

RESPECT DIFFERENCES *AT WORK*

Respect is the foundation on which a healthy work culture is built. It's also the key to working well in a diverse work environment. You can improve your chances of success at work and build the engagement and commitment of the people you work with by showing your respect for differences in others. That includes respect for the unique strengths of every individual and for the diverse perspectives that come from different life experiences.

WAYS TO RESPECT DIFFERENCES AT WORK

Listen before you speak.

When you're communicating with someone—especially someone with different perspectives and opinions than yours—seek first to understand, then to be understood. Listen to what the other person has to say before responding with your thoughts. To ensure that you're listening well, summarize your understanding of what the other person has said and ask if you've got it correct. Don't interrupt or speak over the other person.

Make an effort to draw out the ideas and opinions of people who don't jump into a conversation.

Different cultures have different norms around the pace of conversation, and outgoing or more reserved people in any culture may have different styles of engagement. While you may be comfortable with rapid back-and-forth talk,

others may hold back from speaking out of courtesy or because they prefer to consider carefully before contributing. You don't have to be a manager or the leader of a meeting to notice that someone who might have a different and valuable perspective has not spoken. Ask the person if they'd like to share their thoughts. By doing this, you're showing that you care about their opinion.

Make a special effort to include people with different perspectives.

It's easy to settle into a rut of working only with people who share your background and perspective. They're likely to agree with you, which makes for less friction. However, less friction can also mean less careful consideration and poorer-quality output. Look around you when you gather in a work group, and consider whether your team has an



appropriate mix of people—by gender, race, ethnicity, age, or other differences. Show your respect for the variety of talent, thoughts, and ideas in your organization by including people with different backgrounds and worldviews in your work groups.

Share credit, and offer praise.

One of the most disrespectful and demoralizing things you can do at work is to take credit for another person's idea or contribution. You get more esteem in others' eyes when you give appropriate attribution and place credit where it is deserved. Go out of your way to thank others for their contributions and offer praise, especially to people who are quieter and less willing to boast about their accomplishments. You don't have to be a manager to give meaningful recognition. You'll make the people you praise feel good, and you'll be contributing to a respectful and motivating work environment.



Build your cultural competence.

You can't respect differences at work if you don't recognize and understand them. Cultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people of other cultures—including people in your own community who have had different life experiences. Building cultural competence takes work, but it pays off in better relationships with people who are different from you—and who may have a great deal to teach you.

Treat others as they wish to be treated.

In a world of differences, it's not enough to treat others as you'd want them to treat you. You need to treat others as they want to be treated. By building cultural competence, you'll begin to be more aware of differences in how people interact and show respect for each other. Notice when someone takes offense at something you do or say, and learn from it. Remember when someone asks you to treat them in a different way (by using a different gender pronoun, for example, or by not interrupting when they speak). When you're in doubt, ask.

By showing your respect for differences, you can help build a more inclusive, productive, and enjoyable work environment.

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