

For Permanent & Positive Change

# The Exchange

**FEATURED TOPIC: CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

## The First Step Is Knowledge

There are multiple steps in becoming more diverse. The first step is knowledge. It is almost impossible to accept something if we have no information about it. Perhaps some religions or work practices bother you. Take the first step to study and learn about the background, purpose, and expectations. That doesn't mean you have to agree. The first step is just to acquire facts for you to take your time and digest.

Part of this first step is asking questions. You may need to know where to get more information or to check the validity of the facts that you have. Don't be afraid of new information. Remember, the first step is just to gather it and study.

The second step is understanding. This is when you take the knowledge and begin to ask questions to uncover what it means to you. If one department uses another measurement tool, then you may need to first learn about that system and ask that department the pros and cons. This step may take a while. If the understanding does not come easily, perhaps you need to go back to the first step and get more information, or inquire of someone else.

The third step is experience. Now that you understand the difference, you need to see if it is right for you. Sometimes this can mean befriending a person from another culture to ease your discomfort of working with them. Spend time together. Get to know them for whom they are. Experience the person.

The fourth step is acceptance. This does not mean that you start using the measurement tool or ignore other friends in favor of your new one. It simply means you are now comfortable. It feels right.

It may take a long time to complete the four steps to diversity. Take one step at a time. Start with the first step. One truth will become evident: the more we know; the more we know we don't really know. ❖

## Are You More Alike or Different?

Here is an interesting and fun activity. Select a co-worker that you get along with well. Have a clock or watch with a second hand handy. For two minutes the two of you can name as many things as you can think of that make you different from each other. Just jot down the number of differences by making hash marks on a piece of paper.

Next, with the same co-worker, spend two minutes naming all the similarities you have in common. Again, just record the number of items.

Now add up the differences and similarities. At TLC, we found that we had over twice as many differences than similarities. Our discussion that followed revealed surprises. We get along great and work well together. Our conclusion, although not scientific, is that different is good. It allows flexibility and better ensures that one of us will have the strengths that another may be lacking.

How diverse are you from your co-workers? Take a couple minutes and find out. It's fun and you may just learn something. At TLC, one person was astonished and disappointed that another had voted Republican for the last 8 years. It's okay. Different is good, remember? ❖

## What Our Clients Are Saying

"TLC leadership training has influenced me in many different ways. It has made me understand more why people are the way that they are. Different personality styles are important to develop not only a well-rounded, successful business, but also to develop a well rounded and successful culture. I do feel like since the training our culture within the business office has been moving in a positive direction."

Raechel Crumly

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### Looking Forward

Our next issue will focus on Cultural Diversity.

### Looking Back

You might also be interested in our January 2008 edition: [Goals](#) or read other [previous issues of The Exchange](#).

*"We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same."*

Anne Frank

## For Permanent & Positive Change

### Racial Diversity and Cultural Diversity: Are They the Same?

Vincent Ivan Phipps

What if you are Caucasian, born in South Africa, educated in London, but now live in America? Does that make you an African-European-British-American?

Keeping up with racial and cultural diversity can be overwhelming. It is a sensitive issue that continues to develop momentum in our offices, homes, and communities. There is a fine-line between asking too many questions and being seen as evasive versus asking nothing and assuming we know it all. Wow! So what do we do?

Here are two examples:

I have an acquaintance I've known for almost 20 years. He is a Caucasian male who tells me constantly that he understands the African-American race because he lives in an urban neighborhood. The area in which he lives is a gated community with an average household income of \$175,000. Where he lives is not even indicative of most places in America, much less an average black neighborhood! Is this racial or cultural?

Another client feels that his Japanese co-worker is rude. My client was raised to always give a firm handshake and look the other person in the eye. The Japanese co-worker was taught never to give direct eye contact and to bow your head to show respect. Is this racial or cultural?

The best way to understand the sociological phenomenon of diversity is to first seek to understand. Use this guide to keep it simple:

**Race** is a grouping of people from a common origin. Your race can be described as original ancestry, such as African or Asian.

**Culture** is a continual practice or way of living. Clothing is cultural. Belief systems are cultural. Even marital practices or philosophies on money can be cultural.

It is important to understand these two differences. Avoid assuming you understand Chinese culture because you work with a person who is Japanese. Although both are Asian race, they have two different cultures.

