

SSSCSP  
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Practices:  
Staff-to-Staff  
Full Course

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Diversity Awareness: Staff-to-Staff  
Introduction

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## **Our Diverse Culture**

We are a nation of many cultures, groups and individuals. To reflect the diversity in our workplaces and our communities, there is an ever-increasing call for understanding of, and education in, diversity awareness.

All employees need to be aware of their responsibilities according to workplace policies and your role.

Consider the following situations.



## Feeling Different

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Frank:** I reported to work on the first day, to an orientation meeting. When I walked in, all the other maintenance employees were like 30 years younger than me. I was probably older than their fathers.

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## Not Fitting In

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Barry:** You know, back when I first started my job, I remember going to the break room for the first time to eat lunch, and being surprised about when I saw only women in the room.

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## The Holiday

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Cassandra:** At our staff meeting yesterday, Rob mentioned that he wanted to get together with me, Eve and Marie to finalize a project we've been working on. I reminded Rob that Marie couldn't be there, that she was taking that day off to observe a religious holiday – one that she takes every year.

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## **Set the Example of Respect**

Have you ever faced similar, uncomfortable situations in the workplace – or know of someone who has? How would you react?

As employees, you want to establish and maintain a respectful, positive environment. You set the example for everyone. And it's important to make consistent displays of civility, respect and politeness toward others.

Every time you show appreciation for the people around you, you help ensure the next generation will do the same, and you also help strengthen the workplace environment.

## Consequences

Employers face consequences when employees say or do something that causes offense to co-workers, community groups or others in the workplace – whether it's intentional or not.

Insensitive actions or words by anyone may result in legal and disciplinary action against the employee. It is imperative that you understand and follow your workplace's policies on diversity awareness.





## **The Cost of a Negative Environment**

The world is full of examples that highlight how difficult it is for people from diverse groups to live, work, play and communicate harmoniously. The consequences for failing to create a respectful environment are clear: human suffering and unnecessary conflict that take up a lot of time and energy.

For your employer, these consequences can result in time and money spent on their resolution – resources that could be better invested elsewhere.

## **A Code of Conduct**

The consequences for not respecting diversity can be severe, but the good news is that through awareness, effective communication and following workplace policies we can avoid these consequences.

The importance of diversity awareness is reflected in the professional code of conduct of many employers. Employees are asked to embrace the value of diversity, and apply those practices in their work and actions.

To learn more about your employer's code of conduct, refer to your workplace's policies and terms of employment.

## Goal

This course provides employees with the tools to be successful in navigating your diverse workplace.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- define diversity
- identify behaviors that contribute to a hostile work environment  
(and)
- examine strategies to increase your diversity awareness

At the end of the course, you'll have a chance to test what you've learned with a short quiz.

So, if you're ready, let's begin.

Defining Diversity

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## Diversity

The word **diversity** often brings up ideas about differences in physical attributes, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other such characteristics. However, diversity is more than that. It's about differences in perception, ways of thinking, feeling, beliefs, communication and behavior. These differences are a real benefit to any environment that celebrates them.



## Celebrating Differences

When differences are celebrated, there is a greater level of comfort in communicating effectively in any situation. A celebration of diversity results in:

- a healthy and dynamic working and learning environment
- a positive image in the community
- job satisfaction for employees (and)
- increased performance levels of employees who are able to be authentic



## Diversity Defined

According to researcher Mara Esty, diversity is generally defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing and celebrating differences among people with respect to:

- age
- class
- ethnicity
- gender
- physical and mental ability
- race
- sexual orientation
- spiritual practice (and)
- public assistance status



## Diversity Defined (cont.)

Diversity is more than just tolerance of others. Diversity involves a *celebration* of the many dimensions and differences found within each individual you work with and an understanding that those differences can make your environment richer.

