

.....COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY.....

TRAINING DAYS:

Changing faces of workforce call for programs that foster respect among coworkers

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As more and more corporate entities strive for greater diversity in their workforce, the challenge becomes uniting their own micro melting pot of employees.

While in the past diversity training programs often meant sensitivity exercises, today's more sophisticated approaches help companies enrich their corporate cultures, maximize the contributions and talents of their workforce and, in the end, can even impact their bottom line.

"Diversity isn't a law and it's not even required, but we know from studies that it's very beneficial to the workplace and can reduce turnover and increase productivity," said Paul Curtis, president of Curtis Communications, an Iowa-based company which offers online training programs (www.hrcare.com).

Unlike sexual harassment or the discrimination of race, gender, age, religion and disability, all of which are protected under various federal laws, creating a diverse workforce is a choice and includes a cluster of factors like sexual orientation, nationality, language and cultural values. True diversity, said Curtis, is about proactively managing a diverse workforce and instilling respect and appreciation among coworkers for their differences.

A former trial lawyer, Curtis became weary of the failures of litigation in dealing with these issues and believed he could be more effective as an educator. Since he founded HR Classroom (www.hrclassroom.com) in 2000, more than 150,000 people have participated in the website's online training programs.

"Diversity and harassment are hot topics right now and harassment training usually begins with a foundation on diversity, on how to respect and honor coworkers," said Monica Famularo, a training coordinator with Coastal Training Technologies Corporation (www.coastal.com).

"Online training allows people a chance to examine their core values, but this topic is complex and really does require an experienced facilitator who can encourage and lead discussion in a classroom setting," she said.

Optimally for Famularo, training works best in groups of no more than 20 people. That size is conducive for discussion and role playing, while larger groups, she said, result in a lack of participation from some members. Some sessions last two hours — others longer — and she also finds well-crafted, creative and educational DVDs, like the ones produced for Coastal, very helpful.

"People are used to being entertained and DVDs can do this while also being very thought-provoking and motivating in the training sessions," she said.



Dr. Gerda Govine

The DVDs come with leader's guides, posters and handbooks, which serve as a leave-behind reference tool.

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"It's not like people sit up overnight and think of ways to get somebody, a lot of this behavior is unconscious," said Gerda Govine, a Pasadena-based litigation consultant, trainer, mediator and public speaker for the past 22 years. "It's not always in your face and there are also cultural issues that fly in the face of our laws."

In recent years she's added education on Islam in some of her discussions and Q&A's, as well as the intra-cultural issues that come into play with Latinos from various countries. Sexual preference is still a big area, where a

"Customizing training to a specific company's situation is important but in order to be successful, the CEO has to promote diversity training and hold his managers and staff accountable," said Andy Erlich, PhD of Erlich Transcultural Consultants in North Hollywood. "The staff must know that management is not just throwing words at this issue or doing it for [selfish] reasons."

"Companies can't afford to put their head in the sand on this issue," said Dr. Erlich. "With the growth of women in the workforce, minority populations passing the 100 million

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gay man, for example, has chosen not to disclose his sexual preference but is frequently exposed to the jokes and innuendos. She's also doing more training of older workers, many of whom volunteer for various non-profits and often feel ostracized when they have problems learning new technology.

mark, the decrease of white males and the age differential between baby boomers and the median age, there is a dramatic change coming in the workforce and diversity training will become even more vital as companies prepare to manage an increasingly diverse workforce."

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