Redefining
Diversity

It's not just the right thing to do. It also makes good business sense.

By Richard Koonce

Since first appearing in the 1980s, diversity training has sometimes suffered from a dubious reputation and oftenoccupied a problematic place in the training curricula of organizations. Early programs aimed at eliminating racial discrimination and sexual harassment were designed to be corrective. They focused on giving people sensitivity training and rooting out racism (and later sexism) in personnel policies and management practices so companies wouldn't be slapped with lawsuits. But those programs often came across to participants as lecturing and even hectoring. The training style could be didactic, and white male managers in particular sometimes felt singled out, accused of sexist or racial discrimination whether such accusations had any basis. No wonder that a generation of programs didn't get much support from top management, traditionally white and male. Subsequent programs became more interactive, using small-group exercises, videos, and other techniques to encourage participant involvement. Still, much of the emphasis continued to be on participants getting the right message and on companies establishing compliance rather than building workplace commitment.

At times, such programs came under political attack: Critics disparaged them for being touchy-feely and more concerned with social change than skill building. The programs were also criticized for lacking content and a hard-wired connection to the needs or priorities of the business.

Now, companies are embracing diversity as a business focus and corporate value. Embracing diversity is-

n't just the right thing to do; there's a strong business case for it. The globalization and proliferation of new retail markets in an Internet-driven world are presenting unprecedented new business opportunities. Via the Web, a company can target its products to virtually any market: African Americans, Hispanics, baby boomers, gays, lesbians, older people, soccer moms. All of those groups have identifiable and increasing buying power, say marketing experts. Companies recognize the importance of creating workplaces that look like their marketplaces and that don't discriminate based on race, age, gender, ethnic background, religion, or sexual orientation.

In addition, companies are moving fast to compete for and accommodate the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce. Just as the "Workforce 2000 Report" predicted in 1987, only about 15 percent of

new entrants into the American workforce are white males. The rest is a mix of Hispanics, African Americans, Vietnamese, Chinese, Russians, Europeans, and others. Despite the current tide of corporate layoffs, recruitment and retention of high-quality knowledge workers remain core challenges, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers. The need to attract and retain top talent has become especially acute as knowledge work has become a key business differentiator and as companies compete for a small pool of knowledge workers.

Charles Schwab & Company and IBM have robust leadership development initiatives to recruit, develop, and promote women and minority managers for advancement. Schwab's program—Build a Culture: No Ceilings, No Barriers, No Limits—has been a key part of its operating philosophy for more than 20 years. Schwab tracks hiring, retention, turnover, time in grade, and participation rates by gender and race to ensure that women and minorities have equal promotional and development opportunities, note Steve Yearout and Gerry Miles in their book, *Growing Leaders* (ASTD, 2001).

At IBM, 38 percent of the worldwide management council (the company's top management team) consists of women, minorities, and non-U.S.-born people. Ted Childs, vice president of diversity, says that women hold top jobs in Peru, Indonesia, France, Spain, Portugal, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Latin America. IBM's executive sourcing process, which focuses on leadership development and succession planning, specifically targets women and minorities.

"It's a global process," says Childs. "Each year, the general managers of each of our major units come in for discussions with the chairman about our leadership development needs. They review the incumbents in key jobs, their development plans and needs, and the replacement table for each of those key jobs, those individuals, and their needs. Within that framework, the discussions focus on female, minority, and non-U.S.-born candidates."

Other organizations—Apple, EDS, AOL Time Warner, AT&T, Ben & Jerry's, Eddie Bauer—support career planning, coaching, and professional development for Hispanics, Latinos, Asians, gays, and lesbians. Eddie Bauer actively recruits people with disabilities, and Hoffman La Roche views the blending of its recruitment, diversity, development, and retention policies as key to its long-term business success. The

attraction and retention of talent are strategic issues for Hoffman La Roche, according to Steve Grossman, vice president of human resources. He has said that the company goes after talented people from diverse backgrounds without regard for gender, sexual orientation, race, age, national origin, or geography.

