

A woman with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the left. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The background is a city skyline at dusk or dawn, with warm lights from buildings and street lamps creating a bokeh effect against a blue sky.

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# Workplace Diversity -

## The Value of Having Diversity in the Workplace

By Lee Perlitz

### Diversity in the workplace

#### Value, Definitions, bias and stereo types

Since the introduction of mass transport by Thomas Cook in the late 19th century the people of the world have taken advantage of the opportunity to move about the globe and as a result our world has become a place of great diversity - a rich cultural tapestry that filters through all aspects of our lives. It has given us opportunities beyond imagining,

increasing our view of the world around us and given us a sense of worldliness that prior generations did not have. It has also brought with it certain sets of problems where cultural, social and economic differences, for example, can lead to misunderstanding.

The world's increasing globalization means more interaction among people from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds than ever before. People no longer live and work in an *insular* marketplace; they are now part of a worldwide economy with

competition coming from nearly every continent. For this reason organisations should encourage diversity to become more creative and open to change.

Recognising social and cultural diversities and dealing with cross-cultural misunderstandings is an important issue. In our everyday lives, it is unlikely that we will deal only with people of similar nature, background and ideals as ourselves. We come into daily contact with many different people. They are our

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customers and our colleagues and we need to recognise and accept their right to their own beliefs and customs and, where practical, to make allowances for their differences and disabilities if we are to interact harmoniously with them.

We have learned to accept and indeed take on certain cultural aspects of the people with whom we have contact. This shows in the food we eat, the style of furniture and houses we buy as well as our choice of cars. There are cultural and national traits that we are all familiar with. For example, French people are known for fashion and food. Italians arguably make the best furniture and their architecture is world famous while German engineering is also world renowned. The Japanese are known for their innovation, the Swiss make great clocks and Belgians make the best chocolate! Our world has grown to be a place that embraces

diversity.

### What is cultural diversity?

In order to fully understand and appreciate the value of a socially diverse workforce we must first understand the meaning of the terms *social* and *diverse* in a work place context.

Dictionary definitions:

*Social* - Encarta gives a variety of meanings as follows;

1. *relating to society: relating to human society and how it is organised*
2. *relating to interaction of people: relating to the way in which people in groups behave and interact*
3. *living in a community: living or preferring to live as part of a community or colony rather*

*than alone*

4. *offering opportunity for interaction: allowing people to meet and interact with others in*

*a friendly way*

5. *relating to human welfare: relating to human welfare and the organised welfare services that a community provides*
6. *of rank in society: relating to or considered appropriate to a rank in society, especially the upper classes*

*Diverse* - Encarta gives a variety of meanings as follows;

1. *consisting of different things: made up of many differing parts*
2. *differing from each other: very different or distinct from one another*

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3. *socially inclusive: composed of many ethnic, as well as socioeconomic and gender, groups*

So the term ‘social’ means the way in which people relate to each other and the situations in which we feel most comfortable. The term ‘diverse’ relates to all the ways in which people are different from one another. Cultural differences can extend to;

- the way in which people of different cultures address each other
- what level of formality or informality makes them comfortable
- their customs and beliefs
- family structure and values
- work ethics
- non-verbal behaviour - in terms of eye contact, hand gestures and physical proximity.
- personal grooming such as

dress code and hygiene issues

- contribution to the local community

Often diversity will also extend itself to the observance of special religious feasts or other celebratory days due to a persons customs, beliefs and values. These are all important issues and need to be considered when communicating within a diverse working environment.

### Cultural Bias

Culture has many layers; what you see on the surface may only be a small part of the many differences below the surface. Generalisations never address the whole story. There is no substitute for building personal relationships, sharing experiences and coming to know others more deeply over time. Culture is also in a constant state of change; as conditions change, cultural groups adapt in sometimes

unpredictable ways and no cultural description can ever be put into words about a particular group. Categorising cultural groups in certain ways, for example “Italians think this way,” or “Buddhists behave like that”, is not practical and can lead to conflict. As we grow and develop as people, we learn about other cultures through direct contact with various cultural groups, information and perceptions from other people or through books, news, newspapers and other forms of mass media. These experiences may develop into assumptions about other cultures or about a particular cultural group. These assumptions may bias our perception of other cultures and so are known as *cultural bias*. Culturally biased assumptions can fall into two categories:

general assumptions about people who are not from your own background. For example, ‘They’re not like us’.

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assumptions about a particular cultural group. For example, ‘Indians only eat curry’ or “The Dutch are all stubborn”

Both categories affect the quality of communication and may lead to inappropriate work practices. Culturally-biased assumptions result in perceptions that can impact on your objectivity when working with culturally diverse groups. The consequences are:

- Stigma
- Stereotyping
- Discrimination

**Stigma** relates to a social disapproval of the personal characteristics or beliefs of cultural groups other than our own. Stigma is often based on ignorance, irrational or unfounded fears, mass hysteria, lack of education, or a lack of information about a particular person or group. For

example, thirty years ago being a single mother generated a stigma. The AIDS virus brought about a stigma to the gay community, while even today mental health problems can still carry a stigma.

**Stereotyping** relates to making assumptions about the characteristics of an individual, based on a generally held view of the person’s cultural background. People will often use stereotypes to describe a particular cultural group. For example “All French people are rude and discourteous” or “Germans are arrogant”. While individuals within these nationalities may indeed be rude, discourteous or arrogant, this is also true of individuals of any nation, not whole nations in general. The term is often used with a negative connotation, as stereotypes can be used to deny individuals respect or legitimacy based on their membership in a particular group. Stereotypes often form the basis of prejudice and are usually used to explain real or imaginary

differences due to race, gender, religion, age, weight, ethnicity, socio-economic class, disability, and occupation.

