

The Magic is in the Mix Promoting Diversity

By
June Fabre, MBA, RNC

People are different. Many organizations are able to benefit from diversity. Unfortunately, others find that it results in subtle and sometimes not so subtle undermining of staff members. Diversity should not be considered to be a threat. When people understand, they see diversity as an important opportunity.

In defining diversity here, I mean recognizing different personality styles or beliefs. For example, some employees like to look at the big picture while others thrive on small details. Certain employees are more people oriented than their counterparts who focus on tasks. Some relish the limelight while others find satisfaction working behind the scenes.

Diversity is an opportunity

Innovation

Innovation bridges us to our future and respect for diversity is its foundation. The powerful status quo frequently squashes many novel ideas. Counteract this tendency by providing a nurturing environment so innovators can survive. A staff development director paired some innovative nurses with status quo nurses to create an education program about critical thinking. The unusual partnerships succeeded because each nurse used the opportunity to teach the other.

Risk management

A balanced mix of personalities within your staff decreases risk. For example, a seminar participant recently recounted some conflicts resulting from her manager's habit of focusing on the big picture while she liked centering on minute details. When encouraged to think back to situations when her detail focus paid

off, her face suddenly lit up. "Yes, my organization was sued several years ago, and it was my detailed written notes that provided the necessary documentation to win the case." So, both the manager and employee were able to decrease risk because of their diversity.

Teamwork

Teams representing many personalities perform better because they recognize all perspectives. With the right attitude, diversity produces synergy when everyone achieves more. Different perspectives add value because they examine all aspects of a situation and avoid potential obstacles.

Five Ways to Focus Inward and Capitalize on Diversity

1. Assess your own self-esteem

Low self-esteem is a lens that can distort situations. People with low self-esteem are more likely to misjudge others. They think, "If the other person is right than I must be wrong." A struggle then ensues about who is right and who is wrong. Competition and sabotaging occur. Skilled nurse managers minimize these behaviors by communicating that all perspectives are valuable, ensuring that each employee has an equal opportunity to participate.

2. Examine your attitude

People fear change, and expend too much energy fighting it. Corporate structure and policies change frequently because of rapid fluctuations in the industry. Ask you, "Is the change a way to improve services or is it a threat to my basic values such as honesty and quality care?" In the first case, go with the flow, but oppose the change in the second instance.

2. Change yourself first

We influence others more than we think. Authoritarian approaches create dependency. On the other hand, a staff friendly culture

cultivates the independence necessary for everyone to reach his or her potential. Align your corporate culture with successful management practices that utilize all of their employees' potential. Healthcare has a lot to gain from independent, autonomous professionals.

4. Be flexible

Good policies create quality and consistency. But, they are black and white, while human situations come in shades of gray. Use critical thinking to interpret them on individual bases. Policies should serve the customer, not the other way around.

5. Have a sense of humor

At company award ceremonies, the department having the most fun is usually the one receiving most of the awards. Humor decreases stress and improves teamwork. For example, friendly teasing about differences can actually bond staff members to each other. " Sara, I know that you'll take care of every detail, probably color code everything and send us a report in triplicate." Sara smiles and nods.

Five Ways to Focus Outward and Capitalize on Diversity

1. Understand diversity

We tend to compare ourselves with others. If the other is different, some people automatically think they are wrong. A better approach is to reframe the situation and ask yourself, "What can I learn from this person?"

2. Show respect

Respect empowers people because it lets people be who they are. Staff are more innovative and productive when they are authentic, and don't have to play a role.

3. Communicate effectively

Different people need different communication approaches. Choose one that matches the other person's needs. In other words, don't be a one trick pony. Learn various communication styles to pick the best one for every situation. If you have one or two styles, they may only work in 25 to 35 percent of situations. If you have six to eight styles, you have a good chance of being effective in every situation.

4. Seek areas of agreement first

Search for ways to agree. A long list of agreements helps to create positive momentum. Focusing on the positive actually makes it happen.

5. Collaborate

Diversity supports collaboration successes. When people say, "These results are better than any single member of the team could have done." You know that you have achieved success. Diversity enhances collaboration.

*June Fabre, MBA, RNC is President of **Smart Healthcare, LLC**. She is a healthcare trainer, speaker and workshop leader specializing in Smart Nursing. Contact her at phone (888) 844-8004, www.JuneFabre.com or write 18 Nichols Rd, Amherst, NH 03031 or info@junefabre.com*