



Diverse Issues

Volume 1, No. 1

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Welcome to the first edition of Diverse Issues. This newsletter is designed especially for extension professionals. The goal is to increase an awareness of, appreciation for, and valuing of diversity. This newsletter will be published every other month.

An attempt will be made to include the following as "regular" topics:

Diversity in People	Diversity in the Workplace	Diversity Activity
Diversity Resource	Diversity Around the State	

Diversity Around the State can serve as a forum for sharing and giving recognition to the many diversity-related activities sponsored by extension agents, assistants, and staff in our state. The success of this section will depend on your willingness to share your wonderful activities. Please submit information about your diversity-related activities to the editor.

*Patreece Ingram, Assistant Professor
Diversity Education*

Diversity in People: When You Meet A Blind Person

Many people are uneasy when thinking about assisting a visually impaired person. The following suggestions will help you feel at ease with blind persons, and are based on thoughtful courtesies you might extend to anyone, sighted or blind.

There are many ways in which you can be helpful to a blind person in everyday situations, but always ask if the person wishes assistance. If help is needed, they'll be grateful. If not, they will thank you for asking.

Speak upon entering a room where there is a blind person. Identify yourself and let them know when you're leaving. Don't leave them stranded and talking to thin air.

When greeting a blind person if others are present, use a name or provide some cue so the blind person can tell for whom your greeting is intended. Remember that blind people can't see when you're looking at them.

Address a blind person directly, not through someone else, and use a normal tone of voice. When giving directions to a blind person, be specific. (They won't mind words like "see" or "blind" so you need not censor your conversation. Remember, too, that nods and shrugs do not take the place of words.)

It will be easiest for a blind person to take your arm when walking. If you stay half a step ahead, the person can anticipate your movements. When providing assistance to cross the street, stay with the person until the opposite curb has been safely reached.

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Avoid the temptation to pet a guide dog. The dog is responsible for leading a person who cannot see and must not be distracted.

When escorting a blind person to a chair, place his or her hand on the back of the chair. If you take them to a car or bus, guide their hands to the door handle. They'll manage the rest. When you dine with a blind person, describe the table setting. The location of food servings can be described as numerals on a clock face.

If you have a money transaction, name each bill so that he or she may fold it according to the individual's own method for identification.

The most important things needed when you meet blind individuals are your good will and common sense. Remember that blind people think, feel and make decisions just as you do. A blind person is an individual who has usually lost only one sense - the sense of sight. Be natural and enjoy one another.

Source: Sight Center, Cleveland Society for the Blind, 1909 East 101st Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44106
Telephone: 791-8118

Diversity Resource

Learning Seed Video's

The Learning Seed offers a variety of educational video tapes for purchase. Most are priced at \$89.00 plus tax and may be previewed for 30 days. A number of titles may be relevant to extension programs. Titles which I have reviewed and feel have merit include:

Valuing Diversity: Multi-cultural Communication (an absolute favorite of mine)
We often feel comfortable with people like ourselves and awkward when dealing with those who are different. This video demonstrates how to overcome this communication barrier.

Gender & Communication
Explains why males and females have so much trouble communicating and suggests how they can communicate successfully in spite of these differences.

Food: A Multicultural Feast
Why do we eat ham but not hamster? This video is based on the idea that even the most intolerant, biased, and foreign-fearing among us already has a multi-cultural stomach. And, we all know, that the stomach is the shortest way to the heart.

The Unbiased Mind: Obstacles to Clear Thinking
This video questions common but biased thinking habits: stereotypes, problems with cause and effect, seeing only what we expect to see, and the invisible self.

Titles which I have viewed ranged between 19 and 23 minutes in length. Each comes with a brief study guide. Contact The Learning Seed for a catalogue at (800) 634-4941. Fax - (800) 998-0854, 330 Telser Road, Lake Zurich, IL 60047.

Diversity In The Workplace

Myths And Realities of Diverse Teams

Work teams in organizations of the 90's are composed of such far ranging diversities as age and generational values, cross-functional differences within the organization, varying educational levels, socio-economic differences and a number of religious differences and practices. These dissimilarities are add-ons to the more obvious issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and physical abilities. With all of these differences, people wonder how any work team ever functions well and accomplishes anything. There are a lot of assumptions about work teams, but we want to separate fact from fiction, myth from reality. To see how your own assumptions stack up against the standard fare, read the following three myths.

Myth 1 - In Diverse teams, the potential for conflict is greater while achieving cohesion and productivity are more difficult.

Diverse teams have no corner on the market when it comes to conflict. More obvious diversities such as race, socio-economic level, education and lifestyle, are often not the source of conflict.

Sometimes more subtle differences such as those due to work experience on cross functional teams has produced friction. At other times, value differences present serious obstacles to cohesion. Any time human beings come together, the soil is fertile for conflict.

Having acknowledged this primary reality of human behavior, it is also true that when teams experience dissimilarity based on culture, language or a host of other factors, education, awareness and understanding can go a long way toward mitigating conflict and misunderstanding.

Myth 2 - People of like backgrounds (e.g. same gender or age groups) will always stick together and don't want to mingle.

There is another diversity assumption that, in truth, more clearly indicates a human behavior reality than a reflection of diversity. The human species finds comfort in likeness. It is predictable that people who look like, sound like or think like you, engender greater trust and comfort than those who are different. You will be drawn to likeness. The challenge and opportunity for a good team leader comes in defining new common ground so that team members may come together around issues for reasons that appear less obvious than those, for example, of age, race or gender.