Here are some tips to make the melting pot of our country more conducive to understanding diversity:

**Listen and observe.** Take mental notes about what others do. This is the best indicator for how you should adapt. Avoid imposing what you think into the conversation or allowing your assumptions to override better judgment.

**Loosen up.** Don't be so sensitive. Understanding

diversity is tough enough. Don't make diversity issues bigger than necessary by being unnecessarily offended.

In college, my Hispanic lady friend invited me to her home for dinner. As an African-American, I prematurely became offended when fried chicken was served. I asked her how she'd feel if I invited her to my house for tacos. She replied, **"I love tacos!"**

**Inquire with genuine concern.** When asking others about their diversity, avoid using words such as: **"they", "those people", "most of them"**, etc. Although we are individuals, we all have common racial and cultural links. Some are consistent, some are exaggerated, and some are just stereotypically inaccurate.

Before I visited the United Kingdom, I assumed everyone who was British was like Benny Hill. I was wrong. When I went to Rio de Janeiro, the local South Americans found out I was from the United States and assumed I was a rich and arrogant professional athlete.

Differences are awesome. One of my favorite cultural cuisines is French-Creole. When making a good gumbo or jambalaya, the more you can add to it, the better it tastes. Varying languages, customs, religions, dance styles, recreational activities and more make us special. Enjoy the variations and learn the awesome ideologies of others while embracing your own racial and cultural beliefs. The stronger you are as an individual, the stronger we will be as a global nation. ❖

#### Quick Tips

- ✓ Educate yourself by researching another culture.
- ✓ Travel to foreign countries to experience first hand.
- ✓ Avoid thinking in terms of "right" or "wrong" or "their way".

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*"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."*

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869)

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*"Why not let people differ about their answers to the great mysteries of the Universe? Let each seek one's own way to the highest, to one's own sense of supreme loyalty in life, one's ideal of life. Let each philosophy, each world-view bring forth its truth and beauty to a larger perspective, that people may grow in vision, stature and dedication."*

Algernon Black

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## For Permanent & Positive Change

### Trends for Diversity in the Workplace in 2008

Deborah Levine

Diversity is a growing aspect of professional development nationwide. The increasingly broad definition of diversity includes gender, ethnicity, religion, race, generational differences and, in 2008, the haves and have-nots of a global perspective. As pundits on television's financial programs note, many corporations are actively seeking executives with international roots and/or experience. We are experiencing the largest wave of international workers, partnerships and investment in a century. What does this global transformation mean for diversity training?

Traditional diversity training has often emphasized harassment issues and legal guidelines. Teaching skills in cross-cultural communication will soon equal the importance of traditional diversity training. Multicultural literacy will become a major element in running a company efficiently. The inability to interface with different cultures will produce costly roadblocks in the team performance of a diverse workforce. The scramble for talented workers will demand a workplace that attracts diversity by its policies, benefits and day-to-day operations. Corporations that have not focused on diversity will need to dedicate more resources to recruitment, development and retention of diversity-proficient personnel.

Marketing already requires multicultural knowledge in order to successfully target an expanding customer base. Companies cannot afford to have multicultural skills isolated in their marketing departments. The majority of workers will need diversity training in order to interface with an unfamiliar clientele. Sales, promotions, and partnerships will increasingly depend on comfort levels and cross-cultural skills. Even more daunting, the avoidance of embarrassing gaffes must be considered. With today's cyberspace technology, missteps can be communicated almost instantly; there is little room for error. With fewer options for do-overs, damage control will emphasize assurances that mistakes will be avoided in the future. Be prepared for ongoing investment in diversity training and maintain flexibility to adjust as our global economy unfolds.

Deborah Levine is a diversity consultant and Editor of [www.americandiversityreport.com](http://www.americandiversityreport.com). ❖

### Stick With It

If you ever told someone to ***“stick with it”***, did you mean to have them pour glue over their bodies or apply adhesive to a problem?

Most likely you meant for them to keep doing whatever it was that they were doing. Daily respect for diversity can be a challenge but if you “stick with it”, it has tremendous payoffs.

