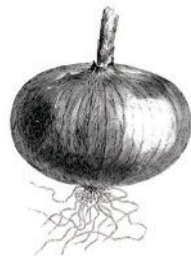


Animals,



Salads,



Orchestras,



Houses



– oh my!



Without proper context and established expectations, diversity training can be as random as the average icebreaker. *By Linda Stokes*

Animals, salads, orchestras, houses — what do all of these items have in common? During the last 20 years, all have been used to describe or build relationships during diversity and inclusion training. But there has been an evolution in D&I training in strategy, execution and content.

The practice has grown from race relations sensitivity training to more cutting-edge areas exploring the intersections between diversity and emotional intelligence. However, even though the topic and the presentation methodology have advanced, reactions to diversity and inclusion training still vary between participants and among industries.

Some participants react poorly and question, “Why me? What did I do wrong?” when they receive session sign-up sheets. Others know and understand the definitions and the business connections. “If people understand the connection to the bottom line, they are anxious to learn how,” said Deborah Ashton, vice president and chief diversity officer at Novant Health Inc.

### How to Avoid Training Traps

Today organizations, trainers and organizational development consultants are looking for the right mix of presenter, methodology and content that will enable managers to leverage the diverse skills and abilities of their workforce. They continually add needed dimensions to the mix to assist participants in gaining skills to create and maintain inclusive teams and meet the needs of an increasingly complex marketplace and community.

However, over the years, some organizations have fallen into traps. Outcomes likely will be more positive if diversity leaders avoid the following:

- Training that is “one and done” versus an integrated, multi-layered curriculum.
- Training that is focused too narrowly or solely on one dimension of diversity.

- Training that is compliance driven versus behaviorally focused and business centered.
- Training that is not customized specifically for the industry or company.
- Training that is not part of an overall D&I strategy.
- Training that is awareness only without an opportunity to gain and practice new behaviors.
- Training that reinforces negative stereotypes.

To turn the experience, the application and the learning into one that inspires, motivates, engages and makes a real connection to the jobs participants do each day, and create better outcomes, consider these tips:

#### **Ensure D&I training answers three critical questions for every audience: what, so what and now what?**

Describe and explore what diversity and inclusion is and isn't. There is still confusion around these words due to history, geography, media and a lack of education. Next, answer the “so what.” Be clear why diversity and inclusion matters to the company, customers and teams, but don't stop there.

The “so what” must be answered by people at their level, for their job, in their location. Corporate responses are not the same as field responses. Executives won't answer the same way as call center employees.

The business connections must be relevant. Frequently, statistics are offered as proof of a business connection, but the stats may be too limiting. For instance, they may be national numbers or talk about buying power. But if the company is a B2B, not-for-profit, nonprofit, or if the person in the session is not in sales, the data has little significance. Discuss the impact of data so it has meaning. Tie it to the business and the company's value proposition. “If you can clearly articulate that aspect and link it directly into major tenets of



#### ON THE WEB

How do you build the business case for diversity and link it to strategic business objectives? Tell us at [ow.ly/cRqm4](http://ow.ly/cRqm4).

# Diversity Training: From Reactive to Proactive

**1960s** Initial diversity training efforts were largely based on compliance. “In the 1960s people were doing it to make sure they were policy compliant and protecting themselves,” said Kevin Sheridan, senior vice president, HR optimization, Avatar HR Solutions.

**1968** Xerox Corp. moves beyond compliance, taking a social responsibility position on diversity, based on a personal commitment from founder Joseph C. Wilson and concerns surrounding the Rochester, N.Y., race riots.

**1977** A U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission consent decree with Duquesne Light Co. requires the company to provide EEO training to its managers as a result of alleged discrimination against blacks and women.

**1979** McDonald’s Corp. begins its Women’s Career Development program. It is the first of many diversity training and development programs at the company.

**1980** Ronald Reagan is elected president. His efforts to deregulate the government’s previously concentrated enforcement of the Civil Rights Act contribute to phasing out the compliance-centric approach to corporate diversity training.

**1987** International think tank Hudson Institute publishes the “Workforce 2000” report, which accurately predicts the changes in the American workforce by the year 2000 and introduces the term “workforce diversity.” Corporations begin to consider assimilating the growing numbers of women and minorities entering corporate America as a major motivator for diversity training.

**1990** In “From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,” published in the Harvard Business Review, diversity thought leader R. Roosevelt Thomas details a paradigm shift away from affirmative action to business survival, and the pressing need to make workplaces encourage upward mobility for everyone.

**1996** Harvard Business School faculty members David Thomas and Robin Ely publish “Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity,” in the Harvard Business Review. The report addresses the learning and effectiveness aspects of diversity training. At this point diversity training is considered a best practice and the concept of “inclusion” joins the conversation.

**1999** Nextel begins showcasing its business case for diversity, developing diversity training to improve employee retention, satisfaction and productivity. The training program leads to the direct retention of 36 people. With turnover costs at the company averaging \$89,000 per employee, ROI is 163 percent.

your D&I strategy ... you will start building the momentum to move your organization forward,” said Ken Barrett, chief diversity officer at General Motors. “Now what” asks, “Now that I know what it is and why I should care, what am I supposed to do or do differently?” Unless and until each person can answer that and demonstrate the new behavior, the training likely won’t be applied in the workplace or make a significant difference.

