

Me Too: Getting to a Place of Inclusion by Finding Commonalities

Friday, April 24, 2015

10:30-11:45 am

Program Description:

Pursuing a diverse and inclusive culture sometimes invokes a focus on the “Other.” This program will discuss a broader definition of diverse, with an emphasis on the idea of diverse meaning “many differences,” looking at a broader definition of diversity than the more traditional concepts of diversity (race, religion, physical ability, sexual orientation, etc.). We will promote an appreciation for other types of differences, such as socioeconomic background, geographic diversity, family size, birth order, and so on, focusing on the fact that while we are different, we share many similarities. Participants should come with an open mind and leave with great ideas about promoting diversity and inclusion through recognizing and appreciating commonalities.

Tips & Strategies for Identifying Common Ground¹

1. **Keep common ground at the top of your mind.** Keep in mind the idea that, in addition to our differences, we share many things in common with one another. We are socialized to focus on our differences.² Appreciate the value in identifying commonalities. Engage in conversations that value diversity and identify common ground. Broaden your diversity and inclusion training to include a focus on commonalities, as well as differences. Encourage others to focus on shared values and/or life experiences, and model the principle by demonstrating how to relate to those who may be different from you in some ways.
2. **Create workplace opportunities for cross-group contact.** Create opportunities in your workplace for groups of diverse people to come together and engage in activities and social events to build camaraderie. Consider creating new kinship groups beyond traditional affinity groups.³ And, provide opportunities for diverse people to get to know each other and perhaps identify more areas of common ground.
3. **Create cross-group employee resource groups.** Employee resource groups are organized around some shared identity – be it a shared interest, life challenge, or some other commonality. Examples include General Motors’ Veterans Affinity Group, Abbott Laboratories’ Part-Time Workers group, and AstraZeneca’s Adoption Network. Some firms have created parent groups as well.
4. **Focus on shared goals.** As we spend more time with people of diverse backgrounds and experiences, we can recognize the various ways we are alike, which can help us shift from a “them” to an “us” mindset.

¹ **Cultivating Common Ground: Your Answer to Bias Reduction** (Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D):

<http://thiederman.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Common-Ground-for-Bias-Reduction.pdf>

² The Similarities Project (<http://www.everydaysociologyblog.com/2011/12/the-similarities-project.html>).

³ A kinship group is any population that shares a characteristic that sets it apart from others. The characteristic could be a disability, hobby, race, etc.