

Maintaining a Discrimination & Harassment-Free Environment

1. Be sensitive to and knowledgeable about the issues which commonly arise in workforces comprised of diverse people. Take the initiative in minimizing potential problems and solving existing ones before they get worse.

Be sensitive to jokes or comments which are intended to be humorous but are often subtle reminders that a woman, minority or disabled person is “different.”

2. Recognize stereotypes and role expectations and the ways in which they typically limit women and minority employees. Think back to some of the things which were said in the Diversity workshop. Take steps to minimize such expectations in your organization.

Look beyond the level of your assumptions and don't rely on stereotypes for information on making decisions which will affect a person's career.

3. Provide mechanisms to facilitate the socialization and inclusiveness of a member of the “non-dominant” culture to the “dominant” culture.

A mentor or sponsor can be particularly helpful in orienting the new person into the organization, making informal introductions, and helping the employee feel welcomed and part of.

4. Be more aware of the quantity and quality of contact and communication (both formal and informal) between co-workers. Strive to minimize isolation and maximize involvement.
5. Recognize and address problems which often prevent women and minorities from getting usable, complete and accurate feedback on their performance.

Stereotypes often result in minority or female employees not being taken seriously. Assumptions such as “that single, young woman might eventually get married and leave” can result in not taking the time to give them honest feedback and help in continued development of skills.

6. Examine your motives for avoiding or minimizing actions that can be seen as discriminatory and have support and resources for addressing them.

Sometimes co-workers and supervisors are reluctant to involve themselves in problems between a black and white employee, or a male and female employee because it is perceived as a “typical work problem” rather than a problem of racism or sexism. A lack of attention to conflicts like this may lead to serious situations later.

7. Avoid the extremes of “over-protection” and “abandonment” in working with minorities. While assumptions are made that women and/or minorities are less qualified than white males, supervisors and/or co-workers often become so concerned with assuring themselves and others that this person can perform, they withdraw the informal coaching. This employee is left to figure things out on their own.

On the other extreme, supervisors and/or co-workers who think that a particular person lacks skill may over protect or “do everything” for the person, resulting in a lack of growth, challenge and achievement for the individual.

The end result of both extremes is that the minority employee is denied the opportunity to perform well and then becomes known as less competent than he or she actually is, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

8. Be familiar with the organizations diversity and disability policies and programs and contribute to their implementation.
9. Plan for changes in structures, policies and practices needed in your department to support and encourage diversity.