As companies grapple with the twin challenges of appealing to emerging retail markets and attracting diverse job candidates, many are becoming catalysts for social change. Perhaps the most important new development in that regard is the growing trend of companies to embrace sexual diversity along with racial, ethnic, religious, and gender differences. Seventy-six firms in the *Fortune* 100 have nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation; 44 offer gay and lesbian employees domestic partner benefits, according to the Human Rights Campaign.

"At Fannie Mae, we believe that the more our company reflects the marketplace in which we operate, the greater our competitive advantage will be," says Maria Johnson, vice president of Fannie Mae's Office of Diversity.

IBM chairman Louis Gerstner says, "Our commitment to build a workforce as broad and diversified as the customer base we serve in more than 160 countries isn't an option; it's a business imperative as fundamental as delivering superior technologies to the marketplace."

Yet, in the midst of growing inclusiveness, diversity programs have critics and are hardly common. In fact, in some churches, religious organizations, conservative advocacy groups, and charities, nondiscrimination policies have been rolled back. In another example, the merged ExxonMobil did not reinstate a written nondiscrimination policy covering sexual orientation that had been in force at Mobil, and it did not open its domestic partner benefits program to all gay and lesbian employees.

Sexual, racial, and ethnic intolerance continue to simmer in many workplaces—especially small businesses, where HR policies are often outdated or nonexistent.

How now?

What is the future of diversity programs? How can they meet changing business and HR needs? What's the best way to go about designing such programs?

Corporate and independent diversity trainers say that the need for diversity programs is escalating. As

companies expand their operations overseas and into new markets, there's a need to tap resident employee and leadership talent in those markets. Global sourcing of leaders is poised to become the next big leadership development trend and is standard business practice at companies such as GE Global eXchange Services, one of the world's largest providers of B2B business services worldwide.

When a company becomes involved in global expansion and global sourcing of leaders, it can present a multitude of challenges, say diversity consultants such as Howard Ross, president of Silver Spring, Maryland-based Cook Ross, a training and leadership coaching firm. For example,

● How do you get people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds to subscribe to a single work ethic?

● How do you meld professional understanding among people of different religious traditions who may come from countries with differing views about women and authority?

● How do you bring people together effectively from around the globe to interact in new work configurations such as virtual teams and strategic e-business partnerships?

Providing people with cross-cultural communication and diversity training can accelerate cooperation in multinational work teams, facilitate group learning, and reduce cultural misunderstandings that might otherwise arise, advises Ross.

Another reason diversity initiatives are getting new emphasis is that many existing corporate leadership development programs don't do a good enough job of targeting, recruiting, and developing all of the minority talent they need. Even in companies with progressive leadership recruitment and development, problems exist in filling the upper ranks with well-qualified minority job candidates. A recent article in the *New York Times* cited the lack of minority faces in the top-level leadership jobs at General Electric, a company

usually lauded for its leadership development.

When it comes to diversity, a lot of companies "don't know what they don't know," says Ross, adding that the predominant organizational culture is still overwhelmingly "white and male" even as firms struggle to recruit and develop diverse people. "[The U.S. corporate culture] is built on white male norms, behaviors, and ways of doing things," he says, "even on white male ways of thinking and speaking."

So even if a company makes a concerted effort to identify and develop talented minority managers in hopes of promoting them to senior leadership positions, the deck is often stacked—say, when a large conglomerate decides to place a high-potential black manager in charge of a textile plant in the rural south or promote a woman over the heads of numerous men to run a manufacturing facility. "We need to raise our awareness of what people are up against when we put them in new leadership positions," says Ross. "That doesn't necessarily mean that we can't put certain individuals in those positions. It just means we have a responsibility in those situations to put people in contexts where they can be successful.

One way many companies try to support the upward career mobility of minority managers is by encouraging internal peer mentoring for women, African Americans, Hispanics, and other groups. Many years ago when Xerox was trying to ensure more participation from blacks in its workforce, a caucus established among black employees had the blessing of then-CEO David Kearns, who encouraged black employees to get together periodically to talk about their challenges in moving through the organization and to get help from other managers. After that, there arose a women's caucus, an Hispanic caucus, and so on.

