



**Benavides Enterprises Inc.**

## **Unraveling Diversity Management: a Practitioner's Road Map to Doing it Right** **By Gladis Benavides, BE Inc.**

Recently one of my clients said something that provided me with some food for thought. He asked me "when do I know I have achieved diversity and a work environment where everybody feels good about work" I quickly responded "NEVER". Then he asked for clarification. That was the hard part. Let me tell you what I came up with, after much thought.

We need to understand that Diversity Management is not about managing or supervising widgets, it is about supervising and managing human beings. Each person in your organization has his/her unique culture, which I describe as "cultural tapes". In addition there are good, bad and ugly folks in every group, every community and every place in the planet. There are also environmental and other factors that contribute to create tension, conflicts and response to differences in the workplace.

So what is a manager or supervisor to do to manage and supervise a multi-cultural workforce and make sure that there is a harassment free and welcoming work environment.

The devil is in the details. Let me give you a recipe of sorts. One that would provide you with the best possible opportunity to achieve compliance and provide employees with clear and consistent work related communication protocols. I can not guaranty that you will never have a complaint or will have issues that you need to address properly.

**First:** Be Proactive in providing your employees with clear policies and procedures that identify your organization's expectations regarding appropriate behaviors in the workplace. You should include those expectations regarding any function under the auspices of the organization such as picnics, conferences, holiday celebrations, etc.

**Second:** Establish the fact that appropriate behaviors including both verbal and non-verbal communications, are not an issue of preference but of performance when functioning in the work place.

**Third:** Address concerns raised by employees in a timely and thorough manner. Your function is to be neutral, to listen to all parties involved, to evaluate the situation and make a determination based on the facts. It is though important to recognize that sometimes, a situation may have history that is, you may be seeing the end of it rather than it being just an instance. Remember that a violation may occur not only by intent but also by result. An individual may not intent to discriminate or even harass another but it is the context, the cultural interpretation or impact that a gesture, a comment or a particular word may have on another person.

**Fourth:** Monitor behavior. Note that I did not say pry or spy. Monitoring is important because you may observe behavior from one or more of your employees that might be a source of complaints or may create a hostile work environment. An early detection of such behavior allows you to counsel individuals in a pro-

active way. Rather than may later having to deal with a complaint of harassment or hostile work environment

**Fifth:** When enforcing your policies and procedures and deciding disciplinary actions be fair and consistent. Recently I learned that retaliation charges filed with the Federal government have gone up almost 35% in the last couple of years. The allegations of differential treatment are generally filed by individuals who believe they have been treated un-fairly; the supervisor has chosen to impose a sanction to him/her that is harder than others without a good reason or other related charges. Fairness and consistency are critical and all decisions must be defensible and based on the facts.

**Sixth:** Remember that conflict resolution is not about making people happy but bringing something to a conclusion and closure in a fair and consistent manner. These suggestions may not result in you not ever receiving a complaint or having to address issues regarding race, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability or others. But you will be in a very good position to prevent and to respond and resolve those issues that are brought to your attention.

A diverse workforce can be creative, energetic and productive. It can also challenge managers and supervisors to acknowledge that diverse perspectives, cultural backgrounds and experiences, genders and ages, abilities and physical and other personal challenges may translate into contributions to the success and growth of the organization.

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