

Who Benefits Most From Diversity Training?

By Sara Ting



When a company is committed to valuing diversity and inclusion, diversity training is crucial to the success of diversity initiatives. One question I like to present in my training is, who is the greatest beneficiary of diversity training? The response is rarely immediate; it's usually slow and tentative, and usually incorrect. The answer is you. That's right, it's the participant in diversity training that benefits most.

Diversity training is about working from the inside out. It's about providing training that acts as a mirror for individuals to see themselves and come to a new awareness and realization. This takes courage and honesty, especially when we have a strong negative reaction to someone we've just met. It requires questioning what's really going on inside of us. Being willing to confront an uncomfortable feeling we may have toward someone who has dark skin, or who speaks with a heavy accent or has a Muslim-sounding name or any strong difference that jumps out at you. When you can do this, it's not only liberating, but empowering. You understand what you need to do to embrace all the ways people can differ from each other.

Another question I pose is, is it possible to be an adult in America and be 100% free of prejudice and biases? Most agree it's not. But if that's true, why do we have such a difficult time talking about it? What is it we're uncomfortable with? Are we afraid to acknowledge our own humanity? Imagine how much easier a dialogue we could all have if we could all be on the same page and recognize this crucial fact of life, and that no one is immune from it. And the great news is, there's a big payoff professionally and personally when we can embrace diversity.

One of the most liberating experiences I had was discovering my personal bias towards my own people. It happened over 30 years ago when I was trying to come to terms with the prejudice I felt existed towards Asian-Americans. The number living in my city was very small. I didn't experience any blatant in-your-face bias; it was more of a feeling. That I had some bias toward Asians myself was a difficult truth to admit.

I remember the incident well. I was in an elevator with strangers. In the left corner was an Asian gentleman speaking with a heavy accent. The minute I heard him speak, I felt uncomfortable and wanted to move away from him. I didn't want to feel connected to that accent. It was then that I knew that I had developed some biases towards my own people, and was simultaneously liberated from the fear of talking about prejudice and bias, once acknowledging it within myself.

Fast forward 30 years. The workplace has dramatically changed. It's diverse. And one of the many challenges companies face is to provide training that can empower individuals to successfully engage with diversity of any kind, whether cultural, ethnic, gender or generational.

Before looking at other groups and our attitudes toward them, we might also want to take the time to see how we feel about our own culture. Again, this requires some really honest soul-searching and self-dialoguing. Don't be surprised if you discover you have some uncomfortable feelings or even a bias about it. They developed over time, and the fact you have them does not make you a horrible person. It simply makes you human. Only inanimate objects have no prejudices.

Discovering a bias is an important first step in diversity training. Working on the feelings to make sure they don't get in the way of personal and professional development is the next. Try and understand the root of the feeling, where it came from. Once you can, you can begin to change it and realize that attaching a bias to someone you don't know isn't a productive way to operate, especially in a professional setting.

And what's the big payoff when we keep doing this work on ourselves? It's almost endless. Personally, I can say if I didn't discover my own bias, I wouldn't have been able to accept the opportunity to be a TV reporter covering the Asian community for 10 years, be a diversity educator and trainer, nor have been able to be an MC for Asian events.

When we realize the opportunities that come with embracing diversity it can enable us to move out of our discomfort zone. The more diversity we can embrace, the more effective we can be professionally and personally. [IdMBA](#)