What does “sticking” with something have to do with persistence? Thanks to the beauty of diversity, you will find out. The saying of “stick with it” started as a cooking term. It dates back to seventeenth century Italy. Although the Italians get historical credit for spaghetti, it was actually the Chinese who invented noodles. Stringed, elongated, sliced pasta in China is called low mein. Low mein was invented almost 800 years before the Italians began smothering it with crushed tomatoes. So give the Italians credit for the spaghetti sauce!

The type of grain used for pasta making and the thickness of the noodle varied. This also affected cooking times. Cook the pasta strings too little and you get crunchy pasta. Cook them too long and you have mushy pasta. A common and less cumbersome way of testing it was to pull a string out of the boiling water and throw it on a nearby rock or wall. If it fell down, it needed to keep cooking. If it stuck, it was ready. This method became so popular that anytime something required continual effort, you were told to “stick with it.”

Understanding and adapting to diversity can be difficult. “Stick with it” by keeping your mind, your ears, and your heart, open. ❖

#### Remember To

- ✓ Ask questions that show sincerity.
- ✓ Remain open to honest feedback.
- ✓ Look for opportunities to socialize with people from other races and cultures.

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*“Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.”*

Daniel Patrick Moynihan

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*“For those who have seen the Earth from space, and for the hundreds and perhaps thousands more who will, the experience most certainly changes your perspective. The things that we share in our world are far more valuable than those which divide us.”*

Donald Williams

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*“[People] may be said to resemble not the bricks of which a house is built, but the pieces of a picture puzzle, each differing in shape, but matching the rest, and thus bringing out the picture.”*

Felix Adler

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### For Permanent & Positive Change

#### Featured Service: Dialect Interference

Therese Padgett

I am a G.R.I.T.S. girl (Girl Raised In The South). Some thirty years ago, I lived and worked in New York City. During that time, my brain gradually got in gear with my ears; the Yankee dialect was so fast that I had trouble keeping up and comprehending what natives were saying. Of course, I cannot even remember the number of times some nice (or polite) business acquaintance would comment on my sweet, rhythmic Southern accent.

In college, I had a linguistics professor who asked if I was from the mid-west. In my naïveté, I actually thought this was a compliment. After all, we have heard that newscasters are trained to use a mid-western dialect – clean, crisp, and non-descript - right? Well, while in NYC, there was a couple living in our apartment building and they were from Kalamazoo, Michigan. I have never before or since heard such a Southern drawl. Recalling my professor’s assessment of my own geographic origin, I was appalled!

So appalled that when I met and became friends with Beverly, the CEO of TLC, I asked her opinion. Now, you have to understand that, when Beverly is interacting with others on a personal level, she takes off her professional hat and does not pay so much attention to voice patterns. But, now that I had requested her professional opinion, she wrote down a sentence and asked me to read it back to her out loud. “A nice French ruler has many inches on it.” Let me just say that immediately after saying this sentence all of our friends in the room were rolling in the floor with laughter! Twenty-five years later, we still crack up every time I say “own” for “on” or “eengches” for “inches”.

Dialect is definitely a cultural phenomenon. It is neither good nor bad. When we are with like-speaking people, there is seldom a problem with our dialect. It is only when we are exposed to a different dialect that we may have a communication problem. It can be our problem, or a problem for the other communication partners with whom we find ourselves. More cultural diversity usually brings with it more diversity in dialects, mannerisms and communication styles.

Do you have someone on your work team from a different cultural background? If you are having trouble communicating because of dialect, TLC can help through individual coaching. Often, dialect differences center around rate, pitch and rhythm. These are aspects of the voice that may connote different things in different cultures. TLC’s communication coaches help people understand the implied meanings of these varying aspects and also provide much practice in perfecting the tools of voice that reduce the obstacles

to clear communication.

Contact TLC today to discuss how our coaches can help you to reduce dialect interference in your communications. TLC can be reached by calling 1-888- 232-2873 or 423-622-8255 or by email at [tlc@talklisten.com](mailto:tlc@talklisten.com).

(I personally guarantee that our coaches will not laugh at your dialect!) ❖

#### Dear TLC,

My office has become the United Nations. This is a good thing except no one understands anything outside of his own culture. We hire based on skills and credentials. We acquire people from all over the world. The problem is we are all on the same floor and no one talks to anyone other than those from their culture. I want us to connect more on a personal level instead of just passing each other and not speaking because we dress, sound, and look different. Please advise.

