the workforce run the risk of limiting their workforce productivity. Simply put, undervalued employees consciously and unconsciously limit their efforts. Hence, it is in the best interests of all companies, large and small to have a comprehensive program of managing diversity from recruitment, hiring, development and advancement to development programs for employees to improve their interpersonal skills in relating to culturally different workers internally as well as externally. Employees, managers and leaders all need skills in this area, which is of growing importance in today's work world.

Bottom line is this -- companies who are effective in this area are efficient in avoiding costly mistakes, and miscommunications that result in lost business with customers, loss productivity of employees and suppliers, and law suits because of cultural incompetence. Diversity is a core competency for business leaders and managers and every employee because of the growing cultural diversity of the workforce.

Companies who are adept at managing diversity place themselves in the unique position of maintaining a competitive edge over companies that do not master it. Effective management of diversity is strength for companies, but it is also a challenge in its complexity because of the myriad differences of people in today's workforces and the degree of adaptation and flexibility, communication skills that are needed to function in multicultural workplaces.

*Can you lend some advice on manageable steps both small and large businesses might take to address their diversity challenges and opportunities?*

The economy has caused many companies to shift focus away from diversity however, commitment to efforts on work place diversity will have the enormous benefits of: strengthening the existing workforce, increasing productivity, increasing company competitiveness, and avoiding costly lawsuits or lost opportunities.

Here are four steps a company can take to refocus its managing diversity effort:

- Assess where you are with diversity. How do you measure diversity efforts within your company? Are there any areas where you are vulnerable? What are employees' attitudes toward diversity? What is leadership's approach toward diversity? Assessments can be performed with profiles or attitude surveys.
- Manage Diversity: Is managing diversity (internally with employees, externally customers) a part of your strategic or business? Have your employees left your

employment because they were not valued for their cultural differences? Are there customer, client or vendor relationships that could improve or increase revenues if you planned a more effective way of reaching them? Making diversity a strategic initiative ties it to profitability issues and helps put the business case for diversity in context.

- **Employee Development:** What kind of training and development do employees need? Is it EEOC compliance, diversity awareness, cultural competency, interpersonal skill development (values, behavioral style, communications, etc.)? Employee training and development should tie in with the strategic plan objectives.
- **Institutionalizing Diversity -** What programs are in place to value differences in the workplace and how are they managed? How do we educate or provide information to employees about cultural differences, and provide opportunities for ongoing skill development? How do we hold employees accountable for managing diversity? How do we recognize employees, managers and leaders for appreciating diversity? How can we measure the effectiveness of our efforts? Leadership must lead by example and role model appropriate behavior for employees. Bottom line gains in all areas should be celebrated.

*Tell us about Goeins-Williams Associates and the work you are doing in the area of diversity:*

Goeins-Williams Associates, Inc. is a performance consultant company in Wilmington, Delaware and Aurora, Colorado. We increase organizational and individual performance and productivity. Our customers include corporations, government, non-profit agencies, and educational institutions. In addition to our services in organizational development, we have been a growing provider of services in the field of diversity. When we are asked to resolve productivity issues that relate to performance, communication and productivity, often we find that the root cause is a lack of understanding about cultural diversity.

Annually, we provide customized diversity awareness training to a variety of clients including, hospitals, school districts, Leadership Institutes, government agencies and community. We also have conducted cultural marketing/planning, cultural audits, and diversity focus groups and cross cultural curriculum development.

We created the Spice of Life™ Diversity Card Deck Training tool and trainer's guide to facilitate dialogue on diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace. We launched this novel product in October 2003 and received key endorsements from Inscape Publishing Company and others. We found that our clients needed opportunities for practice and skill development with their employees. We also found through our work in diversity consulting and training that many smaller companies did not have budgets for diversity training wanted to provide a product that would them an affordable opportunity to discuss the complex topic of workplace diversity in a non threatening way. Our products are

being purchased by a diversity of customers in the US and Canada through the DiversityInc.com online store (where it is a featured best seller) and our own website. Our customers include military, hospitals, customer service businesses, universities, schools, local and state governments, corporations and a host of independent consultants and trainers.