

Career Corner

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Creating an atmosphere of inclusiveness in the workplace

By Yuezhou Huo '15

As the world economy continues to become more and more global, and workplaces have grown increasingly diverse, the awareness of the strengths and advantages a diverse workforce offers is also gaining momentum. As Douglas M. Stayman, associate dean for MBA programs, noted during a diversity training session sponsored by Johnson's [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) (ODI) in August: Not only does diversity foster creativity; awareness of diverse perceptions and points of view is crucial to avoiding cultural slights and blunders. "An organization won't be successful if it doesn't embrace the diversity of different people," Stayman said.

Embracing diversity means creating a workplace in which people of all backgrounds and cultures feel included, welcome, and valued. Inclusion involves respecting individual differences and capturing the advantages they provide. "Companies really need to look at inclusion as a strategy," says Nsombi B. Ricketts, director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. "We are at the point where [fostering inclusion] is a necessity to drive innovation; companies that are not able to do this will not survive."

How can managers foster an inclusive work environment? What are some effective ways to make every member of a team feel valued? The following tips will provide some useful strategies

Be a role model. Employees look to their managers as models, so it's important to lead by example. In order to foster inclusion in their teams, managers must first understand diversity and inclusion. Think of diversity in its broader sense, moving beyond strictly ethnicity and race to include differences in age, sexual orientation, military status, and other groupings. Inclusion is about being open to perspectives different from your own and realizing that everyone's voice is important, says Ricketts. You can set a good example by valuing each individual's opinions and making everyone feel comfortable sharing their points of view.

Support your employees. Inclusion requires supporting people from diverse backgrounds. Ricketts recommends setting an open-door policy to encourage employees to come to you to discuss their concerns. Try to understand your employees' long-term goals, talents, and passions outside of work. Acknowledge employees' contributions to make them feel valued. Make work schedules flexible so they can balance their work and personal lives. Managers should also encourage employees to utilize support networks for people from different groups.

Treat employees equitably. "Make sure there is equity in pay and promotional opportunities for everyone regardless of their background," says Ricketts. Managers need to provide opportunities for each employee to contribute and advance, and to access professional development opportunities and training.

Educate employees about diversity and inclusion. Acquiring knowledge of cross-cultural communication and learning to understand how business traditions differ from one culture to another are essential skills for employees in creating an inclusive environment, says Ricketts.

Incorporate efforts to increase inclusiveness in your goals. Actions speak louder than words. Set specific business goals for fostering an atmosphere of inclusion to transform ideas into concrete plans. "What gets measured is what gets done," says Ricketts, "Successful companies hold their leaders accountable to move the diversity inclusion agenda forward."

Motivate employees to act inclusively. Consider incorporating inclusive behavior in performance evaluations to motivate employees to think actively about their own behavior. Criteria might include participation in training and cultural events within the organization as well as equitable treatment of diverse coworkers.

Watch out for pitfalls. Avoid common pitfalls when interacting with your employees. Believing that certain groups of people are good at only certain things will keep you from fully leveraging your team's intellectual capital. Also, although it is easy to stay in your comfort zone and talk to people who share backgrounds and interests similar to your own, it's important to get to know each of your employees personally.

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