Fannie Mae has taken the idea of employee caucus groups a step further. It has 14 Employee Networking Groups for African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Catholics, Christians, Muslims, older

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workers, gays, lesbians, veterans, and so forth. The groups serve as social and networking hubs, and they foster workplace communication about diversity issues among all employees, including senior managers, says Johnson.

Ross is a big believer in such affinity groups, but to be effective, he says, they need ongoing support from top management. The CEO of a hospital that his company worked with in the Midwest met regularly with black managers in small-group settings. "It was a powerful thing. The CEO was a white male, and the meetings kept him connected with the managers and their concerns," says Ross. "It also kept them connected to him so they knew where he was coming from with decisions. He could bounce ideas off them, and that created a sense of partnership."

Affinity groups also need to be linked with other corporate initiatives and power centers, say diversity consultants. At Fannie Mae, the chairperson of each Employee Networking Group also serves as a member of Fannie Mae's Diversity Advisory Council, which meets three to four times a year with a representative from the Office of the Chairman to deal with diversity issues. IBM takes a similar approach. It runs eight executive taskforces—one each for women, men, Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, gays and lesbians, and disabled workers. The taskforces, plus a ninth group that deals with work-life balance, inform IBM's leaders and decision makers on diversity issues at all levels.

"Members of our senior executive team are involved in leading each of those efforts," says Childs, "which allows diversity issues to permeate the culture and fabric of IBM." Three of the taskforces (women, disabled, and gay-lesbian) are global, which means that at IBM diversity isn't just a U.S. goal but a global one.

What goes in?

So, what goes into effective corporate diversity training programs? At IBM, every new manager is exposed to diversity training as part of the leadership development curriculum. The central theme emphasizes why a diverse workforce is critical to meeting the needs of a diverse marketplace, says Childs. Managers learn that they'll need diversity skills and sensitivity in handling business projects, managing multicultural teams, and dealing with a wide variety of global customers.

IBM sponsors more than 100 U.S. networking

groups and will soon have its first networking groups outside of the United States. IBM also has about 50 diversity councils scattered throughout its offices around the world.

At Fannie Mae, all aspects of corporate training, including leadership development, contain a robust diversity component, says Johnson. Over the years, Fannie Mae's diversity training has evolved and is completely redesigned every three years to meet emerging needs. "The first round of training, designed in 1992 and rolled out in 1993 and 1994, was basically sensitivity training like everybody else was doing at the time," says Johnson. Perspectives in Diversity came online in 1996. "It emphasized how diversity impacts our business and our future, and it included a lot of information about changing U.S. demographics."

Recently, Fannie Mae rolled out a new diversity training package containing many elements of the Perspectives in Diversity program and made it available to its customers, who are mortgage lenders. The goal is to acquaint them with the rich prospective market of homeowners among lower-income and ethnic Americans. "If banks don't make home loans in underserved communities because of bias of their loan officers and underwriters, we can't buy loans," says Johnson. "But if our clients generate more loans in their communities, we'll have more loans to buy, which helps us meet our business goals."

Fannie Mae has also established clear goals to increase the ratio of minorities at the officer and director levels, and it ties compensation to the promotion of diversity as a business value.

Given such efforts, challenges arise. "You get the greatest resistance when you can't make the link between the workplace and the marketplace," says Childs. "The marketplace is where people connect diversity to value. When people see diversity as enhancing their ability to compete and win, they're less likely to offer resistance."

To that end, Childs spends a lot of his time at IBM holding town meetings with employees—events he stages in tandem with IBM's vice president for market development and which he began several years ago after an IBM employee questioned why the company spent so much time on the topic of diversity.

"The VP for market development typically gives a presentation on the diversity of IBM's marketplace and how the company is crafting strategies to go

How to Create Effective Diversity Training

The outcomes of diversity training have sometimes proven elusive for organizations to measure. That's one reason diversity experts and facilitators insist that programs should be aligned with corporate strategies and help drive and reinforce other organizational initiatives, such as employee recruitment, development, rewards, and advancement.