**Discrimination** in a cultural context refers to showing prejudice towards a certain group. Most of the time, discrimination involves the unfair labeling and treatment of others and is based on both stigma and stereotyping.

These three consequences are the most common; you could no doubt add others to the list. Within a workplace these negative consequences may lead to:

- resentment of clients and co-workers who come from different cultures. If a worker believed that all refugees or asylum seekers were ‘queue jumpers’, then the attitude toward a refugee client may be less

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compassionate than that of a worker who understands the trauma and grief experienced by refugees forced to flee their homeland.

- inadequate service to customers; where not enough information is gathered about their needs because of stereotypical beliefs about the client's ability to understand or express their wishes or where the client's behaviour is misinterpreted as normal or abnormal.
- failure to react appropriately to people in need. A distressing example of such a false assumption happened at a Brisbane bus stop in 2006. An Aboriginal university guest lecturer in a diabetic coma was ignored and left unattended for several hours by passengers

and passers-by, who presumed that she may have been intoxicated.

While a person's race should not be an issue it is an unfortunate fact that it often still is. During your working life you will most certainly be working with colleagues, or dealing with customers from other cultures. Therefore, it is a good idea to develop an understanding of their cultural background in order to work with them as effectively and harmoniously as possible. In some cases certain races (or nationalities) of people are *perceived* to have traits that seem to be present in many people of that particular race or nation. For example:

- Australian people are generally considered to be 'laid back' in their outlook and are able to cope with a variety of situations without being too offended. This can often lead to

a lack of understanding when people of other cultures don't react the same way. Australians often have a keen sense of fun and 'mateship' and prefer informality in their day to day dealings with others.

- American people also have a friendly, laid back outlook - although they are seen to be a little more conservative than Australians. Only around 10% of Americans have a passport. This makes them somewhat isolated in their outlook. At home, they are used to excellent standards of customer service. When travelling overseas they often expect American standards and services in other parts of the world and can be a little puzzled when they find this not to be the case.
- German people are seen to be

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very precise, orderly and to have a strong work ethic. For example, if you have told a German person that documents you are preparing for them will be ready to collect at a certain time, they will expect them to be ready at that precise time, and may not understand if they are not. This may cause them to act in what seems to be an abrupt and sometimes demanding manner. They are also very formal in their dealings with others. Unless they are known to you, or have initiated a less rigid approach themselves, a formal address is essential. German people who have known each other for many years continue to call each other by their formal titles - they will say 'Good morning Mr Schmitt' or 'How is your mother doing Mrs Schultz?'. Therefore they will not,

generally, take kindly to being addressed by their first names by strangers or being overly familiar.

- Japanese people are also perceived as having a strong work ethic and a firm belief in order and structure. They are team oriented, have a strong sense of honour and are very aware of presenting the right image. In social situations they can easily be embarrassed by rude or discourteous behaviour and could then politely but firmly close their communications channels. They are also relatively formal in their dealings with other people. Where, in Australia, we believe that good communication skills mean maintaining eye contact - in Japan too much eye contact is considered to be staring and therefore rude.

Other traits can include the way in which some cultures deal with time. Some cultures take a very relaxed view of time and punctuality while others are not as flexible about issues of time management. This can often lead to conflicts where one person insists on being on time when another one does not take punctuality so seriously and often arrives late for work or meetings.

Different cultural groups can also have a major influence in the local community;

- in the many different foods available to us
- cultural festivals in the area
- music, and much more.

People from other races and cultures have a great deal to offer. By interacting with them in a positive way, and trying to understand them, we can learn about other

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countries and customs, we can broaden our own outlook on life and increase our personal ‘database’ of knowledge. Having said that you cannot know it all, so if in doubt polite and courteous behaviour is a universal language!

### **The value of cultural diversity**

We have looked at some of the ways in which people differ. But why is this important?

The working life of most people, in today’s world, is one of constant contact with people from all walks of life and from all corners of the earth. We live in an era of enormous social diversity. If we do not recognise and accept the cultural differences between people we could create disharmony and distrust in the workforce. Furthermore we risk losing the opportunity for personal growth and the enhancement of the work team.

The value of diversity in business is enormous. It can improve the level of teamwork, performance and customer service through a broadened base of knowledge and experience. A culturally diverse workforce is creative and flexible. It exposes customers and colleagues to new ideas, different ways of working and reaching decisions. Learning from customers and colleagues from other backgrounds, also broadens our own personal horizons and expands our own knowledge base, making us more efficient and tolerant as individuals.

When employees come from diverse backgrounds, they bring individual talents and experiences with them. This invariably contributes to an organisation’s overall growth. Embracing employees with different skills and cultural viewpoints helps in understanding the needs and requirements of the customers, on a global scale. Diversity in workplace

leads to a wide variety of viewpoints and business ideas. This helps an organization to formulate the best business strategy, with its large pool of different ideas and solutions.

*So the advantages of diversity in the workplace can mean:*

**Creativity increases** when people with different ways of solving difficult problems work together towards a common solution. There is no one best answer to any question—the more ideas you can obtain from different people, the more likely you are to develop a workable answer. Other cultures can offer insightful alternatives you might not have considered. This is a tremendous advantage of diversity in the workplace.

**Productivity increases** when people of all cultures pull together towards a single inspiring goal.

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**Language skills** are obviously needed in today's increasingly global economy—and diverse workers often have this proficiency. To truly build relationships with the other people of the world, it is an advantage to speak their language

**Understanding how our country fits into the world picture** is crucial. By relating to people of all backgrounds, we will gain a greater perspective on how different cultures operate and experience greater success in both the community and in global business as a result.

