# Diversity in the Workplace: How to Bridge the Gaps - Handout

# **WHAT'S AT STAKE?**

Today's workforce is rich in diversity. Working together are people of different ages, cultures, physical abilities, education, sexual orientation, language and religious beliefs. Each of us is unique, and our different strengths and perspectives contribute to the strength of our teams.

# WHAT'S THE DANGER?

To work together safely, it is important to remember that different backgrounds can influence a person's approach to communications, risk-taking, work processes, teamwork or even compliance with rules.

# **Example**

In some cultures, open communication with someone in a position of authority is unheard of. So instead of showing disrespect to your boss, your co-worker may say that he understands a safety rule when, in fact, he doesn't.

There are communication differences across the generations, too. Young workers, wanting to be seen as valuable to the organization, may loudly contribute suggestions or opinions. To their older co-workers, who, early in their careers were taught not to speak unless spoken to, this behavior might seem disrespectful and create some unnecessary tension between the workers.

#### **HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF**

Ultimately, though, all co-workers must share one common goal: to create a safe workplace. But how does everyone cooperate to prevent incidents if someone on the team views assistance as weakness, or considers obscene a hand gesture intended to say "ok"?

Here are some ways you can bridge the communications gap in your diverse workforce:

- Don't buy in to stereotypes. Get to know your fellow workers as individual persons.
- Listen and learn about other cultures, customs and lifestyles. And convey your desire to be

- sensitive to your differences as early as possible. Showing sincere respect for your co-worker is about the best first impression you can make.
- Give the benefit of the doubt in your dealings with fellow workers. Instead of feeling slighted or insulted, consider the possibility that mannerisms or words may have a different meaning in another culture or generation.
- Be honest and tell the person where you are coming from. For example, you can say "I don't know if risk creates excitement for you, but at this stage of my life I don't need that much excitement. So I want you to tie that ladder off before you climb it."
- Lead by example. Help your co-workers develop safe work habits and encourage them to speak up if they have any concerns related to safety and health.
- Rethink the golden rule. Individuals have different values or different ways of showing values. So rather than treating others as you'd want them to treat you, treat others as they'd want you to treat them.
- There's no such thing as a trivial ethnic or sexist joke. One offensive joke can weaken the whole team. Do not make jokes about race, ethnic origin, sex or any other topic that could be offensive, and discourage others from making such remarks.

# **FINAL WORD**

Learn how to bridge communication gaps. Because no matter how diverse the workforce, all workers have one thing in common: the desire to go home safely. QUIZ

- 1. The different strengths and perspectives of the individuals in today's workforce contribute to the strength of our teams.
  - o True
  - False
- 2. Our backgrounds can influence our approach to risk-taking.
  - True
  - False
- 3. Despite our differences, what is the one thing that all workers have in common?
- 4. If you know the cultural background of a person, you know all there is to know about that person.
  - o True
  - False
- 5. There's nothing like a good sexist joke to lighten the mood. As long as there are no women around, there's no harm done.
  - o True
  - False

### WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

You and two other workers have been assigned to work together on a project. One is an older man, well past traditional retirement age, who's been doing the job for several decades. The other is a young woman, with piercings and tattoos, who's been on the job for three months. Do you anticipate any differences in attitudes toward the project or safety? If so, why and what, if anything, should you do about it?


BEFORE THE TALK - TIPS	AFTER THE TALK- CHECKLIST
<ol> <li>Take the time to learn about the skills, knowledge and backgrounds of the people on your team.</li> <li>If you have had significant diversity or managerial training in advance, and believe you can keep the discussion under control, lead a discussion on different slang expressions. Ask participants to share one. What's acceptable?</li> </ol>	PROVIDED FOLLOW-UP TO WORKERS THAT DID  POORLY ON THE QUIZ  NAME:  DATE:  OBSERVED WORKERS  TASK(S):
What's not?  3. Does everyone on your team understand the written instructions, signs, labels and procedures around the workplace? Are they written in plain English? Are translations necessary? As well, speak with your workers individually about specific signage in their area, as they may be uncomfortable about bringing it up in the meeting.	DATE:  REFRESHER TRAINING TOPIC(S):  DATE:  OTHER (DESCRIBE):
4. Consider unifying your team by developing a name for your group and a team-based mission. Discuss who you are, why you're together and how relevant your work is to the organization.	MEETING DATE:LOCATION:
NOTES	

# **ANSWERS:**

- 1. True
- 2. True
- 3. The desire to go home safely

- 4. False
- 5. False



ATTENDANCE		
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INSTRUCTOR	DATE:	
SAFETY TALK:		