Here are key steps to ensure the effective implementation of diversity programs.

Step 1 Obtain top-level leadership support. People and organizations focus on what their leaders focus on. For diversity initiatives to succeed, they require the enthusiastic support and involvement of a company's CEO and top leadership team, who must clearly enunciate the importance of diversity as a business value and goal. The leadership ranks must also reflect a diversity of races, faces, perspectives, and points of view. Without a clear-cut commitment to diversity as a corporate value and focus, it's unlikely that diversity programs of any kind can be sustained.

Step 2 Conduct a needs assessment. That will help people better understand how cultural impediments in the organization, such as outdated leadership thinking or management practices, may thwart progress, says Chris Stewart, president of Educational Dimensions. A needs assessment tailors diversity training programs to meet specifically identified needs and optimize results.

Step 3 Embed in a larger framework. Diversity issues should be addressed as part of corporate transformation initiatives and as an embedded component of recruitment, development, training, and promotion. Performance metrics for managers should also take commitment to diversity initiatives into account, and the initiatives should be factored into reward and recognition systems and policies.

Step 4 Research best practices. Companies such as Fannie Mae, IBM, and AT&T provide outstanding examples of ways to design and implement diversity initiatives on an enterprise-wide basis, and how to integrate diversity goals into strategic planning and business goals. Those companies and others take a holistic, systemic approach to embedding diversity

themes and priorities into all operational areas and at all organizational levels.

Step 5 Use diversity as a business advantage. Leading organizations take time and care to ensure that they appreciate the full diversity of their employee populations and the ways in which workforce diversity can be leveraged to marketplace advantage. The mechanisms that IBM and Fannie Mae use for leveraging employee knowledge and feedback into the development of business strategies provide good models for how your organization might leverage diversity to its advantage.

Step 6 Design informational and transformational programs. Every diversity program needs to convey information about specific policies and initiatives an organization has in place or is about to implement. The programs need to be transformational in design and content, bringing employees of differing backgrounds together to create synergy, trust, and greater workplace cooperation and understanding. Transformational topics might include why workforce diversity is critical to achieving business goals, the nature of workplace prejudice, the power of language in shaping our perceptions of others, and how misconceptions can adversely affect employee productivity, morale, team unity, and organizational performance.

Step 7 Use various methods and media. Role play, storytelling, small-group discussions, videos, simulations, vignettes, and exercises should all be incorporated into the design of diversity training. Diversity trainers will want to explore how to develop Web-based programs, especially as downstream components of face-to-face workshops.

Step 8 Recognize your role. In the current business environment, diversity isn't typically thought of as a bottom-line issue, but it's possible for you to make a strong business case for the value of diversity in furthering your company's goals. As a trainer or in-house diversity expert or change consultant, take it upon yourself to educate your company's CEO and top leaders about how diversity as a value and business focus can help the organization reach new markets, foster an atmosphere of inclusiveness, and create a world-class workforce.

after diverse markets," says Childs. "Then, I talk about the diversity of the workplace and why that's important in attracting customers. In essence, I connect the two dots."

Childs says that the meetings have proven valuable in helping people understand why diversity is important to IBM's success and why it isn't just a race and gender thing anymore. "At IBM, diversity encompasses a family of issues, including race, gender, thought, culture, and geography," he says.

At companies such as Fannie Mae and IBM, diversity has become firmly embedded in the overall strategy, business goals, and policies toward employees. The companies see it as good business to create a large organizational tent under which people of all colors, backgrounds, and religions can work and interact. That trend seems to be rolling not just in workplace programs, but also in legislative initiatives.

A corporate value

Hewlett-Packard, General Mills, Kodak, FleetBoston, and Prudential Financial are some of the latest companies that support legislation to ban workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. "Some of our most talented employees are gay or lesbian," says Austin Sullivan, senior vice president for corporate relations at General Mills. "We want to send a clear message about how much we value them and how determined we are to see that they and others won't be discriminated against."