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## Diversity Terms

To have a stronger understanding of diversity, let's review a few terms related to diversity awareness:

- **Culture** refers to people with a similar learned set of beliefs, values, traditions, social practices and often language.
- **Race or phenotype** refer to observable characteristics such as skin color.
- **Ethnicity** refers to people who share a language, religion, nation or culture. (and)
- **Intercultural communication** refers to effective communication among people from different cultures.



Behaviors that Contribute  
to a Hostile Environment

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# Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Behaviors That Contribute to a Hostile Environment

## **Unacceptable Behaviors**

A lack of sensitivity to diversity awareness can lead to unacceptable behaviors and violation of organizational policies, including terms of employment. Here are some of the most common unacceptable behaviors that can occur in a diverse environment:

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## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Behaviors That Contribute to a Hostile Environment

### Unacceptable Behaviors (cont.)

- **Ethnocentrism** is a learned belief in cultural superiority. We view our own group as the *right* one and rate all others in reference to our perceived “right way.”
- **Stereotyping** is categorizing a group of people and making claims about the characteristics of all people who belong to that group.
- **Intolerance** is an unwillingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behavior that differ from your own.
- **Prejudice** is a negative attitude toward others based on faulty stereotypes and causing irrational feelings of dislike.
- **Discrimination** is unjust treatment of others. While prejudice refers to attitudes or beliefs, discrimination refers to behavior. (and)
- **Racism** is categorizing people in terms of physical traits. Although racism is often used interchangeably with prejudice and discrimination, what distinguishes it from those terms is oppression. Racism is about banning certain people from something, such as a meeting or social gathering, solely because of their race.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Behaviors That Contribute to a Hostile Environment

### Unintentional and Intentional Effects

All of these behaviors can happen **intentionally** or **unintentionally**. You may mean to act in a certain way or you may not realize you are hurting someone. Either way the behaviors can be offensive and cause conflict. And each can lead to personal insult, harassment or in extreme cases discrimination claims.

For example, *ethnocentrism* is the belief that your group is superior to another group. It can occur with the misunderstanding of different cultures. In some cultures, making noises such as belching during a meal is rude. In other cultures belching is considered a compliment to the chef.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Behaviors That Contribute to a Hostile Environment

### **Unintentional and Intentional Effects (cont.)**

People of both cultures believe they are *right* and use their own understanding of table manners to judge others. Instead, they should practice cultural relativism. This is the idea that we should view others' cultures through their lens and not our cultural lens. We must respect other cultures, just as we expect people to respect ours.

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## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Behaviors That Contribute to a Hostile Environment

### **Employer Consequences**

When people feel excluded or out of place, turnover rates may increase, while productivity and employee morale decrease. This type of environment isn't good for anyone or any organization.

Think about how much money is spent on recruiting and onboarding new employees. When the climate and culture is not conducive to diverse employees, employers lose money due to high turnover rates.

A negative working environment can also impact public image. When an organization is labeled a bad place to work, word spreads fast and requires the company to do a lot of public relations campaigns to rectify the negative reputation.

# Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Behaviors That Contribute to a Hostile Environment

## The Good News

We are raised within our own culture and taught about the world by the people with whom we interact. It's understandable that we use our perceptions, worldviews, values, beliefs and customs to make decisions about others.

For example, stereotyping – seeing everyone in a group as the same – is quite common. However, stereotyping often leads to prejudice, which is a belief. But it can turn into discrimination against that group, which is an action.

The good news is that we can avoid creating a hostile environment, and instead create an environment where everyone feels valued, respected and celebrated.



# Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

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## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### Increase Your Diversity Awareness

We contribute to the success of our working environment by being positive communicators. To do so, you need:

- **motivation** – the desire to be an effective communicator
- **knowledge** – (or) information about others to communicate in a way they will understand (and)
- **skill** – the ability to be an effective communicator

Let's go over each of these strategies that'll help you increase your diversity awareness and better demonstrate respect for all staff members.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Motivation**

**Motivation** is your *desire* to overcome problems such as discrimination and stereotyping. When you are motivated, you *want* to be flexible and open to other points of view.