Myth 3 - It is almost impossible to be harmonious and collaborative with team members when fundamentally different values exist on a team.

Value differences where our most sacred values are concerned make for very difficult bridge building. Nevertheless, agreement can be reached painfully but successfully. One of the most striking examples occurred on a team where two people had differences the size of the Grand Canyon. One team member was a gay member of an ethnic minority group. Another team member was an admittedly homophobic white woman who could not reconcile homosexuality with her Christian beliefs.

Value differences of this magnitude make peaceful coexistence challenging, to say the least. For the woman, a person's sexual orientation is a preference, therefore, an immoral choice. With her upbringing, she found the concept of homosexuality a difficult one for her to grasp and sinful in her eyes because she believed people had responsibility and control over their sexual orientation. The two colleagues

had some painful conversations one-on-one, where they aired their viewpoints. These conversations, gut wrenching though they were, finally cleared away the anger and animosity. The real healing, however, came in the process of doing their respective jobs. They developed a healthy regard for each other as professionals who shared common organizational objectives. Eventually that respect extended to one another as human beings. While there is

much in the world they will never agree on, they can appreciate each other for the jobs they do, and even have some warmth toward one another as colleagues. Getting beyond fundamental differences is not easy, but is possible by seeing where values overlap in the task at hand and slowly building on it. A little courage and honesty don't hurt either.

Diversity Around The State

Clinton County Expo Builds A Better World Using *Life's Little Reminders*

Build A Better World was the theme of the Clinton County Cooperative Extension booth at the Clinton County Expo, held on May 20, 1998. The Expo was sponsored by the Clinton County Chamber of Commerce. Valuing of diversity was promoted with the distribution of *Life's Little Reminder* kits. The kits were enthusiastically received by more than one thousand expo attendees. Each kit was composed of a small clear zip lock bag containing a number of small items and a card which said the following:

Life's Little Reminders

This kit provides small reminders that can help us focus on life around us: at work or at play; with family or friends; at home or when we travel; in our community or in the world. Isn't it wonderful how alike and different we all really are?

Button: To remind us to "button our lips" to keep from saying hurtful things about others.

Lifesaver: To remind us that we can be a life saver to others by courageously standing up to negative statements that can erode an individual's self-esteem.

Golden Thread: To remind us that friendship and kindness are the golden threads that tie together the hearts of everyone.

Mint: To remind us that you're worth a "mint" to everyone by eliminating discrimination and harassment.

Eraser: To remind us that mistakes are unavoidable, and we need to erase our embarrassment by apologizing when a mistake is made.

Magnifying Glass: To remind us to look more closely at how we and those around us respond to acts of racism, ageism, and other forms of discrimination.

Marker: To remind us to make our mark as a leader, to have fun, and to always try to make those around us feel special.

Star: To remind us we will all be better citizens when we first **Stop, Think, Act, and Reflect.**

The kits were such a hit that plans are being made to distribute them at the Clinton County Fair, the Center County Grange Fair, and Better Kid Care programs.

Thanks to Sandra Hall, Clinton County Extension Agent, for sharing this wonderful idea.

Diversity Activity

Pipe Cleaner Similarities

Goal

To help individuals see the various commonalities that they share with others regardless of background, race, or culture.

Time

20-30 minutes

Materials

Enough pipe cleaners so that each participant has four. Long pipe cleaners are best, although the shorter variety may be used. Provide a variety of colors.

Procedure

Place the bunch of pipe cleaners on a central table and ask each person to select four pipe cleaners in the colors of their choice.

- Step 1.** Tell participants that their task is to shape the pipe cleaners to represent something (or things) that is very important in their life, or something that is an important goal in their life. Allow about 5-7 minutes. The trainer should circulate around the room to notice the type of creations which are being made.
- Step 2.** Working with the person next to them, ask participants to try to guess what each person's creation represents.
- Step 3.** As a total group, ask participants to stand if their creation represents the concept that you name. For example say, "If your creation represents something to do with **religion**, please stand." Note the number of people who are standing. Once they are seated, call upon those to stand whose creation represents another concept. The following are concepts that may be called: religion, family, friends, money, education, health, others that you notice. When most people have had a chance to identify with one of the groups standing, then ask those who have not yet stood to raise their hands. Ask one of the people with a raised hand to tell what their creation represents. Then ask if anyone else made a creation that represents that same or similar concept. If so, ask them to please stand. Continue until nearly everyone has had an opportunity to stand.

Discussion Questions/Conclusion

Lead a discussion about what participants learned from this activity. Note the fact that everyone in the room is different. Note specifically any differences that are apparent such as age of group members, part of the state one is from, type of community one lives in, position one holds, etc.

1. What did you notice about the concepts we chose to have our pipe cleaners represent?
2. What if this group was filled with people from very diverse backgrounds? What do you think the chances are that many of these same concepts would surface?

Conclude by pointing out that regardless of our backgrounds, those things that are very important to us are often similar for all of us. So, if you find yourself on a deserted island with someone you consider to be very different from you, and you think you couldn't possibly have anything to talk about, think about your pipe cleaners and you will have plenty to talk about.

"If we were to wake up some morning and find that everyone was the same race, creed, and color, we would find some other causes for prejudice by noon."

George Aiken, U.S. Senator

Diverse Issues is available on the Web

Web Address:

<http://www.cas.psu.edu/docs/casdept/familyliving/pi/pimenu.html>

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