Some companies are breaking new ground in how they define diversity. American Airlines, for example, recently extended employment protection to transgender workers, joining at least 23 other employers—among them six of the *Fortune* 500.

Still, the future of diversity training is in some respects unclear. How does one design programs to have maximum impact on a wide variety of people whose needs may be difficult to address in a single class or initiative? What training tools are the most effective?

Those questions weigh daily on people who design diversity training. Cheryl Kravitz, executive director of the National Capital Region of the National Conference for Community and Justice (formerly the National Conference of Christians and Jews), says that NCCJ provides diversity training to a wide variety of clients, including school systems, police departments, media organizations, and private companies. Kravitz,

who thinks storytelling can be a powerful training tool in diversity work, says, "It brings everyone in a group to ground zero."

Kravitz invites participants to think back to a time when they felt marginalized or stigmatized for being different in any way. "In our training designs, we like facilitators to go first and share something about themselves that will knock people's socks off. "In my case, I share that I'm a former battered woman. After that, people feel it's OK to share whatever's on their minds."

Kravitz recalls a program she was involved in some years ago when she worked with a police department and the black community in a town outside of Washington, D.C., where an African American man with a long criminal record committed suicide after robbing a bank. "There was a big split between the African American community and the police department over why that happened," she says. In a roomful of participants that included members of the African American community and police officers, a woman spoke up that she was the sister of one of the little black girls killed in Birmingham in 1963. The woman's story had a tremendous impact on one of the white police officers in the room, bringing about a transformation of his point of view about the man's suicide. Now, the officer is featured in a video about the value of NCCJ's programs.

Storytelling, says Kravitz, is powerful and transformational because it personalizes prejudice, discrimination, and stigmatization. "When people share common experiences of hurt, it can be life changing. What's more, storytelling is a great way to reveal people's diversity and commonality in a single exercise. It can unite people in a classroom or workplace in ways one might not imagine.

"We've done diversity training with groups of all white males in which you wouldn't suspect much diversity. But scratch the surface, get at people's personal stories, and get them talking, and you discover everybody's not the same. Someone in the group may have a disability no one could see or someone's gay or Muslim. People discover they do have differences, meaningful differences."

Kravitz also uses group-process tools such as an exercise she calls The Person Behind the Face. Kravitz hopes her workshops get people who are different to speak up for one another. "That's what we want them to be able to do after we leave."

Chris Stewart, president of Educational Dimensions, a training and consulting company in Mitchelville, Maryland, uses a variety of process tools in her diversity workshops. She especially likes role play for engaging people in a discussion of diversity. "We start out asking people to role play nonthreatening roles," she says. For example, participants are given the chance to relate to each other in role plays as husbands and wives or parents and grandparents. Once people's commonality in such roles and trust is established across racial lines, Stewart nudges them to take on more challenging parts. A white person might be asked to play the role of a black person and vice versa. The goal is to help people understand the challenges of going through life in another race, gender, or life situation. In Stewart's experience, the role plays help participants develop mutual empathy and understand how misunderstandings and miscommunication can occur among people of different races, genders, and backgrounds.

Dominant vs. nondominant cultures

The building of empathy among people in well-run diversity programs can play a powerful transformational role in workplace situations, says Howard Ross. In addition to forging a tight bond, the empathy helps people from a dominant culture (white and male) understand adversities faced by nondominant groups such as women, minorities, disabled people, gays, and lesbians.

"For the most part, cultures are invisible to dominant groups," says Ross, observing that a white male in a large organization might not think of its culture as "white and male" while a woman, Hispanic, or gay or lesbian person probably would. "People in dominant groups tend to be more focused on their individual identity than group identity. People in nondominant groups tend to be more focused on their group identity," he says. That different perspective can keep people apart in the workplace and foster miscommunication, mistrust, low morale, and poor performance among people of differing backgrounds. Ross thinks effective diversity training can improve work performance, team unity, and morale, and reduce turnover and absenteeism.

