

WE KNOW

HUMAN RESOURCES

MANAGING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

QUICK GUIDE

Managing diversity means acknowledging people's differences and recognizing these differences as valuable; it enhances good management practices by preventing discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. Good management alone will not necessarily help you work effectively with a diverse workforce.

Many people believe that everyone in the workplace should be treated the same and that equal rules should apply across the organisation at all times. But equality looks different through a diversity perspective, because sometimes it requires us to treat people differently due to their unique circumstances.

While we may share similar values, such as respect or need for recognition, how we show those values through behaviour may be different for different groups or individuals. How do we know what different groups or individuals need? Perhaps instead of using an equality perspective, we could use the platinum rule which states: "treat others as *they* want to be treated." Moving our starting point from what may be our default view ("our way is the best way") to a diversity-sensitive perspective ("let's take the best of a variety of ways") will help us to manage more effectively in a diverse work environment.

With effective management of diversity, your business can develop a reputation as an employer of choice. Not only will you have the ability to attract the best talent from a shrinking labour pool, you can save time and money in recruitment and turnover costs.

Recent statistics have shown that the ethnic diversity of the New Zealand population is growing at a rapid rate. The face of the workforce is changing bringing a host of new opportunities and challenges for leaders. The Canterbury rebuild, in particular, is attracting a larger number of migrants to live and work in our region than ever before. Are you prepared and equipped to manage them effectively?

In order to attract and retain the best people from all walks of life, according to the Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust, you will need to establish a workplace culture that embraces diversity and flexibility. The business benefits of providing such a culture are substantial; some include:

- Increased retention, loyalty and morale
- Positive workplace culture
- Improved recruitment
- Reduced absenteeism
- Improved productivity performance and efficiency
- Strong working relationships
- Status as an employer of choice

Below are some tips on how you can adapt effective employment strategies to your workforce and recognise the wide variety of needs that exist:

- Clearly articulate your organisation's values ensuring that tolerance and respect are priorities.
- Consider different forms of flexible work arrangements that may be suitable to your business including shorter weeks, extended leave periods and quality part-time work. This can be a greater draw card than remuneration for parents or people with strong commitments outside the workplace.
- Encourage employees to share their priorities and working needs with management in order to assist the organisation to help meet their specific needs.
- Offer phased retirement opportunities to extend the working lives of valued older employees.
- Ensure there is a no tolerance policy and good practices in place for bullying and harassment.

- Try to recruit a diverse range of people remember the best management teams often reflect the diversity of the workforce and your customer/client base.
- Cultivate a versatile work culture that treats people as individuals and can bend to their needs.
- Facilitate and encourage relationship building across all levels of the organisation.
- When recruiting, write a job advertisement that has a broad appeal. You may want to write several versions in a different language to attract a diverse range of applicants. Consider advertising in ethnic and community-based as well as mainstream media.
- Develop an employee training programme focussed on different aspects of diversity, such as cross-cultural communications, sexual harassment, working across four generations, or diversity management.
- Support employees with their out of work interests, this may include permitting extended leave or a temporary period of part time hours if intensive training is required.

There are a number of other suggestions on www.eeotrust.co.nz. However, talk to the people in your organisation, find out what they want from their workplace and discuss how you can support their search for a greater work life balance and develop a more diverse and productive workforce.

Remember, diversity in the workforce is an asset. The combination of different cultures, backgrounds and opinions, managed well, and a culture of strong work and life balance can lead to opportunities of creativity, higher productivity, and increased innovation.

“Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common. Celebrate it every day.” - Anonymous.

*Information sourced from: - EEO Trust and Statistics NZ
University of California, San Francisco.*