



HOW TO MAKE DIVERSITY TRAINING MORE EFFECTIVE: 5 SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

By Dr. Maura Cullen

Nowadays most companies and university's provide diversity training initiatives to their employees and students. Providing diversity and social justice programming are an essential component in order to receive the advantages that these initiatives provide. However, having the information offered during these sessions stick with participants after the session is complete can be challenging. Here are five quick tips to consider when conducting diversity seminars in order to make more effective and enjoyable.

1. AVOID THE BLAME GAME

One point of resistance that trainers need to overcome in order to be effective is to avoid the blame game. Many participants may come into the training with the mindset that they are going to be blamed for all the social ills of the world. Disproportionately, many white people have this perspective and it is especially true for white men. They may feel as if they are walking into the room with a bull's-eye on their backs and as a result their resistance may be high. Their previous diversity training experiences will have a direct correlation to the level of resistance they will bring to your diversity training.

As diversity professionals, it is best to operate from the assumption that there are people in the room who have had negative experiences with diversity related issues. Therefore, the first few minutes of the training are critical and will often set the stage as to how forthcoming and safe participants will feel. They will take their cue from the trainers/consultants. Like most human beings, if we feel as though we are getting blamed for something, we immediately get defensive and tune out or even get hostile. That said, it is imperative for you acknowledge that in the beginning while framing it in a positive manner. Here's an example:

"By a show of hands, how many of you have had negative experiences in past diversity trainings? What would you need today in order to have a more positive experience?"

2. Debunk the Robin Hood Diversity Deficit Model: Take from the Rich, Give to the Poor

Many people in the advantaged or dominant groups see diversity as a deficit model, that in order for you to win than I must lose. That in order for you to have more, it means that I must have less. Like it or not, we must address their concern. We have to answer the question "What's in it for me?" People in the advantaged group, often think that diversity is "other" related, that it is not about them. In fact, many feel as though they are now being discriminated against.

Successful training programs need buy-in from participants. This can be accomplished by demonstrating how issues of diversity impact them and how they can benefit from such knowledge and skills.

This does not mean that issues of privilege can't be discussed. In fact, conversations about the dominant groups advantages in life are critical in understanding the dynamics of social justice and diversity. However, my suggestion is not to lead with a discussion about privilege until you have addressed the what's in it for me question.

3. Training Initiatives Should be Skill Based

For people who are persuaded by the moral argument that diversity is a social justice issue and that it is the right thing to do, you don't need to convince them of the value of participating in diversity education. People in this group often are fond of saying, "You are singing to the choir—we get it." However, as I outline in my book, *35 Dumb Things Well-Intended People Say*, even well-intended people can cause harm. Providing people with the necessary awareness, skills and action to communicate across difference can be a huge asset to furthering your diversity initiatives.

For those not so ready to jump on the "I love diversity" bandwagon, they are more likely to see the value in developing a skill set for increasing their own communication skills rather than having their values and beliefs called into question. In addition, they need to be convinced that the skills needed to communicate across difference can be useful in ALL facets of their lives, both personally and professionally.

4. Establish Power Pyramid Partners

Every successful diversity initiative needs an ally and advocate at the top of the Power Pyramid championing the cause. Change requires leadership and the higher the advocate's position power, the more the message gets heard and is taken seriously. Building partnerships is the most effective way to get buy-in from more people at different levels across the organization.

5. People need to be empowered and inspired.

In order for people to continue on their path of competency as it relates to issues of diversity, they need to feel inspired and empowered. They have to believe that they can make a positive contribution to the culture and climate of the organization. Because of this, they need concrete action steps to implement right away. Otherwise, they may leave feeling overwhelmed or saying to themselves, "That was good, now what?"

Assist them in examining their spheres of influence and where they can make an immediate impact, personally and professionally. One simple way to achieve this is to pair them with another participant and have them discuss a **STOP-START-CONTINUE** action plan. This involves having them describe one thing they are going to STOP doing to build a more inclusive environment, one thing they will START doing to build a more inclusive environment and one thing they will CONTINUE doing to maintain an inclusive climate.

Diversity training does not and should not be all doom and gloom. In fact, the more enjoyable and engaging you can make it the more likely participants will enjoy the experience and walk away with information that builds a more inclusive organization.

To receive Dr. Cullen's **FREE** video series visit
www.DiversityQuickFlicks.com
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are six 'must see' short video's addressing today's most common diversity
challenges and offers quick solutions.

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Dr. Maura Cullen is the author of "35 Dumb Things Well-Intended People Say: Surprising Things We Say That Widen the Diversity Gap". She is widely considered one of the nation's foremost authorities of diversity issues on college campuses today. Maura has over 25 years of experience as a keynote speaker and trainer. She earned her doctorate in Social Justice & Diversity Education from the University of Massachusetts, is a Founding Faculty member of the Social Justice Training Institute and Founder of the Diversity Student Summit. To learn more visit www.TheDiversitySpeaker.com.