One thing that Kravitz, Stewart, and Ross agree on is that contrary to popular myth, diversity training is by no means just for white men. It has to be for everybody.

"Every group needs diversity training because every group carries within itself both good and bad [attitudes]," says Kravitz. Stewart points out that "a lot of people aren't aware of their prejudices and all of the ways they respond to other people." Adds Ross, "We all have issues with others. All of us who are part of dominant cultures and, for the most part, those who come from nondominant cultures almost always have judgmental views about people in nondominant groups."

Ross believes there's no such thing as "good and bad people" and that diversity programs should get away from the "us and them" approach. "If we label anyone *bad, evil,* or *ignorant* before a diversity program even starts, we lessen the possibility of people learning new things because no one's going to be motivated to change," he says. "Our belief systems about race, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth come from a lifetime of being trained in some cases to see people different from us as less than us."

Diversity experts agree that you can't avoid generating conflict when planning and delivering diversity training, or even when trying to promote a large, inclusive workplace. Johnson recalls a time when conflicts arose at Fannie Mae between members of the Christian ENG and the Gay/Lesbian ENG. She had to become personally involved to get the groups to respect each other's perspective, which eventually resulted in each group hosting a lunch for the other.

Ross says that the conflict that arises around diversity issues can be healthy. He'd rather see conflicts surface in a workshop than go underground. "Diversity programs need to be highly participative. My general rule is that at least 75 percent of the people in the room need to interact…not just sit there and be lectured to."

Diversity experts also say it's important to create "a safe container" of space where people feel free to share their thoughts openly and honestly. "You have to create enough safety in the group so that people feel comfortable talking about what's on their minds," says Ross. "And in my mind, that means avoiding political correctness."

That involves finesse and choreography on the part of a diversity facilitator. For example, does a facilitator permit a person who identifies himself as a fundamentalist Christian who believes homosexuality is sinful to express that view in a room where gays might be present or others who'd be offended? Getting

The Person Behind the Face

Cheryl Kravitz's goal in her diversity workshops is to foster compassion and empathy. To that end, she conducts an exercise she calls, The Person Behind the Face. She distributes sheets of paper with balloons drawn on them. Participants can use as many of the balloons as they like to define the dimensions by which they identify themselves.

For example, a participant might indicate that she is a mother, wife, professional, and breast cancer survivor. Another person might indicate that he is a father, divorced man, successful salesman, devout Catholic, and child of an alcoholic. Participants can use as many self-descriptors as they like and then describe themselves to the group.

As facilitator, Kravitz goes first. She usually describes herself as "a young mom and an old mom" because she had her first child at 16 and at age 40 adopted a second child. She also tells people she's Jewish, a woman whose mother has Alzheimer's, a person who once found herself in a coma, and a former battered wife who almost died at the hands of her first husband. Kravitz finds that disclosing all of that information in workshops typically has a cascade effect on participants, evoking a rush of personal sharing. As she goes around the room and people share details of their lives, it forges invisible bonds, at times between people one might not expect. A second woman might reveal that she also was a battered wife, says Kravitz, or a gay man who comes out by sharing his story may find that he's not the only gay person in the room.

The Person Behind the Face is a powerful transformational tool, says Kravitz, because it helps people understand that the way someone looks on the outside may have little to do with who and what they are on the inside. The exercise can unfreeze people's preconceptions of others and help melt prejudice and stereotypes.

people to speak forthrightly is a key tenet of diversity training, but so is consideration. Just where do you draw the line? Diversity facilitators say that it's important to introduce the ground rules at the start. "One goal of NCCJ programs is to have participants understand the importance of treading lightly regarding what they say about other people," says Kravitz, who has a framed print hanging in her office with the words *Tread Lightly*.

Many diversity experts also advise facilitators to occasionally challenge people's assertions and reframe a discussion when someone says something potentially offensive. Ross says that if he were to hear sexist or anti-gay comments, he'd invite others to ask what their attitudes are.