Two self-reflection activities you can do to increase your motivation are to:

- acknowledge your feelings (and)
- explore stereotypes about yourself

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Motivation: Acknowledging Your Bias**

Acknowledge your bias. Realize that you interpret and judge the behaviors of others through your own cultural lens. In order to grow and become accepting of others, we must acknowledge any biases or preconceived notions we have of others.

The reality is we all hold biases that we're often unaware of. In order to combat biases, we must learn about and acknowledge our biases.



## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Motivation: Explore Stereotypes About Yourself**

Explore stereotypes about yourself. Reflect on, and think about, the stereotypes often associated with the groups you belong to. Are the stereotypes accurate? Do they describe you as an individual? Or, are you seen as the same as everyone else in the group?

You are your own person, and if someone claims you are a certain way because of a group you belong to, you probably resent that. The same is true for all people.



# Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

## Knowledge

**Knowledge** is what you know about others.

To effectively increase your knowledge about other staff members, their cultures and who they are as individuals, you need to:

- seek information
- develop a tolerance for feeling uncertain about a person or the person's culture (and)
- develop knowledge of your own culture

Let's go over each of these key points.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Knowledge: Seek Information**

When you seek information, you need to ask questions, but don't intrude into other people's personal lives. Knowledge about the culture of the people you interact with helps increase your diversity awareness. It is okay to ask questions about others' culture. Of course, you must seek this information politely and without passing judgment.

When we work with people, we often develop a relationship organically, which allows us to be in positions to ask them questions about their culture that we may otherwise be afraid to do.

There are also many credible books and online resources that help us seek valid information about different cultures, groups and identities.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Knowledge: Develop Knowledge of Your Own Culture**

Develop knowledge of your own culture. Many of us have never stopped to think about our own culture or even tried to define it. Our culture is developed through a variety of factors, such as our home life growing up, school, friends and the media.

If you are able to understand why you interpret events a certain way, or why you behave a certain way, you'll likely become more understanding and accepting of others and their culture. Remember that just because someone does something differently than you doesn't make it wrong.



# Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

## Skills

**Skills** refers to a person's outward behavior.

Your skills are what the other person experiences in interactions with you. Good diversity awareness skills include:

- respect and empathy for the other person
- positive verbal communication
- active listening skills (and)
- appropriate nonverbal communication

Let's dig deeper into each of these points.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Skills: Respect and Empathy**

Respect is conveyed by showing concern and interest in others and their ideas. It can be as simple as giving a speaker your full attention, nodding your head to show that you're listening and using an appropriate tone of voice.

Empathy is the ability to show awareness of another person's thoughts and feelings. And it's often defined as putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Do your best to clearly understand what life might be like for another person. Then communicate in a way that's sensitive to their point of view.

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### **Skills: Positive Verbal Communication**

**Positive verbal communication** is descriptive language that does not evaluate the other person.

Descriptive language gives details without passing judgment or stating an opinion. An example is: “I’ve never had food that tastes like this before. It’s definitely spicy.” The statement is void of any judgment and will not offend others.

Evaluative language passes judgment on a person or a person’s behaviors, and asserts that your opinion is the right one. An example is: “You eat *that!* That’s disgusting!” This statement passes judgment, and someone might take offense.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Skills: Positive Verbal Communication {1}**

Positive verbal communication also uses equality language, not superiority language.

**Equality language** lets others know you see them as equals. An example is: “Although I don't have arranged marriages in my culture, I would be interested to learn more about your experience with it.” This statement passes no judgment nor indicates one type of marriage is the *better* way. It simply shows an interest in the topic or non-judgmental curiosity.