Different Flags.

#### Dear Different Flags,

Once a week (perhaps on Fridays), assign each culture to bring in a sample of their cultures’ food, music, and beverage (non-alcoholic or you’ll really have cultural shock!).

Select the format to include: famous people from that culture, their countries global contributions, past times, etc. A brief discussion could also follow. People resist and fear what is different. This hesitation is common because of ignorance. Educate others and show the beauty of a culture and they are no longer afraid because it becomes part of them.

#### Happy Birthday!

**TLC wishes a Happy Birthday to clients celebrating in February:**

- » Johanna Renee Baum
- » Rona Pohl
- » Terry Nolan
- » Eleanor Cooper
- » Ashlee Pitzl
- » Jeff Goebeler
- » Amanda Perl
- » Nancy Long
- » Festus Akindele
- » Erica Jizmejian
- » Kevin McClary
- » Candice Dettloff
- » Marty Miller
- » Dana Dial
- » Keith Henry
- » Dave Kanoy
- » Sheri Amante
- » Glenn Berry

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*“One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings.”*

Franklin Thomas

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*“It is a great shock at the age of five or six to find that in a world of Gary Coopers you are the Indian.”*

James Baldwin

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*“If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.”*

Margaret Mead

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## For Permanent & Positive Change

### CEO CORNER

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

#### Is America Diverse?

The dictionary's definition of diversity is, "the fact or quality of being different." That leads me to the title question: Is America diverse? I have traveled to 22 countries on five different continents and my response to that question would be another question: Different than what?

Some places I have traversed have quickly identified me as a "Yank" or an American. After we got through the basic amenities and created true conversation, many were surprised by my contributions. I was different than the picture they had in their mind of an American. Of course, I fulfilled the stereotype in some countries such as when I ordered an Italian wine in a restaurant in Paris.

In some places I have gone, I discovered I was the first American the people had ever met. That responsibility of setting a positive first impression weighed heavily on my mind and heart.

I met a man in a Scottish pub several years ago who thought Americans were the most polite and caring people he had ever met. This was good news for my patriotic self. I asked him if his experience was based upon meeting Americans in Europe or going to the states. He exclaimed that he went to the states every year. I was convinced I had met the poster boy for building American goodwill across the globe. I then asked him where in the USA he had been. His answer was a short two-word response: Disney World! I didn't have the heart to set him straight. We need all the goodwill ambassadors we can get.

As our world shrinks, what others think about us does matter. It can affect our economics, policies, environment, and politics. I tell people of other nations that Americans are different from each other. I believe that is one of our biggest strengths. Some say we are a melting pot. I think, rather, we are unique beings who are learning to accept our differences and not be afraid of them. It is an ongoing process. Many of us are still afraid of anyone who looks, talks, or

thinks differently than we do. I may not like your opinions or actions, but I am very grateful that you have a right to express them in this country. I have been to places where freedom of speech was just a dream.

The political primaries will be an indicator of just how diverse we are comfortable being. We have a woman and an African American running for the Democratic Party. I found it ludicrous that the media coined Hilliary's tired and somewhat frustrated phrase as an emotional meltdown. It was just as crazy if the media was correct when they suggested that episode gave her the New Hampshire primary. It's crazy because that would indicate that we want a strong president, but we want a woman who can show her vulnerability. Maybe I'm over-reacting. Perhaps we want all of our candidates to demonstrate their humanity.

Let me close with a play-on-words. The key word here is diversity, not "biversity". By that I mean that acceptance of others is not narrowed down to a choice of two: them or us. It is all of us, or as is commonly said in the south, "all y'all." Think of your family and list the differences each person has. Do the same with your friends and co-workers. Diversity brings variety, different ideas and experiences, and new solutions. Study. Understand. Experience. Accept. Live your dreams! ❖

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*"Insight, I believe, refers to the depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another."*

Mary Catherine Bateson

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*"Peace is not unity in similarity but unity in diversity, in the comparison and conciliation of differences."*

Mikhail Gorbachev

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*"Difference is of the essence of humanity. Difference is an accident of birth and it should therefore never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace: respect for diversity."*

John Hume

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TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by e-mail [tlc@talklisten.com](mailto:tlc@talklisten.com) or phone 1-888-232-2873. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

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