**New processes** can result when people with different ideas come together and collaborate. In today's fast-moving world, there is no longer room for thinking, "We *have* always done things this way and cannot change." Workers must bring multiple skills to the environment, think cross

culturally, and adapt quickly to new situations.

Workplace diversity can make organisations more productive and profitable. They also bring differences that we must understand and embrace for those benefits to be realised.

#### **Adapting the work environment**

People from culturally diverse backgrounds can bring enormous strengths to an organisation. Their talents, skills, expertise and relationships can increase staff confidence and improve client service. For this to occur, the organisation must ensure that work practices consider the needs of clients and employees from diverse backgrounds, and provide training and encouragement to staff. Culturally appropriate practices in working with people of diverse backgrounds may relate to the following:

- collection and provision of information in a way that is accessible to staff and customers of all backgrounds
- using communication methods that address the needs of a diverse workforce. This could include
  - the use of Braille
  - photos or diagrams rather than text explaining procedures
  - translation of important staff / procedural manuals into other languages and more.
  - equal employment and promotion opportunities
  - provision of assistance for specific staff or customer needs
  - provision of food services (where a canteen is available) that consider cultural or medical dietary requirements.
- workplace health and safety - ensuring appropriate induction and ongoing training occurs in a manner that addresses the needs

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of a diverse workforce. This might also include providing wheelchair ramps and access to bathroom facilities.

- Interpreter services, as the ability to speak and understand English may also affect a person's ability to move within an organisation in regard to processes and promotion prospects.

### Modifying work practice

At times work practices may need to be modified to ensure that you can engage with culturally diverse clients or co-workers effectively. To determine the requirements for culturally appropriate service, you will need to consult with others who have specific knowledge of the cultures that are represented within your workplace and its client base.

### Cross cultural conflict

We all belong to cultural groups of one type or another. The group we belong to might be based on the country we were born in, the religion we belong to, our physical disabilities (i.e deafness), our economic position in the community or many other factors. When the cultural groups we belong to are in a large majority in our community, we are less likely to be aware of the day to day issues that surround us. Cultures shared by dominant groups often seem to be 'natural,' 'normal' or 'the way things are done.' We only notice the effect of 'cultures' on our community if they are very different from our.

When looking at why things go wrong between people of diverse backgrounds it is important to bear in mind the basics of human nature - that we all want to fulfil our own needs and desires in ways familiar to us and if this does not happen conflict is inevitable. Conflict develops because we are dealing with people's lives, children, pride, self concept, ego and so on. Although inevitable, misunderstandings can be minimised and resolved by recognising the early indicators of conflict. But first we need to understand the reasons why conflicts can and do occur.

### Recognising signs of cross cultural misunderstanding

In order to maintain a healthy and harmonious workplace it is important that we learn to recognise the signs of impending conflict and attempt to divert or resolve any issues before they become major issues. Conflicts and misunderstandings can occur when two people with different ideas believe they have the better view point. The issue can become one of ego or of gaining control. It can also happen when individuals or groups are not getting

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what they need or want and are looking out for their own self interest. Sometimes the individual is not aware of the need and unconsciously starts to act out. Other times, the individual is very aware of what he or she wants and actively works at achieving their goal. Whatever the scenario, the main component in conflict is misunderstanding. These misunderstandings can occur due to some of the issues we have previously discussed. For example:

- **Race, Culture and Religion.** Cultural influences and identities can be very important to people depending on the situation. When an aspect of cultural identity is threatened or misunderstood, it may become an issue of major conflict between cultural groups. This could lead to negative working conditions. In these cases it is helpful for the people in conflict

to talk to each other calmly, perhaps with a mediator, to help them see each others point of view and to find ways to move forward in a positive way.

- **Age.** The ‘generation gap’ can cause conflicts between age groups; with older people believing that younger ones are irresponsible, and younger people believing that the older generation doesn’t understand them or what they are going through.
- **Family structure.** Migration to Australia has had an impact on family structures and the way people from other countries integrate into our communities. The family patterns change as each generation grows up. For example; first generation migrants will definitely bring with them the traditions and customs of their homelands whereas second

generation migrants may have strayed from the old ways to a certain extent. By the time you reach the third generation the home country has become Australia and often the old traditions have been forgotten and could, potentially, lead to conflict within family groups or different generations in the workplace.

- **Physical or mental disabilities.** People who are deaf, blind, have chronic illnesses or condition have their own problems to deal with and can benefit very greatly from understanding on the part of work colleagues. People in these groups do not always ‘advertise’ their condition so it can be difficult to know why conflict is happening.

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## Resolving conflicts and misunderstandings

To resolve conflict it is necessary to

work for the good of the group rather than individuals within it. This takes good communications skills (covered in chapter three). Steps to help resolve a conflict could include:

- Begin by establishing a rapport. You can do this by demonstrating a willingness to listen and by being honest and open about concerns.
- Set goals for resolving the conflict and plan for frequent communication until the issue has been settled to everyone's satisfaction.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions. Be patient and let the other person have their say, without interrupting or imposing your own thoughts or ideas on them.
- Watch the other person's body language. They may only be saying what they think you want to hear, but in reality don't feel that way at all. Watching for non-verbal signals can give you a good indication of what they are actually thinking and feeling regardless of cultural background and language considerations. Equally, you should be aware of your own body language - making sure that you are sending positive signals. Always remember, the object here is to resolve the conflict and if you feel that some things are not being said you will need to draw them out. If you don't know what's wrong - how can you fix it?
- Discuss differences in opinion and/or culture openly and calmly and continually stress the importance of resolving the conflict and reaching an understanding.
- Make sure you keep only to the facts and don't let emotions get in the way. Allowing emotions to surface can often breakdown the communications process, as tempers heat up and become agitated. Having said that, keep in mind that all people are different! All emotions and beliefs that a person has or feels are valid in their eyes. They have a reason for the way they feel. These reasons may not necessarily be good ones to your way of thinking, but to the other person - they are valid.
- Remain calm at all times. If the other person is emotional or aggressive then you need to

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demonstrate maturity and calmness to get the conversation back on track. Shouting or behaving in an aggressive manner will only make the situation worse.

