

Working with Diversity

It should come as no surprise that we are all different. And the global economy has brought together diverse cultures interspersed into the workplace. Sometimes, this can result in a form of culture shock.

Many companies offer training on how to manage diversity. The training sets up guidelines and rules on how to behave in the workplace and what is and is not expected when certain conditions arise. The training is usually mandatory and human resource departments are often looked upon to monitor violations of the guidelines. Sometimes, they may require employees to retake the training to reinforce the concepts.

Employees may feel alienated when a group of people start speaking a foreign language. In the United States, it used to be considered rude for people to speak in different languages when there are people present that didn't speak that language. Today, it's not so simple. People from different countries usually speak their native tongues better than second languages so while working they can get more accomplished by doing so. One way to help in this area, is to ask to speak in a common language when the conversation turns casual and only speak in the native language when conducting business. This way everyone can participate in the casual conversations.

Even something as simple as foods that people of different cultures eat can cause people to feel uneasy. It may not smell right to those unfamiliar with them or it could be a type of food that they would never imagine eating. Luckily, issues of food are usually much lighter than other issues and are often a great way to break the ice.

Religion can be another tricky situation since beliefs are something that people hold for much of their lives. Even with training, it can be difficult for some people to fully accept religions outside of their own. Many people tend to overcome these differences after working together for a while. For others, it may take more time, if at all.

It's not just cultural issues that may come up, it can be issues across gender lines and sexual orientation. There are more women than ever in the workplace and in decades past men tended to be insensitive to women that did work. Sexual preferences and sensitivity to people that

are transgendered are all situations that make diversity even that much more complicated.

What people tend to find out after working with these diversities, is that people are not that much different overall. In fact, if we search for common ground, we can establish new workplace friendships and bonds that can last a lifetime as well as learn something new in the process.