

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING “INTERACTING WITH DIVERSITY (MAPPING YOUR DIVERSE ASSOCIATIONS)”

Objectives:

- To assess the extent of one’s contact with diverse people.
- To increase awareness about the need to broaden one’s associations.
- To identify areas of discomfort in dealing with others who are different.

Intended Audience:

- Participants in a diversity awareness training session.
- People wanted to deal with their own prejudices and stereotypes.
- Managers wanting to enhance their effectiveness with diverse staff.
- Employees serving diverse clients/customers or working in a diverse organization.

Time: 45 minutes

Materials:

- Copies of “Interacting with Diversity” worksheet for participants.
- Easel.
- Flipchart.
- Felt-tip markers.
- Pens/pencils.

Processing the Activity:

- Facilitator introduces the activity, giving the relevant objectives, and explaining that all of us have had varying degrees of contact and comfort with diverse individuals.
- Participants fill out the grid, putting a check in each box where they have experienced contact with individuals in each group.
- Participants then rate, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1=low degree, 10=high degree), their comfort with individuals of each group.
- Participants then discuss in small groups (three or four persons each), their grids, sharing their responses and reactions.
- Facilitator may chart pertinent discussion questions on easel to guide small-group sharing.
- Facilitator then leads a total-group discussion of insights, learning, and application, charting relevant points.
- Facilitator leads group brainstorming of ways to increase contact and comfort with diverse individuals, writing responses on flipchart.

Questions for Discussion:

- With which groups do you have the most contact? Least?
- What is the result of contact or lack of contact?
- With which groups are you most/least comfortable?
- How does your comfort level influence your interactions with people of diverse groups (e.g., co-workers, clients/customers, job applicants)?
- Which groups are most often stereotyped?
- Which groups are the least/most represented in your organization?
- Which groups are least often promoted in your organization?
- What can you do to increase your comfort with certain groups?

Caveats, Considerations, and Variations:

- Dealing with an emotionally charged issue such as prejudice is apt to cause some tension. There may be nervous laughter as well as resistance to exposing one's own feelings about certain groups. Therefore, this activity needs to be preceded by activities that have built some trust, openness, and comfort in the group. It also needs a clear introduction explaining its purpose as well as strong facilitation of the group discussion.
- There may be participants who want to hold on to their discomfort with certain groups. They may also make veiled slurs (e.g., "I don't want to feel too comfortable with gays.") or stereotypic comments (e.g., "It's not so safe to be friends with terrorists."). Such instances present prime teachable moments. First, the comment needs to be confronted: "You may be only joking; however, such comments reinforce stereotypes." You can then explore the tension underlying the humor (e.g., "What is it that makes us so uncomfortable about dealing with gays?"). You can also talk about the effect of such attitudes on job interactions, "How does this feeling impact your relationship with a gay client?" or "What does this mean when you interview a Middle Eastern job applicant?" as a variation that tailors the activity.
- You can have participants brainstorm a list of the diverse groups they deal with, then use that list, rather than the list on the worksheet.
- If time is limited, you may choose to do only one of the sheets.