**Superiority language** indicates to others you are better than they are. An example is: “I would never let my parents arrange my marriage. That's weird!” This statement claims that arranged marriages are inferior to non-arranged marriages. This statement will offend others.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Skills: Positive Verbal Communication {2}**

Think twice about what you are going to say before you say it. Avoid sarcasm, slips of the tongue or inside jokes about others. This will help you avoid being accused of discrimination or other negative behaviors.

You should never make comments about your negative feelings with regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, identity, expression or culture.



## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Skills: Active Listening**

**Active listening** requires focusing on listening, asking questions and paraphrasing to reduce the chances of miscommunication.

Too often we listen to respond; active listening requires that we focus on what the speaker is saying. Take the following example of a conversation between two active listeners.

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### **Skills: Active Listening (cont.)**

Two colleagues, Ana and Liz, are sitting next to each other as they wait for a meeting to begin. Ana, a Mexican immigrant, has her arms crossed. Liz hears her heavy sighs, observes Ana's frustrated body language and asks her if something is wrong.

Ana describes some challenges she's facing with their institution's new inclusive religious holiday policy. Ana is a Mexican immigrant. And the new policy grants permissions for Christian, Muslim and Hindu holidays, but neglects some of the Mexican holidays that Ana's family celebrates.

Once Ana finishes, Liz restates Ana's concerns and suggests to mention them in the meeting. They quickly rehearse what Ana will say, and Ana's body language relaxes. As their supervisor walks in, Ana thanks her co-worker for the support.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Skills: Nonverbal Language**

Nonverbal language is communicating without words. It's what your posture, movements and facial expressions are saying to the other person.

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**Skills: Nonverbal Language (cont.)**

Here are a few ways to check your nonverbal communication to make sure you are showing respect:

- Be aware of your facial expressions. Avoid expressions such as pursing your lips or squinting your eyes in disapproval. Keep your face relaxed and open to show you are listening.
- Make eye contact and nod your head to show you are listening with respect. In a few cultures, direct eye contact should not be made. If this is the case, do what the other person does.
- Turn toward the person who is talking, and lean slightly in that person's direction.
- Avoid crossing your arms over your chest. Keep your body open to the person talking.
- Avoid shuffling your feet or moving from side-to-side. Stand in a relaxed manner and use your arms and hands naturally.
- Avoid pointing your finger at the person talking. (and)
- Be aware of any emotions you are feeling and how they are showing on your face, and in your posture and movements.

The right nonverbal language is what's most appropriate and effective for a given context, setting and occasion.

## **Nonverbal Language and Cultural Practices**

Nonverbal language can be cultural. For example, in one culture, it may be common for two people to stand 12 inches apart during a conversation. In another, it may be common to stand even farther apart. Neither is right or wrong. Different cultures have different practices.

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### **Skills: Nonverbal Language and Mirroring**

In order to learn more about nonverbal language, closely observe the person you're communicating with.

Pay attention to how the other person stands, gestures or makes eye contact. This will allow you to use a tool called **mirroring** or watching what the other person does, and then doing the same. For example, if the other person doesn't make eye contact, and uses very few gestures, it may be helpful for you to also avoid eye contact and cut back on your hand movements. Now you have adapted your communication style to the other person's culture. And it may allow your interactions to be more productive and positive.

## Diversity Awareness: Staff to Staff Strategies for Increasing Your Diversity Awareness

### **Electronic Messages**

Finally, let's take a moment to consider the opportunities for misunderstanding posed by the latest technologies. Can you think of examples from your own experience?

Think twice about what you want to say before you say it in an electronic message. Emails, texts, social media and other electronic activities leave room for miscommunication. Electronic communications lack the nonverbal signals that tell the receiver the message is meant with humor, irony or other expressions that put our words into context.

Before you send any email to anyone, always read through the message to make sure you will not offend the recipient.

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Scenarios

## **Situations You Might Encounter**

Let's take a look at a few situations you might encounter. For each, consider what you think would be the best way to handle the situation.