- Avoid placing blame. During conflict resolution, determining who's right or wrong or who's at fault is not what you're trying to do. A problem exists and what you are trying to do is to find a solution to the problem that will be satisfactory to all persons concerned. Finding someone to blame is not going to resolve the situation.
- Ask open questions, for example: *'I understand that your primary concern is... but what else can you tell me?'* Asking this type of question draws out any remaining issues that a person might have.

Follow through with clarifying questions. For example: *'So what you're saying is that you are unhappy working in the accounts department and you would like to be transferred to administration.. is that right?'* In this way you will get a full understanding of the issue(s) of concern.

- Check to see if anything has been left unsaid. Issues, even minor ones, that have not been dealt with, or that have not been resolved satisfactorily can fester and spring up again without warning. A situation that you thought was resolved - is therefore not! Ask questions to be sure. For example: *'From what I have heard, I believe that the main issue of your concern is based on what we have just discussed. Having gone over this issue with you, how do you feel about the situation now?'* In doing this, we check to make

sure that the other person is satisfied with the resolution, or if there are still issues that need to be addressed.

- If necessary, bring in an interpreter or a neutral third party to 'referee' the discussion. This should ensure that the issue is talked out in a calm and civilised fashion. This third person could also point out areas where a compromise might be possible.
- At all times keep in mind that the end result of the discussion should be to establish (or re-establish) a harmonious working relationship.
- Show the other person courtesy and respect - allowing them to state their case without bias.

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- Once again, what you are hoping to achieve is a working relationship that is directed toward the good of the whole - a working relationship that will create a happy and harmonious place in which to work and an atmosphere where customers will feel welcome.
- If everything you have tried fails you may need to try other methods to make communication possible. These might include;
- Non verbal language. Using sign language, gestures, showing or demonstrating what you are after.
- Colleagues who might be familiar with the customer's language. You might have friends or relatives who can speak another language who can help out if you telephone them.

Outside organisations including:

1. interpreter services
2. diplomatic services
3. local cultural organisations
4. appropriate government agencies
5. educational institutions
6. disability advocacy groups.

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# *Your Disability Is Protected Health Information*

By Tammy Rome

Recently a friend of mine was challenged to disclose the reason she has a legally-obtained handicapped license plate. To those who confronted her, she did not appear as though she deserved a handicapped parking space. Her disability is invisible, yet fatal. Being forced to disclose the reason for her permit to complete strangers was humiliating. She just wanted to enjoy a nice outing with her family while she is still able.

**This isn't the first time I've heard about such incidents.**

While there will always be small-

minded trolls, the backlash against invisible disabilities seems to be growing. It gets worse when politicians join in. In January 2015, Senator Rand Paul made it clear that he was among those who doubted the veracity of nearly half of all those currently receiving Social Security Disability Income (Kessler, Washington Post).

*“What I tell people is, if you look like me and you hop out of your truck, you shouldn't be getting a disability check. Over half of the people on disability are either anxious or their back hurts - join the club. Who doesn't get a little anxious for work and their back hurts? Everybody over 40 has a*

*back pain. And I am not saying that there are not legitimately people who are disabled. But the people who are the malingerers are the ones taking the money away from the people who are paraplegic, quadriplegic. You know, we all know people who are horrifically disabled and can't work, but if you have able bodied people taking the money, then there is not enough money for the people who are truly disabled.”*

The worst part about this statement is that he should know better. As a member of Congress, it is his job to oversee the budget. Social Security programs are a part of the national

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budget and are funded by payroll taxes earmarked specifically for retirement and disability. In 2014, the trustees of Social Security released the results (Trustees Report, SSA.gov) of an investigation into fraud, waste, and abuse of Social Security benefits. The investigation revealed that less than 0.02% of all benefits were fraudulent. Contrary to Senator Paul's statement, malingering is not widespread within the Social Security program. In fact, the Social Security Administration does an excellent job of screening applicants and monitoring for fraud (Protecting your Investment, SSA.gov). Nobody is "taking money away from" those more deserving because the disability application process is so rigorous.

What Social Security staff know that Senator Paul and others like him seemed to have missed is that disabilities include a lot more than just paraplegia or quadriplegia. In fact,

some people with paraplegia have greater ability to work than those with less obvious disabilities. Disability benefits are awarded based on a person's ability to work. Those whose symptoms are severe enough to prevent them from working any type of job generally qualify for benefits. Many people with disabilities are able to work and excel at their jobs. They do not need, nor do they apply for, SSDI. Among those who apply, not all are approved. Many applicants spend years going through the appeals process before finally receiving benefits (Faces and Facts, SSA.gov).

#### **Disability status is protected information**

The Health Information Protection and Portability Act (Health Information Privacy, HHS.gov) protects patients from being forced to disclose information about their disability to anyone. If you are disabled, you are

not required to justify your disability status to self-appointed "disability police". That information is private and protected by law. You may grant written permission for the release of limited information. You may also rescind that permission (in writing) at any time. No one has the right to demand you explain what justifies your access to SSDI, SSI, handicapped parking, or any other disability-related benefit.

#### **Reasons you may choose to disclose information**

Obviously, there are some people who need your health information in order to best help you. Your doctors would be useless without your health history. Still there are others who are not so obvious.

- Physicians, dentists, psychologists, and other health care providers need access to

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health information from each other to improve treatment collaboration.

