Valuing Diversity

Whether you are employed at an office, farm, restaurant, manufacturing facility or store, odds are you are surrounded by people from different cultures and backgrounds. Being employed in such a diverse and inclusive workforce requires sensitivity to the cultural backgrounds, native languages and social practices of those around you.

We all know the importance of embracing the differences between individuals by recognizing everyone's unique contribution to the organization. Employees who work well together and treat each other equally and with respect are the foundation for any successful enterprise.

The following suggestions can help ensure that the workplace is an inclusive, productive and accepting environment for everyone.

A Model for Valuing Diversity

With so many personalities, cultures and backgrounds, there is great potential for miscommunication and false impressions to disrupt workflow and create bad feelings among co-workers. Work is not the place for controversial or potentially inflammatory comments. When in doubt about whether what you have to say may be insensitive to others, keep this model of valuing diversity in mind:

Awareness of self and others. Be aware of how your words and behaviors affect others, as well as how their words and behaviors affect you. Also, be aware of your own assumptions and prejudices.

Sensitivity and skills. Develop ways to communicate that reflect an understanding of and response to other people's views, as opposed to telling them your view and how they should behave as a result.

Seek knowledge. Learn about cultures, experiences and values different from your own. Offer to share knowledge of your experience with others.

The New Golden Rule

Another step you can take is to use the New Golden Rule: Treat others the way they would like to be treated. If you're confused about what that means, ask them. Your question will help avoid misunderstandings and can open a valuable exchange of information. Some other tips to keep in mind:

- Understand and respect individual differences. Remember that not everyone sees things the same way you do and keep an open mind toward others.

- Be assertive. Let other people know how you want to be treated, and don't be afraid to speak up if something makes you uncomfortable. How will people know that you find a particular expression or behavior offensive unless you tell them?

- Be thankful if someone has the courage and sensitivity to tell you how you've offended them. Don't get defensive; the only way you can correct the situation is through honest communication.

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