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## Feeling Different

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Frank:** I reported to work on the first day, to an orientation meeting. When I walked in, all the other maintenance employees were like 30 years younger than me. I was probably older than their fathers.

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## Feeling Different (cont)

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Frank (voiceover narration):** I tried to find someone who was remotely my age, so I kept looking around the room. No luck.

**Frank (v.o.):** When my supervisor introduced me to the crew, one guy said to me, “Nice to meet you, sir.” ‘*SIR?!*’ Really?

I wasn’t counting on having to work with a bunch of *kids*, basically. I’m worried that I’m really going to feel very left out with this crew. I’m sure they won’t respect my ability to do the job. I really thought I’d be working with more people like me.

**Frank:** This is going to be miserable.



## **Feeling Different: Outcome**

Frank could use some of the self-assessment tools we discussed earlier in the course to uncover the true source of his concern. Although people of different age groups do sometimes act and react differently, communication will help you find the similarities.

Remember that our “differences” provide us with an opportunity to learn from others. Only when you open up to people can you learn to celebrate each other’s differences and find the similarities.

## Not Fitting In

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Barry:** You know, back when I first started my job, I remember going to the break room for the first time to eat lunch, and being surprised about when I saw only women in the room.

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## Not Fitting In

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Barry (voiceover narration):** I was nervous. A bit uncomfortable, for sure. I thought about leaving the room and finding another place to eat. But then thought that maybe I should ask a group if I could join them?

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## **Not Fitting In: Outcome**

It is not uncommon to experience anxiety when entering a situation where no one else is of your gender, religion, race or ethnicity. Unfortunately, some reactions due to shyness, such as quickly leaving a room, may sometimes be interpreted as prejudice. In a workplace that celebrates differences, becoming comfortable in all situations is key to your success.

If Barry had decided not to enter the breakroom at all when he saw all the other employees were female, they probably would have picked up on the fact that he was uncomfortable. His co-workers could have seen this as a sign of prejudiced feelings, even though he wouldn't have directly done anything to insult them. In celebrating our differences, we should feel comfortable talking to anyone we work with.

## The Holiday

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Cassandra (vo):** At our staff meeting yesterday, Rob mentioned that he wanted to get together with me, Eve and Marie to finalize a project we've been working on. I reminded Rob that Marie couldn't be there, that she was taking that day off to observe a religious holiday – one that she takes every year.



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## The Holiday

### VIDEO SCENARIO

**Cassandra (vo):** Rob was so upset that Marie couldn't make the Friday meeting. Said it was 'ridiculous' and 'unnecessarily inconvenient.' and Eve agreed with Rob. She added that everyone else would be there Friday and that we shouldn't have to work around Marie's 'stupid' holiday."

**Cassandra (vo):** I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Marie had just reminded us last week that this holiday was coming up. I don't understand what the big deal is. The project is basically done. But... I'm new, and I really don't want to ruffle any feathers.

**Cassandra (vo):** Eve and Rob were being downright rude and disrespectful to Marie, but... it isn't my place to call them out on it, right?

## **The Holiday: Outcome**

Diversity is about finding what you have in common with your co-workers and celebrating each other. Cassandra could help her co-workers see that by speaking up.

Cassandra could suggest they have the meeting on another day that week, and/or get Marie's feedback another way ahead of time, such as through email. Cassandra could also question if it is necessary that Marie even be there if it's the end of the project.

While saying nothing doesn't seem to directly affect the working environment, allowing unkind comments to be made about others promotes an intolerant work environment. In order to create a respectful environment, it is your responsibility to help people avoid making negative comments. Joining in the negativity with the group would most certainly insult your co-worker, and could be seen as discrimination.

## Checkpoint

After taking this course, you should be able to:

- define diversity and other related terms
- identify behaviors that can contribute to a hostile working and learning environment (and)
- demonstrate a variety of strategies to help you increase your diversity awareness

Review these points and repeat this course, if needed.



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