- Health insurance companies need access to health information in order to process claims and pay out benefits.
- Private disability insurance companies need access to health information in order to process claims for benefits.
- The Social Security Administration needs access to health information in order to determine eligibility for disability benefits.
- Employers need limited information when requesting accommodations in the workplace or asking to use FMLA.
- The DMV needs limited information in order to issue a handicapped parking permit.
- Attorneys need access to health records when retained

to appeal a denial of benefits or pursue any legal action relating to disability.

- School officials will need limited access to health information when determining eligibility for Special Education services.
- Loved ones may need access to health information in a variety of situations such as emergency care, consent for treatment when a patient cannot communicate, etc.

### Dealing with bullies

Knowing the facts won't prevent you from being cornered by loved ones, co-workers, or even complete strangers. Some people have poor boundaries. They think that it is their right to insert themselves into the privacy of others. No amount of knowledge on your part will stop them from being bullies. That's right. People

who challenge your disability status are bullies. So don't reinforce their childish behavior by giving them what they want. Stand up to them and refuse to engage in their "prove it to me" game. If you are concerned that you might get flustered, then memorize some of these comebacks:

- It is none of your business.
- That's between me and my doctor.
- Leave me alone.

On rare occasions, you may have to take additional measures. Some bullies don't know when to quit. Some may even violate local, state, or federal laws by continuing to harass you or in trying to impede your rights (blocking your path, pushing or shoving, etc.). Hopefully you never encounter such hostile behavior. In the event that it does occur, know that you have several options depending on the nature and location of the behavior.

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- Report a co-worker to Human Resources
- File a written complaint to the Department of Labor for violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Information and Technical Assistance, [ada.gov](http://ada.gov))
- File a written complaint to the Department of Education for violation so the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Building a Legacy, [idea.ed.gov](http://idea.ed.gov))
- Contact security or the police
- Petition the courts for an Order of Protection (OOP)

### Get support

Some of us are fortunate to have supportive loved ones who will advocate on our behalf when we are most vulnerable. Many others struggle to face these challenges alone. If you are in the latter situation, please reach out for help. Find a sympathetic therapist, a friend, or support group. Go online if necessary. People are social creatures. We need others who understand, support, and love us unconditionally. We are all going to have bad days. The bullies who don't believe us have a knack for catching us off guard when we are most vulnerable. That is when we need our support system the most.

*You have rights. You are not alone.*

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# The Business of Education in America

By Arthur Jackson Jr

For over two hundred years the American education system has been based on the right of all its citizens to an education. Through this guiding principle America has led the world to expanded education opportunity for women, oppressed minorities, and populations generally. As the world has come to embrace the American philosophy, America is abandoning this core belief and dividing education into the wealthy, who can afford education, and the rest of the country that will not be able to afford it.

For several decades, American education was in retreat in the technical areas of science and

engineering. To address these deficiencies, technical schools in secondary education and for profit colleges came into existence. They encouraged students not inclined to pursue additional education to enter technical fields and pursue higher education. Students that would not become engaged in a process of learning were suddenly involved. Students who could not make passing grades were suddenly making the A's and B's in vocational technical courses and for profit technical institutions.

Today, these two areas of education constitute a growing number of successful students actively involved in

higher education. Vocational schools and for profit colleges are designed to encourage students to become involved in technical careers, and are often structured without much of the liberal arts training that accompany traditional degrees. There's been a longstanding disagreement as to whether students should be funneled into specific and very narrow technical educational streams, or whether all students should be forced to obtain a more generalized education designed to move them toward undergraduate degrees and eventually to graduate degrees.

Although this disagreement has

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ragged for several generations, the effect of vocational training and for profit technical institutions cannot be denied. They have successfully moved a large segment of the population into technical careers very successfully. However, in recent months the department of education has begun to take issue with the success of the schools because they cannot guarantee that their graduates will be able to meet income guidelines created to show the success of American education of dollars that are being spent for these programs. Vocational schools and secondary education are being cut across the nation in response to the economic downturn our society is currently facing, and this policy of the department of education. Rather than address the more complex issue of how we can meld traditional, and technical areas of education into a single educational system, federal funding to provide vocational training and technical education is being slashed by the Federal government.

At a time when the administration and the business community I recognize the need for a stronger commitment to technical education throughout the country, we are reducing the ability of students to obtain the education loans necessary to pay for their education because we have a fundamental disagreement as to whether there should be more general education in English, literature and the arts, and less a single minded focus on a narrow technical field. This seems to be an argument without merit since both have the single purpose of trying to educate the American public to be competitive in the marketplace of tomorrow. This is occurring at the same time that a recent study has demonstrated that the effect of a college education benefits all students whether it is in their field, general education, or in a narrow technical area. Rather than building on that premise to encourage students across the country to pursue higher education, our focus has turned to the ability of students to repay the loans to banks as the single determining factor as to whether the education was useful. The standard being put forward by the department of education does just that.

It focuses their efforts on seeing that students can make enough money to repay the loans, rather than focusing on why education costs are rising so dramatically. Their focus is on making sure that students repay banks. With businesses making arguments that they need to import more foreign workers to meet the growing technical demand of high tech industry, we're forcing American students out of the educational system as we argue their ability to pay back a bank is the single determining factor as to the quality of their education. This would not be so absurd if it were not for another of movement that is taking place in grade

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schools around the country today.

For people who have money, there is a growing need for private preschools that are for profit in nature to prepare their children for the prestigious schools that select only a handful of American students each year. This for profit model for primary and secondary schools is becoming as popular in United States as it is abroad in countries such as Europe and Asia. Parents of wealth are quick to hand over as much as \$40,000 a year to have their children placed in preparatory schools that will prepare them for prestigious colleges. Currently, a number of private investors are putting up as much as \$200,000,000 to fund these types of for profit institutions. It is a growth industry that will find a burgeoning market place with in this country and abroad as the division between haves and have-nots in education continues to broaden.

