GLOBAL INTERCULTURAL FLUENCY

DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Global intercultural fluency as an important professional skill and integral to your overall college experience. We consider global intercultural fluency to be vital to your success as a career professional. We know that an awareness and understanding of diversity, equality, and inclusion will add to your value in today's workplace.

The 21st century has presented us with a workplace that is more diverse and a marketplace that is more global. While there are countless benefits to a society that is more pluralistic and intercultural, there are, at the same time, challenges related to our ability and desire to understand the differences in other people and to deal with this new environment.

It can be very exciting to think about a world that is awash in a beautiful diversity of people working together in harmony. But that reality, which is noble and achievable, requires genuine effort, the desire to learn, and real collaboration.

"We inhabit a universe that is characterized by diversity."
-Desmond Tutu

TODAY'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The modern business community realizes the economic, social, and ethical importance of operating as a company that values diversity in its customers and in its employees.

At a pace that has been quicker than the government's ability to pass laws to protect human rights, corporations all across America have been very progressive in their acknowledgement and affirmation of a global and intercultural society.

American business recognizes the variety of talent that is available in a diverse candidate pool that would potentially contribute to the overall productivity of their workplace. They also recognize the huge untapped profit potential that is available from a more expanded, more diverse, customer base.

American business knows that it is to their deficit to ostracize the populations that would potentially contribute to their talent pool and their profit margin. Basically, it is simply bad business to conduct your company with a lack of global and intercultural fluency.

Research reveals that almost all of the Fortune 500 companies, a staggering 93%, are completely aligned with the idea of hiring more diverse employees and serving a more diverse clientele. And these companies have taken the necessary steps to be successful in this important business initiative. You will see these values reflected in their mission statements, hiring practices, training programs, and community outreach.

There are very few organizations that can operate solely at a local level, without interacting outside of their own state or country, whether it is with a supplier, a customer, or another business. Therefore, being able to communicate with individuals with a different cultural background than oneself is important to be successful in a diverse workplace.

In fact, the best and most profitable American corporations are very supportive of diversity initiatives, promote social change, and implement educational programs that advance global and intercultural fluency. For many companies, it is a point of pride to be able to say they are supportive of diversity.

SKILLS EMPLOYERS VALUE

When we think about the skills employers value in the workplace of the 21st century, we typically think about factors related to specific subject matter like mathematics, writing, language, the arts, history, science, and the basic elements we expect from an educated person.

Additionally, employers seek candidates with a broad-based education and a higher level set of competencies for professional positions that require a college degree, including an understanding of the humanities, social and political conditions, business principles, critical thinking, and an overall liberal arts literacy.

When we think of the demands of the changing workplace and the competencies required of new professionals entering today's progressive and competitive environment, it becomes clear that a certain resiliency is needed. 21st century companies value candidates who are adaptable in their work habits,

flexible in their thinking, adjustable to new situations and problems, and comfortable with change.

When asked about their expectations, today's employers quickly point to those higher-level competencies that are reflective of the new and ever-changing economy.

More than ever, the future workplace will require candidates to possess communication skills, technical competencies, leadership abilities, and ethical conduct.

And, significant to this conversation, today's modern workplace will increasingly rely on the innovation and productivity that comes from teams working together on important projects.

Candidates in the 21st century need to possess strong interpersonal skills and the ability to collaborate with others, to accommodate a diversity of viewpoints, and to adopt of attitude of healthy and harmonious interaction.

DIVERSE TEAMS

Working with others in a team environment means working with people who are different from yourself. To be a valuable team member in today's progressive workplace means that you are highly effective in working with diverse individuals.

One of the major areas of professional competency that is growing in demand is a global intercultural fluency. Candidates who lack an understanding of diversity and a comfort in working in multicultural environments are not regarded as valuable employees.

To be effective in today's diverse workplace and global marketplace, and to be regarded as a credible candidate, you will need to develop the skills to work effectively on teams and manage good customer relations with a fluency that demonstrates respect for others, regardless of their background or identity.

Make no mistake, global intercultural fluency is considered a professional competency that will be valuable in your current work setting and critical in your future work settings. Hand in hand with ethical conduct, global and intercultural fluency is the mark of a true professional.

Global intercultural fluency is the result of a collection of factors that include awareness, understanding, and empathy. An education in such concepts as diversity, equality, and inclusion will help you interact in a more professional and ethical manner and be more effective in your relationship with others.

An individual who demonstrates global and intercultural fluency is someone who shows openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact with a variety of people and understand cultural differences. An individual who possesses intercultural fluency values, respects, and learns from people from diverse backgrounds.

When your language reflects an intercultural knowledge, when your personal interactions occur with ease and comfort, and when your attitude reflects sensitivity, empathy, openness, acceptance, and affirmation, you will be regarded as someone who has credibility and integrity. You will be someone who is trustworthy.

DEFINING DIVERSITY

So, what is meant by diversity? Certainly, we can agree that diversity is about variety, assortment, and difference. While there are many things we all have in common, we all possess certain qualities that make us unique, special, and distinctive. These differences are part of our identity, part of our personality, and part of our life experience.

"Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."
-Stephen R. Covey

So, in what ways are we different from each other? And in what ways are we the same? We suggest that there are two categories of diversity. Internal diversity. And external diversity.

Internal Diversity - Represented by those factors a person is born into. They are things that are innate, naturally occurring, and generally unchangeable. These characteristics are not chosen or controllable. So, internal diversity relates to things that belong to or exist within the person.

These things include… Race... Ethnicity... Nationality... Culture... Sex... Gender... Sexual Orientation... Gender Identity... Personality… Age... Physical Ability... Mental Ability

External Diversity - Represented by characteristics a person is not born with. These factors are selected, acquired, adopted, or developed. These are things that are changeable or controllable. And they may be related to things that are the result of outside influence or control.

These things include… Interests... Education... Appearance... Citizenship... Work Status... Geographic Location... Family Status... Spirituality/Religion... Political Affiliation... Relationship Status... Socioeconomic Status... Place of Birth... Personal Experiences

You will likely recognize that your own identity in many of these areas overlaps with the identities of others. You will also easily recognize that your identity in some of these areas differs with the identities of others.

"We are all different, which is great because we are all unique. Without diversity life would be very boring."
-Catherine Pulsifer

Whatever group of characteristics combine to create a person's identity, that is who they are, and it may be totally unique to them. They are who they are and you are who you are. And, if their identity is different than yours it does not mean they are in any way wrong or in error. And it does not mean you cannot develop an understanding of that person or a relationship with that person. We do not have to be the same in order to get along and work together.

"Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance."
-Verna Myers, Diversity Advocate

DIVERSITY | EQUALITY | INCLUSION

We suggest three concepts worth further definition.

Diversity - Any feature, trait or dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another. It means respect for and appreciation of differences. But it's more than this. We all bring with us diverse perspectives, work experiences, lifestyles and cultures.

Equality - Ensuring that every individual has an equal access to opportunities to make the most of their lives and talents. It means being equal in status and rights. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. It means ensuring individuals or groups are not treated differently or less favorably, on the basis of their specific characteristics.

Inclusion - Being welcomed, valued, respected and supported. It's about focusing on the needs of every individual and ensuring the right conditions are in place for each person to achieve his or her full potential. Inclusion involves respecting individual differences and capturing the advantages they provide. Inclusion should be reflected in an organization's culture, practices and relationships that are in place to support a diverse workforce.

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

Global intercultural fluency means that you are able to understand that people don't all think and act alike and that cultures can influence how people think and act.

Employers value candidates that already have developed this important professional skillset. Employers seek candidates who are able to engage and communicate with diverse team members, are respectful of diverse co-workers, and can effectively interact with a diverse clientele.

How does a college student develop a global intercultural fluency? Perhaps it starts as simply as reminding yourself that college is a time to learn new things, meet new people, and expand your horizons. It also means testing the limits of your comfort zone and not always gravitating towards what you are familiar with. It means being open-minded about meeting people whose ideas, viewpoints, backgrounds, and lifestyles are completely different from yours.

"Celebrate diversity, practice acceptance and may we all choose peaceful options to conflict."
-Donzella Michele Malone

To be successful in benefitting from such experiences, you have to be willing to listen non-judgmentally and practice trying to see things from the perspective of somebody else. Such willingness will help you develop empathy and compassion for others.

Going out of your way to meet people from other cultures is one example of how to develop global and intercultural fluency. Interacting with international students on campus is a way for college students to understand and learn about different cultures. A worthwhile goal might be to learn a greeting or understand a holiday that is unlike your own.

Attend international and cultural events and festivals. Join an international club. Learn another language. Volunteer to help with a campus or community project related to international issues. Attend a holiday celebration with an international student whose culture or religion is different from your own. Take a personality test. Attend a lecture given by someone whose background, identity or viewpoints are completely opposite of your own. Take a course that introduces you to international subject matter or the problems and concerns of minority and marginalized populations.

"Diversity is the art of thinking independently together."
-Malcolm Forbes

"Diversity is not about how we differ. Diversity is about embracing one another's uniqueness."
-Ola Joseph

"Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together."
-Jacqueline Woodson

DIVERSITY ON THE JOB

So, what does global intercultural fluency look like on the job? How is it demonstrated in the workplace among co-workers? How is it reflected in the marketplace among customers?

Respect for others' differences begins by understanding that your identity is not diminished when you affirm the identity of another person. In your effort to accept others, you are not asked to change or surrender your own viewpoints or beliefs. Your exposure to other cultures, lifestyles, and viewpoints will not damage your identity, but will, instead, broaden your understanding of the world. Your goal is to welcome others, learn from others, and work with others, regardless of how different they may be from you.

The ethical behavior of a professional person celebrates diversity and does not insist on everyone looking, acting, and thinking alike.

Inherent to the notion of being a professional person is a sense of service to others. A professional person has developed an emotional maturity and internal stability that is not threatened by the differences in others. Their integrity and ethics as a professional person leaves no room to be self-serving, judgmental, or defensive. Such a person puts others' needs ahead of their own.