At its root, say diversity trainers, diversity training is about helping people shine a spotlight on themselves, their beliefs, and their ways of looking at the world. That can be tough work for facilitators and groups alike. Kravitz points out that it also involves risks for the facilitator and participants in that their own attitudes about other people or groups might change in the process."

IBM's Childs agrees. He advises organizations that are developing diversity programs to "be prepared for pushback. You have to be willing to deal with conflicts. And understand this: If you're not encountering [resistance], you're not pushing yourself forward. You've got to go where you haven't been. When what you find makes you a little uncomfortable, I think that's a positive sign."

Fannie Mae's Johnson echoes that view: "Some people won't be happy [you're doing programs at all]. Others will complain that the programs aren't bringing results as quickly as they should."

As with any transformation initiative, diversity professionals agree that top-level leadership support is critical.

"You need unwavering and obsessive commitment from the top of your organization if diversity initiatives are to succeed," says Johnson, who adds that you also need adequate staffing and funding. "I don't look for people with HR or diversity backgrounds. I look for people with strong project management skills who know the business systems of the entire organization. Being a diversity professional is about common sense, good judgment, organizational knowledge, and valuing people."

Forms of Bias

The National Conference for Community and Justice identifies these forms of prejudice present in American society:

Exclusion and invisibility. Perhaps the most fundamental form of bias, this is also the most difficult to detect. It can result in inadvertent, complete, or relative exclusion of a particular group or groups. It can also involve excluding specific information about groups and individuals, including their contributions and history. When a group is wholly or partially excluded, it's difficult for other people to tell what's missing. It's easier to detect bias in what's included than to be aware of all of the dimensions of what is invisible. Exclusion and invisibility diminish the value given to particular groups and silences the legitimacy of their voices.

Stereotyping. A bias that portrays members of specific groups as having characteristics in common, negative and positive. Some people perceive that positive stereotypes are acceptable because they value the traits ascribed to the group. But the reality is that negative and positive stereotypes are harmful because they present people as homogeneous just because they share one attribute or role rather than present a wide range of individual roles, beliefs, preferences, and behaviors within the group.

Imbalance and selectivity. This bias is sometimes apparent in how the news media cover certain events or how corporations make decisions about what faces to include in corporate brochures, training videos, and advertisements. It presents only one interpretation of an issue, a situation, or a group of people, restricting comprehensive knowledge and perpetuating a one-sided, skewed, or simplistic view of complex issues, situations, or people.

Unreality. This refers to the tendency, when presenting information, of individuals or groups to ignore particular facts about other groups or individuals because of prevailing beliefs or ideologies. When unreality is present, underlying facts or issues that could clarify attitudes and actions are excluded when discussing racism, sexism, and other biases. Substantive or controversial topics may be glossed over, denying people the information they need to recognize, understand, and address issues of discrimination.

Fragmentation and isolation. This form of bias refers to the tendency of the media and others to separate or isolate the experiences of minority groups from those of the majority population. When present, fragmentation and isolation imply that the experiences, history, and situations of people of color, people with disabilities, older people, women, and other specific groups are somehow unrelated to the experiences of other people in the population.

Linguistic bias. Language is a powerful tool for framing perceptions of people and conveying information, perspectives, and attitudes. Ethnic and racial slurs and terms such as *sexual preference* can categorize people and groups in ways they don't like and aren't accurate, but still reinforce prevailing assumptions.

◁⬤) **Source/** *Building Bridges With Reliable Information: A Quick Guide About Our Community's People,* **NCCJ, National Capital Region**

Though Fannie Mae is a place that embraces diversity as a business value, Johnson has taken aggressive steps to elicit middle management support for diversity programs. For example, she asked the heads of Fannie Mae's different business units to identify high-potential employees—especially white male managers and directors—to serve as diversity facilitators and trainers. The move wasn't without controversy. "Some people thought, *Why should white men get the opportunity for another high-visibility assignment,*" says Johnson. But, she says, it's helping reinforce the importance of diversity awareness and training across the organization.