These parents have little faith in the public education system in this country. They are putting their money, and their children in the hands of for profit institutions that they believe will make them better able to compete in the highly technical world of tomorrow. As Madison Avenue at the American banking system find a new profitable market, they will exploit it as fully and as completely as they have the traditional American education system, to the detriment of the larger society. Education in this country is becoming a tool of banks and the wealthy and not what was envisioned by the founding fathers or the many men and women who helped create this country over many generations. It is no longer serving the public need and only looks to the needs of the wealthy, and the financial institutions whose profit motive is the single driving force for their existence.

While the rest of the world is adopting the American model of an educational system that is the envy of the world, we are abandoning that system to move toward one that cannot serve the nation or the society. If we continue down this road our nation will be forever looking to the educational systems of other countries to provide the technological expertise, and the innovative thinking that will move the world and the society forward. In one breath the department of education for our nation is telling us that for profit institutions do not work and we must regarded with suspicion graduates at any college level from these institutions, while at the same time this same model is being instituted at grade schools and in elementary schools across the nation because there is a growing need for a better education system to meet the standards of tomorrow. However this growing need excludes much of American Society. If we follow this path it will only the wealthy will receive an education in this country.

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# Time To Set High Academic Standards

By Megan Wilson

For decades, political and business leaders have demanded education reform because bad schools were putting our nation “at risk” of losing its economic advantage. Many years, billions of dollars, and hundreds of reform strategies later, the schools survive largely untouched while America enjoys one of its greatest periods of prosperity in history. To some this is an enigma: how can we lead the world economically while trailing the world educationally? How will our economy fare when generations of poorly educated students comprise its workforce? Contrary to conventional wisdom, our

schools do not exist just to train tomorrow’s workforce. They exist, primarily, to produce a well-educated citizenry. Education in a democracy has many dimensions-civic, intellectual, economic, and moral, to name a few. As instructors teach literature, algebra, history, and physics, on a deeper level their schools are recreating American society. When they falter, our cultural legacy-even our civilization-is what is truly “at risk.” That is why school success and pupil achievement matter-not just for the gross domestic product.

Americans today are rightly concerned about cultural decay-the erosion of

traditional values, loss of our national identity, and balkanization of our communities. This is a real, heartfelt desire to disentangle “We the People” from “We the Consumers” and “We the Employers.” America is defined by far more than its economic might and military muscle. It stands for high principles and the legacy of the Enlightenment. Liberty, reason, equality, justice-these ideals are not innate in humans. They must be taught and cultivated. This solemn duty falls squarely on the shoulders of families and schools.

But the schools largely reject this

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civic mission. Afraid even to ask what it means to be an American, schools instead harp on vague concepts such as self-esteem and diversity. Valuing individual differences and talents is surely important, but so is understanding what binds us together. Schools must concern themselves with the unum as much as with the pluribus.

Furthermore, educators complain that it is virtually impossible to make some kids study things that do not seem immediately relevant to their adolescent lives—such as algebra and Aristotle. It is so much easier, many argue, to let kids pursue their own interests and study what they like. No bitter pills to swallow, no unhappy campers. Anyway, what really matters is “learning how to learn.” And feeling good about it.

That certainly makes it easier for the teachers, and is all well and good until those high school graduates enter the

voting booth knowing precious little about American history and the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. It is fine until the American people debate a war in the Persian Gulf without knowing where that is—not to mention why it’s important. It is harmless until conversations about global warming degenerate into empty rhetoric and shallow posturing because so few people possess the tools to comprehend the science or even ask the right questions.

The situation is little better in higher education. Universities, having shed their core curriculum and sloughed off any pretense to moral leadership, not to mention stewardship of souls, have degenerated from knowledge centers into training centers. As students have flocked to financially attractive fields, disciplines such as literature, history, and philosophy have suffered greatly. As our schools and universities adopt a single-minded, utilitarian rationale for

the education they provide, a degree today has become less an affirmation of knowledge than a resumé-booster. Education is trivialized when it is reduced to a venue for vocational marketability.

Achievement tests measure more than future workplace skills. They also gauge whether our schools are fulfilling their mission to produce well-prepared citizens. Certainly knowledge is not all it takes to be a contributing citizen, but it is a prerequisite. Dismal test scores indicate that this basic democratic need is not being met. Fortunately, we can reverse this trend. The first step is to set high academic standards. Standards spell out what students are expected to know and be able to do by certain points in their schooling. According to recently released and hard-nosed appraisals, most state standards are poor. They lack clarity, content, and rigor. Well-constructed standards clarify priorities

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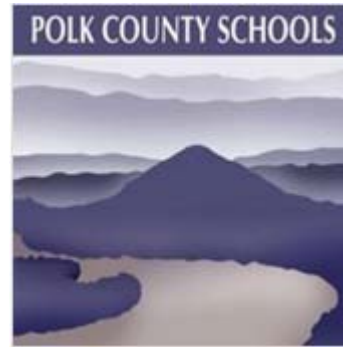
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and expectations. They specify what is essential for all citizens to know, no matter where they come from or what occupations they will choose. Should all future citizens understand the Constitution? The Bill of Rights? The 14th Amendment? Romeo and Juliet? The Pythagorean Theorem? Newton's Laws of Physics? Standards answer these questions.