In a professional setting, ethical behavior means that we cannot afford to show disdain or animosity to those in our environment because of their differences. We should not, due to our personally held beliefs, our poor attitudes, or preconceived notions about others' differences, be arrogant, aloof, standoffish, or unapproachable. Such attitudes are an occupational hazard in a professional setting.

Whenever we feel threatened by those around us whose values and beliefs differ from ours, our professionalism is in question. Whenever we cannot be bothered to make accommodations for the values and beliefs of those who are different from us, our ethical behavior is weak.

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CUSTOMER SERVICE

In the context of customer service, global intercultural fluency means that a person's appearance should not adversely affect your reaction when meeting them for the first time. Our facial expression and body language may bely our personal response to their clothing, hairstyle, skin color, or physique. We might subtly display an adverse or unfavorable reaction to a person with dreadlocks, multiple tattoos and body piercings, or ornate and exotic attire. We may register discomfort with a person who is in a wheelchair, or someone who is has purple hair, or someone who is overweight, or someone who is affectionate with a same-sex partner.

Further interaction with persons who are different from ourselves may reveal someone who holds different political views, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or lifestyle choices. These engagements with diverse individuals should be opportunities to learn more about each other and should never be used to argue, debate, or demean.

You should never give the impression to your customer or co-worker that your identity is somehow superior to theirs. You should always be inclusive in your words, actions, and attitudes and communicate the idea that we are all equal, valued, accepted, and welcomed.

"Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others."
-John F. Kennedy

MICROAGGRESSIONS

To do otherwise is to subject others to subtle, negative messages, called "microaggressions," that serve to discount and marginalize others. Microaggressions are covert and usually occur out of an unchecked habit that takes place in an established environment where people speak and act without regard for the feelings of others, but typically have the effect of letting others know who is in the majority and who is in charge.

While not often overtly expressed, the result is usually manifest as some kind of majority privilege, including for, example white privilege or heterosexual privilege. It is the notion that anyone who is not a member of the majority or mainstream group is somehow inferior. We rightly regard these subtle and subdued oppressive behaviors as forms of bigotry and prejudice.

For example, bigotry against a person based on race is, as we know, called racism. Bigotry based on sex is called sexism. Bigotry based on age is ageism. Bigotry based on a person's disability is called ableism.

A general attitude of bigotry might simply be described as "negativity," as in homonegativity. Or "anti" as in "anti-semetic" or "anti-gay."

We see this kind of subtle oppression reflected in "centric" attitudes, as in Eurocentric, Anglocentric, and Christocentric attitudes, which communicates the notion that being white, English-speaking, and Christian is superior. It carries with it the assumption that everyone feels that way.

"Phobic" is another way to describe bigotry. The word literally means "fear." The common example is the term "homophobia," which means a fear or hatred of homosexual people. Or "transphobia," to describe a fear or hatred of transgender people. Or "Islamaphobia" to describe a fear of hatred of Muslim people. Or "xenophobia," the fear of strangers or foreigners.

The term "normative" is another way of describing these types of oppressive attitudes. Someone who is not trans-gender is called cis-gender. And someone who regards transgender people as being abnormal is considered to be cis-normative in their attitudes. Likewise, a straight person who feels superior in their sexual orientation would be said to have a "heteronormative" attitude. People who discriminate based on where someone comes from, or is snobbish about regional differences, may have "metronormative" attitudes, suggesting that an urban lifestyle is superior to a rural lifestyle.

We should never assume, for example, that all of our customers and co-workers share the same religion as us, or the same political views, ethnic background, lifestyle, family structure, sexual orientation, gender identity, or personality.

Don't automatically assume everyone is straight. Or that everyone comes from a traditional family structure. Or that everyone celebrates Christmas. Or that everyone attends the same church.

We should never speak in terms that indicate that there is one common, normal, preferred identity. We should never act in a way that leaves people feeling ostracized, isolated, marginalized, or left-out.

To be effective in diverse environments may require we practice sensitivity to greetings, holidays, social customs, language usage, preferred pronouns, and personality traits.

Or perhaps is may be a matter of becoming more comfortable with gray areas. You see, we often regard the world as black and white and we sometimes forget about the gray shades. Things are not always binary. Issues, solutions, and people do not always go one way or another. What about those areas in-between? We might need to remind ourselves to think outside the norm. With people, especially, we cannot always fit things neatly into specified boxes.

We see this with the emerging notion of gender fluidity. But, it is also relevant to our understanding of all kinds of identities, situations, and manifestations that might be ambiguous and outside of what we think of as typical. Some people may defy our convenient definitions of what is expected or normal. They may be outliers.

It may take some conscious effort on our part, but it could be helpful in our acceptance of others to consider that people's identities might be non-conforming, flexible, variant, fluid, expansive, creative, atypical, or even adventurous.

By increasing your awareness and understanding of the global marketplace and diversity in today's workplace, you can gain a greater sense of professionalism, enhance your ability to effectively interact with diverse populations, and increase your effectiveness with co-workers, colleagues, clients, and customers.

"When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become a wiser, more inclusive, and better organization."

PAT WADORS

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