

DR. LOIS FRANKEL

Get and keep the job you want.

While waiting in the lobby for a meeting with a client, I thumbed through her firm's latest annual report. I couldn't help but notice that in a picture of the senior leadership team there was no diversity. No women. No obvious people of color. No one in a wheelchair. No one very old or very young. During the course of our meeting the topic of diversity came up and I mentioned the picture. After a brief discussion she suggested that in future coaching tips, we cover how individuals can demonstrate commitment to valuing diversity by making it a part of everyday work life, rather than compliance with a policy or a program. And so, this month's tips focus on how you can be an advocate for valuing differences in your workplace. The tips come from Roberta Youtan Kay, Corporate Coaching International's diversity specialist.

The traditional notion of diversity has shifted to one of inclusivity. There are many ways in which people are diverse – it doesn't only have to do with gender, the color of one's skin, ethnic background, or other factors we typically relate to equal employment opportunity. People think differently, act differently, and value different things – all of these differences can contribute to feeling excluded from the mainstream in the workplace.

Inclusivity means *everyone* has a voice at work. Diverse voices contribute to a richness in the decision making process. Creating and managing a diverse and inclusive workplace is a business imperative for organizations that seek to be competitive, productive and successful in today's global marketplace. Diversity of opinion enables groups of people to explore ideas that may be on the periphery, yet valuable solutions to real-time problems.

Whether you're one who is usually in the mainstream, or someone who feels excluded for any reason, here are some things you personally can do to make inclusivity a reality at work.

1. Make a habit of slowing down and avoiding a rush to judgment. Quick decisions often perpetuate the status quo. Ask yourself whether it's possible that you are opposed to a particular idea simply because it's a new idea or because it comes from someone who doesn't think, act or look like you. Taking action in this one simple way will open you up to possibilities you may have never considered.
2. Play the role of gatekeeper at meetings. Many times people who think differently (for whatever reason) never express themselves for fear of being ridiculed or because the "majority" are quick to embrace a solution espoused by someone with whom they feel more comfortable. As a result, great ideas may never get airtime. You can make a difference by asking quieter or different people, for their opinions. A gatekeeper ensures everyone gets through the gate before it closes.

3. Make it a conscious choice to invite people who are different from you to lunch, meetings, or impromptu gatherings. Do this at least once a week. Sometimes we get so comfortable with people who are most like us we wind up forgetting to include others. Don't assume they would ask if they wanted to be included. Sometimes people who are different or who are more formal than you need to be invited.
4. Be an advocate for others when you observe unfair or inequitable behaviors. For example, if you notice that people who are more "intuitive" and require more time to think things through are rushed through decisions, suggest the group take a break and come back before reaching a final decision. Or, if someone makes a comment and it's ignored, only to have a member of the "dominant" group pick it up and get credit for it, mention that you heard the same idea first expressed by the other person.
5. Learn to speak the language of the "dominant" culture. If you're the person who is "different" in a group, learn to express your ideas in a way that others can hear. This doesn't mean giving up who you are, it's simply a way of following the maxim, "When in Rome, speak as the Romans."

Remember, diversity exists whenever people in a group of two or more see themselves as different from one another. It may help to think about a situation in which you were the different one and how you would have liked to have been treated. Inclusivity is about ensuring the best ideas and practices are implemented regardless of where they come from.

On another note – let us know if you would like to attend the presentation I am making with Olympic Gold Medalist Janet Evans at 9:00 a.m. on June 18th at the Sportsman's Lodge in Studio City, California. The topic is "Coaching Winners at Work." You can get more information or RSVP at info@corporatecoachingintl.com.

Best regards,

Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D.