We must develop world-class standards and then hold students and schools accountable for reaching them. Without incentives and real consequences, we would be naive to expect changes in behavior and performance. We have to make knowledge count. High school seniors should have to know certain things to obtain a diploma. Most other democracies have challenging high school exit exams because they understand this. Low test scores are a chronic, not acute, problem. Our standard of living will not plummet tomorrow if today's students don't learn more math, science, literature, and history. Like a high cholesterol count, low test scores indicate a general illness and foreshadow problems down the road. Our economy might remain strong for a while regardless of what our educational system produces, but our body politic will surely sicken as more and more of our citizens know less and less. We must start treatment today to prevent illness tomorrow.

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# New Teachers Are Receiving Support, Orientation, And Formal Training

By Jeff C. Palmer

As a shortage of teachers grows toward crisis proportions, the nation's schools are struggling against twin burdens to hire well-prepared new teachers and to keep them from leaving the profession. Many schools, particularly those in urban areas, have turned to formal programs of training and support for novice teachers as a way of easing what for many is a make-or-break first year, according to a new study. The study contends that the scope and quality of these induction programs has taken on unprecedented significance in the face of the nationwide demand for teachers.

The attrition rate among new teachers stokes schools' hiring needs. Nationally, more than 19 percent of new teachers leave the classroom within three years. Nearly 11 percent leave in the first year of teaching alone. This is part of the reason for the projected need for 198,000 new teachers a year over the next decade, with demand highest in urban districts.

The school districts responding to a new survey reported an average 89 percent retention rate for teachers participating in their induction programs. The data show unequivocally the importance of induction programs in helping to reduce high teacher turnover and in bridging

the gap between teacher preparation and the reality of the classroom.

Although more new teachers are receiving support, orientation, and formal training in their crucial first year in the classroom, how their induction experience is defined varies widely, according to the study. Despite wider acceptance of the idea of formal induction, the quality and scope of the programs range "from comprehensive to cursory."

The study found, for example, that mentoring by veteran teachers is one of the most common activities cited by school districts as part of their

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induction programs. But the roles, responsibilities, training, and deployment of mentors vary enormously across different school systems. In addition, not all districts offer release time, stipends, graduate credits, tuition, or other incentives to mentors. While 88 percent of school districts described their programs as “formal, in-depth and sustained,” more than a quarter of them said their programs did not serve all new teachers.

In education, teachers who make the transition from novice to seasoned professional often do so by navigating solo through uncharted waters. What new teachers experience is in stark contrast to the experiences of medical residents, law associates, and even rookie basketball players, who are required to go through extended training, development, and mentoring during their respective induction periods. Few areas of the professional

development continuum are as important as the induction years.

Nationally, more than 49 percent of first-year public school teachers participate in some type of induction program, while the participation rate rises to 58 percent for new teachers hired to work in urban schools.

The study found that induction programs improve new teachers’ knowledge, skills and performance, provide personal support, introduce new teachers to school system norms and procedures, and familiarize them with school system values. While states have grown more active in pushing for teacher quality, school districts have taken the lead in establishing and coordinating induction programs, with or without state funding. The study found that 79 percent of the programs were managed by school district personnel, typically without higher education (or other) partners.

Among the recommendations to federal, state and local policymakers and school leaders to consider as they develop policies and strategies to meet the needs of novice teachers:

- View induction as a multiyear, developmental process. Inductees have different needs as they pass through stages of their professional development, ranging from basic survival to teacher leadership.
- Train principals so that they understand how to orient and support inductees. Principals need training in effective ways to create supportive working conditions, develop mentoring and informal support relationships, assign classrooms, and recognize and address inductees’ professional needs.
- Establish a first-class mentoring program backed up by enough funding to serve all eligible inductees. A formal process should be set up to identify

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and train highly competent classroom teachers to work with and mentor inductees on a regular basis. Mentors should be given release time to observe, coach, and demonstrate lessons, and to attend meetings. They should be offered stipends to cover their time and materials, assistance from district coordinators, and annual evaluations.

- Link new teacher evaluations to district- and state-level standards. Inductee performance assessments should be both formative (for improvement) and summative (for decisions about employment status).

- Invest in technology to facilitate communication among teachers. Electronic mail, online forums, and bulletin boards are easy and inexpensive ways for inductees to share ideas, concerns, and encouragement, and communicate with mentors, program directors, and university faculty.

- Evaluate induction's effectiveness in resolving attrition and building teacher competence. Effective programs require regular evaluation of all program components and desired outcomes.

The new study is based on 209 usable responses to a survey of 985 school districts in large cities and towns. The districts were located in 36 states and the District of Columbia. As part of their study, the researchers conducted a review of existing literature on induction and visited programs in 16 major cities. Those cities were: Albuquerque; Cincinnati; Chicago; Clark County (Las Vegas); Jefferson County (Louisville); Los Angeles; Minneapolis; Norfolk; Rochester; and San Diego.

Our challenge, as a nation, is to prepare and sustain the best teachers in the world. All teachers should participate in an ongoing collaborative and comprehensive effort to improve their teaching skills and increase the achievement of their students.

New legislation would create a new formula program to fund skills and leadership training for mentors, to ensure that mentors have the skills necessary to help our newest teachers, in addition to team teaching, peer observation and coaching, curriculum-based content training, and dedicated time for collaborative lesson planning. The legislation would also provide teachers opportunities to visit other classrooms to model effective teaching practice; training on integrating technology into the classroom, addressing the specific needs of diverse students and involving parents; and partnerships between elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education to provide advanced training opportunities.

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# Ideas on How to Reduce the Stress of Teaching

By Richard D Boyce

Over almost fifty years in the classroom, I found I needed to find ways to reduce stress. Stress became greater as I accepted more responsibility in the second half of my career as a head of a large Mathematics department. During this time, the school grew and there were significant changes in the Mathematics syllabi and in the teaching of Mathematics.