The Difference September 11 Makes

In light of the events of September 11, discussions of diversity might seem of secondary importance. But the events of that day do have relevance to diversity because, regrettably, they resulted in other incidents of intolerance and prejudice. A number of hate crimes against Arab Americans and even anyone who appeared to be Middle Eastern or Muslim were reported, including the death of a Sikh man in Arizona. Sikhs, in fact, are neither Middle Eastern nor Muslim. Despite heartfelt statements by political and religious leaders worldwide recognizing that Islam is a peaceful faith and that the bombings were acts of terrorists, there is danger of Islamic profiling.

How do we behave from now on against the dreadful backdrop left by the events of September 11? Perhaps the answer is this: Regardless of the treachery committed that day and in the days following, we, as individuals, shouldn't respond in blind and undirected outrage towards others. This is a time for restraint and reason, cool-headedness and compassion. It's a time not to lash out but to reach out to others, especially those of different cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. That in no way diminishes the enormity of what happened but constructively channels energies towards building a more tolerant, inclusive, and humane world.

The St. Louis, Missouri Chapter of the National Conference of Community and Justice has developed several suggestions to help guide our thoughts and actions at this difficult time.

Start with yourself. Look within. Become aware of your own anger, frustration, and bias. Identify ways to redirect your emotions to promote peace, inclusion, and justice.

Learn more about targeted groups. These organizations can provide information about the history, culture, religious beliefs, and challenges of certain groups:

- Council on American-Islamic Relations
- Institute of Islamic Information and Education
- Islamic Center of America.

ICA can provide information on American Muslims. The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and Arab American Institute can provide information on the Arab American community in general. For information on the Sikh community and religion 🔊 **sikh.org, sikhnet.com.**

Identify and report hate crimes. It's important not to ignore acts of hatred directed towards any individuals perceived to belong to a targeted group. A hate crime is any crime committed against an individual or a group because of race, color, religion, national origin, ethnic background, disability, gender, or sexual orientation.

Reach out to targeted groups. Personal expressions of support and concern give solace to groups threatened with violence. After a window in an Islamic bookstore in Alexandria, Virginia, was smashed by a thrown brick, sympathetic residents visited the store and sent the owner letters of regret and comfort.

Commit to stand with targeted groups. Just as there must be a long-term commitment to the people who suffered losses on September 11, we need to support and protect targeted communities for the long run.

Worship with targeted groups. You may want to worship with people of different faiths to share spirituality and learn their beliefs.

Get involved. Contact public institutions and officials to encourage their continuing support of targeted groups. Join organizations that are working to build an inclusive community.

Take a stand. Speak out against intolerance.

Make a personal connection. Get to know someone in a targeted group.

The St. Louis chapter of the National Conference of Community and Justice developed this guide in partnership with the St. Louis chapters of the Anti-Defamation League, The International Institute, and The Urban League.

"Those people are opinion-setters in the organization," says Johnson, adding that they've brought a lot of credibility to the diversity initiatives. She says they've also boosted the ratings for diversity workshops and training sessions. In the last two years of using internal diversity trainers drawn from Fannie Mae's various lines of business, Johnson says, "We've gotten incredible ratings…some of the highest of any training in the company ever."

Childs thinks diversity programs must be "tightly riveted" to the overarching goals and needs of the business, and embedded deep in an organization's culture. "Given the corporate value content of diversity here at IBM, it can't be owned by senior leadership alone or by members of the individual constituencies. It has to be owned by everyone. It has to be seen as a corporate value, shareholder value, marketplace value, and workplace value."

In that regard, Childs believes that his main job is to continue to connect the dots so that people understand that the workforce is the vital "bridge between the workplace and the marketplace."

Not rocket science

Everyone interviewed for this article said that diversity programs are a valuable and necessary component of corporate training programs, but they disagreed whether diversity is simple or difficult.

"It isn't rocket science," says NCCJ's Kravitz. "It's stuff we learned when we were five years old. It's important for every person to have empathy, because everyone wants others to have empathy for them." Johnson agrees, pointing to a copy of the Golden Rule that hangs on her office wall to remind her what's at the heart of Fannie Mae's diversity training: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* **TD**

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