



Personal Tool

Ways for everyone to take steps towards supporting diversity

This tool was created by one of our senior clinical team members, Kate McPhee, Psychologist & Clinical Associate Coordinator at AccessEAP.

Diversity, whether it is race, culture, gender or being open to a non-binary world, has many benefits in the workplace. The reasons are varied but often boil down to one theme: first, we are human. That means of course that finding a point of similarity with someone who looks, sounds and behaves differently is easier when we start to see the other person for their humanity first. If you are struggling to find common ground with a colleague, neighbour or loved one's partner, remember that here in Australia and New Zealand, we are some of the most culturally diverse nations on earth. Our strength is often found in our diversity.

With all this diversity, at some point in your life, you will encounter a person who is so different from you that you may feel frustrated or scared. However, our piece today is to illustrate that with that difference comes a richness that similarity cannot give you. This is because that other person can show you a different perspective or a more sustainable approach to working, loving or living. If you are worried that you cannot adapt to the change, remember that as humans, we have frontal lobes that exist for executive functioning. This means that we can learn, adapt and grow (particularly with other humans) at any age.

When thinking about diversity and how I approach it in my own life, I went back to my childhood roots. I was fortunate to grow up in an incredibly culturally diverse country town in Northern Victoria. Of course, at the time, I thought it was the daggiest place on earth, and I could not wait to leave. But since becoming an adult, I have learnt that growing up in a place like that allows you to play, work and relax with those who were born overseas, were in same-sex relationships, and believed in different Gods, has a positive impact. In my case, it taught me to ask how a person was rather than where they came from and encouraged me to listen to answers before asking another question.

Bringing this into a workplace (or family) context, can you imagine how much more productive and nicer the workplace could be if it had more respect, tolerance and less judgment? Not only would employee relationships improve, but their level of customer service increases as well. Those who work in teams and complete projects report fresher ideas and more possible perspectives on the outcomes when there are diverse members of the team speaking their perspectives and possible strategies for the project. This sounds like a workplace where I want to work.

In other research, it appears that larger companies that have diverse leadership teams are more profitable. It appears that diversity is cheap to implement (e.g., hire different people from different backgrounds and orientations) and yet has a high-end return: greater acceptance in the workplace.

So how do we take a step forward and encourage diversity?



Change the conversation. Be a voice in any conversation and speak up about your discomfort with the labels and negativity that is being talked about. Talk about your own experiences and how much you gained from the diverse relationship.

Support the individual human, be it the non-English speaker, the breastfeeding mother or person who needs to pray at different times of the day. Be an encouraging voice by suggesting different meeting times, platforms and approaches that you know are in their best interest.

Invest in Diversity Training. Suggest to your leadership team that there are different organisations that can assist with diversity training in the organisation. Set up a team that supports this group or become an AccessEAP Ambassador, where training and support is given for all types of diversity.

Avoid playing favourites to different cultures and orientations, practice politeness and look for ways that you can incorporate non-discriminatory practices and policies.

Watch your own language and talk to a trusted friend or AccessEAP counsellor to see if you can be more inclusive in your approach. Psychologists call this less black and white thinking – easy to discuss and hard to implement. Give it a try over the next week.

Our final top tip with diversity is if you cannot see any way of positively engaging with the other person, look for what you have in common with that other person. It may take a couple of water cooler conversations and one or two coffees, but Brene Brown tells us that getting to know the other person is beneficial because people are hard to hate up close. We are here to help. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