I found that my time was not mine anymore with students, parents, teachers and the school administration wanting my time. Below is how I chose to meet stress head on.

The first thing I realized was that I

had always to be available for consultation for thirty minutes before and after school so that teachers, students, parents and the administration could see me. This left me no recourse but to use the time before and after these periods for my planning, setting and the marking of assessment. (In normal term time, I was always reluctant to take work home. Only at exam marking time would I do that so that I finished my marking quickly to allow me time at school to sort out issues that might and did arise around the testing and marking process).

So it became obviously that I had to use the times before and after school when most teachers and students had left the school campus. Here are the reasons why it helped reduce the stress levels.

- It reduced interruptions to planning and marking by students and others
- It was a quiet time which meant I could work with greater efficiency.
- I would try to plan meetings with students, parents, teachers, and administration then.
- I would have these and my staff meetings then because the bell to start school becomes an end point encouraging quick resolutions in these meetings.
- I was always more efficient in the mornings because I was fresh.
- It was always easier to get resources

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that I needed for lesson planning.

With my classroom teaching, I would plan my term's work where I would finish the allocated learning work for the term two weeks before the testing period. This gave me time to create a revision program as well as allow for unplanned interruptions to the teaching program. The revision program put the onus on the students to do the work. My role became advisory, rather than having to plan lessons during this time.

Litigation has become an issue for all teachers, more so in the role of a Head of Department. So it is important to document any decision you have made that you think might be challenged. I did this in my personal diary rather than my school teaching diary. It was also important for me to detail any of my concerns with the school administration before making any decision that might be called into question.

It is also important to have outlets in your school life that reduce stress. For me, it was school sport. I coached the school's Baseball and Australian Football teams. In my early career, I was involved in the School Cadets. Other teachers become involved in drama, musicals and debating to give some examples. In these activities, you see a different side of your students. They see you in a different light as well. This helps reduce stress in your relationship with them in the classroom.

In the classroom, the students want to know you are there to help them. So I would always detail to my classes when I was available outside class time to offer help. I would always allow time at the beginning of each lesson for questions and have information for students who had been absent from the previous lesson.

I always had a "To Do" list to make sure I kept up with all my responsibilities. It was divided into urgent and not urgent

tasks. I would review it daily adding and deducting items as necessary. My goal was always to complete these tasks ahead of time allowing me time to tackle any unexpected task that rears its ugly head from time to time in every teacher's life.

Finally, I would want to know how I was going with my planning for the term, semester or the year. So I would create a set of goals, short, mid-term and long term. These I would write on a white board in my office where they were always visible. They would also be in my diary. I would review them regularly, crossing off those that had been achieved. I would give each goal a priority. If a goal was not achieved, I would consider why and re-orientate the goal if possible. At the end of a term, semester or year, I would review all I had done and achieved during the time. Often you feel you have not achieved much. This review shows you that you have. It is an excellent stress buster.

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# Why Are Some Principals Failing in Urban American Schools?

By Ronnie Phillips

Communication plays a key role in all facets of a business. Effective communication in the workplace starts with not just finding your own voice, but the right tone of voice to deliver your message. Business letters, memos and letters you write can benefit from an expert and authoritative style. When you communicate well with your clients and within your industry, your professional peers will take notice and you will begin to climb through the ranks.

Effective Speaking Can Help You To Accomplish More

Workplace productivity is greatly improved through effective communication. In the business world, time is money. So, when it is about explaining details to your team members, your communication skills will pay off. The ability to speak and communicate clearly will save you a lot of time. Moreover, excellent communication skills save you the trouble of having misunderstood communications with your team or clients that could potentially upset your work.

Opportunities Are Limitless For Individuals Who Can Talk Clearly

Whether you are trying to get your

dream job or vying for promotion, training on effective communication skills will help you to achieve your goals. Employers and managers are constantly on the lookout for individuals who can articulately express themselves. Believe it or not, the way you communicate influences your performance at work and makes you seem like the ideal candidate.

Good Communication Skills Help In Solving Problems Quickly

Irrespective of the industry, every professional runs into problems in their workplace. In fact, there are some jobs that are all about problem-solving.

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Communication plays a pivotal role in many challenges and problems in the workplace. It is often said that many problems are solved through effective communication.

In addition to the above, there are other aspects of using communication training courses. These are as follows:

- 1. Helps individuals to become good salesman:** The marketplace today is flooded with innumerable products and services. Even though some products are better than others, they miss the limelight because the sales team lacks skills to communicate with the targeted market. With the help of training, individuals will be able to develop marketing and persuading skills.
- 2. Development of a personal brand is encouraged:** To stand out in the crowd, it is important that individuals are able to develop a personality of their own. Unless you have a personal brand that people can quickly identify when they look at you, you are probably going to fall behind in the race and lose out on your dream job or promotion.
- 3. Improved personal and social relations:** The workplace is not just for working, it is also for networking and making friends. Without good communication skills, you will not be able to mix with your team members. As you improve your verbal and non-verbal skills, you will be able to develop and maintain better social and personal relations.

Some are born talkers whilst others have to develop the skills through training. If you are someone who lacks effective communication skills and finds it difficult to put your thoughts and views across, you must consider enrolling for a training course. Since training courses today are also available online, you do not have to worry about the course hampering your other prior commitments. Alternatively, you can also opt for face-to-face training courses or arrange for communication skills training at your workplace.

A lot of people have benefited from communication training courses and you will too. All you have to do is search for accredited courses that are conducted by industry experts. Also, make sure to go through the course module to determine whether they are offering the things that you are looking for. Register yourself and see the difference in your attitude and personality within days. In addition to improving the way you communicate, these training courses will also help to make you feel more confident about yourself.

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