

BUSINESS WOMAN

EDUCATING AND ENCOURAGING WOMEN IN BUSINESS

FEATURE:

Beyond Borders: Diversity In The Workplace

By JESSICA M. BROUGHTON

The issue of integrating and managing diversity in the work environment has always been a challenge for business owners. Diversity once fell along the lines of race and gender, and then grew to more readily include issues of religion, evolving gender roles, and generational differences.

But because business knows no boundaries, international diversity has come to the forefront as business owners and employees alike learn to work and grow across international borders. We now operate in a truly global economy; employees are coming from all walks of life and backgrounds, and business owners have to adapt to a work environment that is very different from what it was 10 years ago.

Because of the global marketplace, business owners have had to learn not only to adapt to working with other countries, but have also had to learn how to adjust to cultural differences. This will enable them to better understand and meet the needs of their multicultural customers.

The challenges of business have now grown to include language barriers, cultural differences, and, in some cases, geographic issues.

While language barriers can most often be overcome with the help of a translator, there are certain phrases and words particular to the English language that have no correlation.

Cultural barriers may also occur as each country has its own particular customs and traditions that, if not respected, could be misinterpreted as insults. It has become more important than ever for communication to be clear and concise between businesses as they navigate the waters of the new business world.



Monica Gould provides business etiquette training to a Chinese delegation sponsored by Kaplan College for the Guangxi International Management Program in Hagerstown, Md.

Monica Gould, president of Strategic Consulting Partners, has worked firsthand with companies all across the globe to help them integrate themselves into the world marketplace. Whenever she works with an international client, she makes sure that they understand that she is more than willing and open to learning more about their culture so that she can best help them.

“Before working with an international client, I do a lot of research on their cultural norms to ensure I am respectful of their culture and style,” Gould said. “When working with them, I preempt potential faux pas I might make by acknowledging that I am not an expert on their culture and am grateful to them for sharing with me how things work in their culture.”

Most recently, Gould collaborated with a Chinese delegation, explaining American business practices and methodology that they may encounter in dealing with U.S.

clients. She explained how businesses in America negotiate and that opportunities to meet other business professionals occur at networking events, such as chamber mixers, an unfamiliar concept to her group.

Despite the fact that the delegation all spoke English, there were phrases that did not translate well. Gould made sure her audience felt comfortable with her so that if she said something that didn’t translate well, they would feel at ease asking her to rephrase it.

There are several ways for employers to create and encourage a diverse workplace. Gould recommends that employers stop profiling what they think their perfect employee looks like. “This goes beyond cultural profiling,” said Gould. “It includes profiling employers sometimes make toward genders, ages, and people with disabilities.”

Hire employees based upon their

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qualifications. Companies may want to consider bringing in a consultant to teach diversity sensitivity. Employees and employers alike are sometimes not even aware that they are being intolerant of the differences amongst their employees. A consultant, as a neutral party, can assess and evaluate where problems in a culturally diverse workplace are occurring and make suggestions on how to best create an atmosphere where every employee feels valued.

Goold suggests that employers take time to understand what each generation's motivations are as it relates to their careers. For example, Millennials are loyal when they know what cause they are working for, which may encourage a business to more clearly define the company goals to their employees. Baby Boomers, however, are looking toward retirement in the next 10 to 15 years, and will be more motivated by job security, often wanting to stay with a company until they retire.

It is of vital importance for companies to take an interest in the individuals they employ and understand their needs. Because each person's motivations are influenced by many factors, ask your employees what they are looking for in a company, what motivates them, what makes them happy to come to work. Don't assume that you know someone's perspective because of their race, religion, or gender.

Conversely, there are certain qualities that potential employees can exhibit that will make them attractive candidates and eager to



work in a culturally diverse environment. Good communication skills are paramount. Employees should be team players. People who are flexible and adaptable are more likely to succeed in today's workforce. Employers are looking for open-minded individuals who are curious and are willing to learn about cultural diversity. Their

nonjudgmental nature makes them an asset to an organization.

The businesses that will continue to grow and prosper are ones that are taking steps to adapt to the global community. Make sure that your business is prepared and equipped to deal with the international community, and your business will know no bounds. 