

## **What You Can Do As Manager or Supervisor? 13 Tips**

With minority Americans expected to comprise more than 40 percent of the US population by 2035 and 47 percent by 2050 (US Bureau of the Census 1996), it becomes more and more important for Manager or Supervisor to improve their cultural competency. Cultural competency is process. It only can be achieved through continuous learning, struggling, and experiencing. Recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting difference is the path.

1. ***Approach every employee as an individual.*** Don't stereotype. Although members of different groups may be diverse in appearance, speech, values, beliefs, and behaviors, they have many things in common that cut across different groups. In fact, there can be as many differences within a group as there are between groups. Therefore, you cannot automatically make assumptions about someone on the basis of group identity.

2. ***Understand that cultural tendency such as language, mannerisms, and communication patterns are not necessarily indicators of an employee's performance and capabilities.*** Within each group there is a range of people, from those who are highly qualified to those who are not qualified for a given position. Managers must understand cultural differences and not allow them to cloud judgments of competence and motivation. Just a person from Louisiana may have to listen closely to understand the dialect of someone from Maine, initially, it may require a bit more concentration to differentiate some words from a Chinese, Russian or Bosnian International. If you don't understand a phrase, ask. This goes for both parties.

3. ***Appreciate and utilize the different perspectives and styles of diverse employees.*** Diversity can enhance a workplace. It's important not simply to tolerate different perspectives but to see them as definite assets. All employees want to succeed on the job and to be accepted by the organization, but they also want to maintain their own senses of identity and have their special perspectives and assets acknowledged and appreciated.

4. ***Become comfortable asking questions about preferred terminology or interactions.*** Since you can't be an expert on all groups, make it known that you welcome information and feedback, particularly if you have inadvertently made an insensitive or inappropriate remark that may have caused offense or done something that had a negative impact on the employee's opportunities.

5. ***Convey clearly your expectations for the work unit, while at the same time recognizing group differences in communication and perspective.*** Employees may have different perspectives on a number of issues, including participation in meetings, leadership style, tolerance for bureaucracy and hierarchy, style of dressing, use of English only, and punctuality. The task for the manager is to determine on which of these issues differences can be accommodated or utilized and on which they may interfere with work requirements. In any case, it is the manager's responsibility to clarify and explain the

expectations of the organization and to make sure that employees understand the expectations.

**6. Use equal performance standards for all employees.** Too often managers' standards for employees from different ethnic groups are either too high or too low. Managers expect some employees to be superstars and expect too little from others. Check your judgments to make sure that you are not magnifying deficits or overlooking problems that legitimately require feedback and correction. Remember that the person who seems different may stand out because there are so few of his or her groups in the workplace, allowing any errors to be easily noticed, highlighted, and magnified. On the other hand, don't overlook poor performance because you expect too little or are uncomfortable about giving needed feedback. Instead, help the employee to meet your standard.

**7. Provide feedback often and equally to all members of the workforce.** Feedback is a gift. It allows us the opportunity to know how well we measure up to expectation. Your failure to give legitimate feedback because you fear being labeled sexist, racist, or discriminatory in some other way demeans the importance of the employee's career goals and expectations.

**8. Openly support the competencies and contribution of employees from all groups.** Many times it is only members of the dominant culture who receive recognition. It is essential that the credentials of new employees be openly stated and that the achievements of all employees be acknowledged when appropriate.

**9. Know the federal, state, and municipal legislation that ensures equal opportunity in employment.** Some key federal laws are:

- Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibits discrimination in wages on the basis of gender.
- Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, which prohibits discrimination in employment based on race, sex, color, religion, or national origin. Sexual harassment is considered a form of sex discrimination under this act as a result of a 1986 Supreme Court decision.
- Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which prohibits discrimination for employees age 40 and over.
- Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of pregnancy.
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which prohibits discrimination in employment against people with physical or mental disabilities if they are able to perform the job with "reasonable accommodations."
- Civil Rights Act of 1991, which restores the intent of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 regarding employment discrimination. The 1964 act had been weakened by several US Supreme Court decisions. The 1991 act also adds the right to seek damages and to request a jury trial for employees in several protected groups.

- The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which grants employees in companies with fifty or more employees the right to take up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave for the birth of a child or the illness of a family member.

**10. *Be aware of subtle and systemic institutional discrimination, intentional or unintentional, that pigeonholes and limits opportunity for members of groups other than those in the dominant culture.***

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are there equal opportunities for training and acquiring new skills?
- Are certain positions seen as suitable only for members of certain groups?

**11. *Confront racist, sexist, or other stereotypic or discriminatory behavior.*** Make your position clear by openly stating that neither you nor the company will tolerate discrimination in the workplace.

**12. *Assume responsibility not only for the behavior and attitudes of your work unit but for trying to influence change in your organization.*** Many decisions affecting the diverse workforce are made at the highest levels of the organization. Such decisions include implementing flextime for women with children or for older employees, granting benefits to life partners of gay and lesbian employees, and, most important, implementing fully the letter and the spirit of the extensive body of law on equal opportunity in the workplace. Managers should seek every opportunity to influence organizational decisions such as these.

**13. *Finally, understand that it is you, the manager, who ultimately holds the key for releasing the full potential of each person in your work unit.***

"Through the sameness we connect, though the difference we grow"  
Virginia Satir - A well known psychologist.

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