Diversity Works for London

Overview of Best Practice in Diversity Training & Development

Good practice regarding diversity training and workshops is for them to be designed bespoke to the needs of each organisation. This is the key to gaining the buy in of those attending the training. Off-the-shelf solutions reduce the transference of learning into the real life workplace for employees as the case studies and situations included are less relevant to their employment experiences. The most effective solutions present scenarios which the participants readily recognise and are therefore more likely to engage with. The training or workshop should include two key elements: awareness-raising and skills-based training.

- **Awareness raising** Training focuses mainly on cognitive features, correcting myths and providing knowledge–based information on areas such as legislation. Although this type of training heightens awareness, it may do little in the way of providing skills to behave or manage diversity more effectively.

- **Skills-based** training builds on awareness training by adding a behavioural aspect and equips employees with the skills they need to manage themselves and others in a diverse working environment. It is this type of training that will have a genuine impact on the behaviours of employees and subsequently the culture of your organisation.

It is often presumed that diversity training programmes will have a positive outcome; however there is a risk that they can also have negative consequences. A lack of knowledge about the components of effective diversity programmes can be counterproductive, create more segregation, becoming damaging to individuals and the organisation.

Diversity Training Top Tips

When considering diversity training explore the following points in order to ascertain why training is being considered, who should be involved and what the training should look like:

1. Decide your goals

Diversity training can be expensive and you need to be clear about what you and your organisation need to achieve from it. If training is not planned carefully then resources can be wasted, and/or you may fail to gain the buy in and support of staff. So, make sure that you:

- Decide the precise aim of the training
- Identify the type of approach you want to take, and the important messages you want to get across
- Decide how you will measure the impact of the training
- Is this refresher training? If so, what is the appropriate level to pitch the training at? It is important to ensure that you gauge the audience in order to deliver the messages most effectively.

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2. Consider who should be involved

- Do all employees within your organisation need to receive training?
- Should the training be rolled out across all hierarchical levels?
- Are there specific groups who would benefit more than others (such as line managers)?

3. Effective Communication

Effective communication prior to the programme with those due to attend is key to reducing negative attitudes, explaining the objectives and highlighting that attendance will help them to develop skills, for example to manage difficult situations more effectively. Communication will also help to reduce anxieties that they have been sent on the programme as a form of punishment.

Key areas to include in your diversity training programme

- An explanation of your organisation's approach to diversity and why it is important
- What your diversity policy means in practice along with background information, for example, dealing with relevant facts and dispelling myths
- The business case for diversity, including why it is in everyone's interest to have an effective diversity policy, not only in financial terms but also in relation to both customers and staff
- The moral case for diversity and why this is important not only for the business but also for individual values and beliefs
- The legal aspect and what this means in practice
- The roles, rights and responsibilities of staff in managing diversity
- The opportunity for employees to raise concerns
- Provide staff with written materials that they can keep which reinforces the training at a later date

Further areas to consider

- Relations with fellow workers and dealing with harassment and bullying
- Specialist training for staff who recruit, select, appraise, supervise, etc. on the practical application of diversity principles in these areas
- Customer service training where appropriate
- Personal bias, stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination
- Adopting a "Golden Thread" approach to diversity training by including it in other training programmes, such as induction programmes, recruitment and management development events.