**Customization of content and its delivery matters.** Are case studies, data and business connections consistent with the industry, location and jobs represented in the company? Can the facilitators — external or internal — share specific examples from R&D, marketing, sales, customer service and production? Is the training

anchored to a specific focus for the company or to attainment of one or more organizational key performance indicators such as safety, innovation, cost containment, quality, market share or others?

“It is critical to have a trainer and firm who take the time to understand your business,” said Michael Wheeler, associate director of diversity at Omnicom Media Group. “Those who are able to provide examples in the context of your own business are ultimately more effective.”

**Build curriculum with a multi-layered approach.** This integrates D&I concepts and skills into other courses such as customer service, sales and patient safety to avoid a “check it off the list, one and done”

**“The business value of a diverse workforce will be the key element of diversity training in the future. As our businesses evolve and become more global and borderless in nature, coupled with an unprecedented communications environment ... training must accommodate those needs and stress cross-cultural and multigenerational diversity.”**

— Jose Jimenez, chief diversity officer, CSC

**2006** Diversity consultants Julie O’Mara and Alan Richter introduce Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks. The tool offers companies a way to gauge how effective their activities are at providing “comprehensive education to foster inclusion.”

**2007** According to a New York Times survey of 265 HR professionals and diversity specialists from companies with 10,000 employees, 55 percent of participants report having a diversity department, and more than 80 percent report mandatory or voluntary diversity training for all levels of employees.

**2008** Led by University of Arizona sociologist Alexandra Kalev, researchers review 31 years of data from 830 mid- to large-sized U.S. companies and find that mandatory diversity training programs are often followed by “declines in the number of women, African-Americans, Latinos and Asians in management positions.” Voluntary diversity training programs, however, demonstrate positive outcomes.

**2010** The Boston Globe reports on the recession’s effect on diversity training. The article, “Training in Trouble?” asks “Is it worth it?” amid tight budgets and tough times.

**2012 and beyond** Cultural competency and multigenerational diversity are buzzwords when assessing the future of diversity training.

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approach. D&I training programs for specific jobs are also useful, such as recruiters and customer contact employees. “Diversity training also should be thought of more broadly once a company has made the initial investment,” Wheeler said. “Gaining the skills and competencies needed requires continued learning and development and should include training such as conflict management, effective communications across cultures, intercultural awareness or even expat training.”

**Results count.** Measuring and tracking session results is critical. But measuring knowledge gains and transference to the job may be challenging. Pre- and post tests are common, but what to do with the data is the bigger question. If questions asked on the pre-/post tests mirror the desired outcomes and are tracked

over time, diversity leaders will have longitudinal information that equates to learning trends. Further, behaviorally focused questions at the 90-day mark indicate transference of learning from the classroom to the job. Again, this assessment works best when participants know they are expected to implement the learning in specific ways, and that they will be evaluated on their accomplishments.

**Diversity and inclusion training should be inclusive.** Too often D&I training focuses on or includes one dimension more than others, or leaves out other dimensions. Measure the number of references in content and examples for all obvious and less visible

**TRAINING** continued on page 45

dimensions. Does the session include thinking styles, GLBT and Caucasian males within all dimensions? Check to ensure content, facilitator examples, conversation and questions are genuinely inclusive.

**Communicate a lot.** What is the plan for managers to communicate upcoming sessions? Is a slide deck or talking points available? Is communication of the training part of the comprehensive D&I communication plan? How many channels of distribution are used to communicate upcoming or ongoing sessions?

Also consider the overarching strategic alignment of the training, the timeframes to accomplish the implementation plan, the support and buy-in required, who will be responsible for coordinating as well as tracking and measuring results, and whether the sessions will be mandatory, strongly encouraged or open to all.

For an easier, more thoughtful and purposeful implementation, consider the following during pre-planning:

- What provisions have been made to communicate before the training and to reinforce the concepts and tools following each session?
- What business connections will training highlight, and what organizational goals will it impact?
- Given that diversity and inclusion is a change management process, what changes is the organization committed to achieving?
- Are the skills presented aligned with the desired changes?
- How does the training fit into the overall diversity strategy?
- What is the plan to measure results?
- How will the implementation of the sessions be coordinated?
- Who will deliver the training? How will facilitators be prepared to speak specifically to diversity and inclusion in the organization?
- How will leaders customize the content and delivery to meet the needs of various levels, positions and geography?
- How does the training align with the business strategy and tactical elements of the D&I strategy?
- How will leaders calculate and communicate the outcomes?

“It’s critical to ensure everyone understands their role in the D&I process and how they will contribute to meeting the needs of external customers, internal stakeholders as well as how they can meet their own needs. It is not a zero-sum game — everyone has to win,” Ashton said.

## **An Evolving Practice**

There are several trends advancing diversity training. Some of these trends are already happening. They include:

1. Blending classroom and interactive e-learning with specific on-the-job projects.
2. Integrating diversity and inclusion concepts into other established organizational training curriculums.
3. Continuously spotlighting various dimensions of diversity as they arise in the workplace or marketplace.
4. Expanding and identifying creative intersections between diversity and inclusion and emotional intelligence, innovation and other constructs.
5. Providing specific D&I curriculum for specific job types such as customer service representatives, recruiters and production line employees.
6. Adding global and cross-cultural competencies.
7. Building curriculum for specific industries.

“Diversity champions today are being challenged more than ever to do more with less — less budgets, less time away from work, and in some cases even less help,” said Bryan Yingst, director of e-learning, KnowledgeStart. “There hasn’t been a better time to embrace a blended approach to training and its many benefits.”

As diversity leaders consider ways to improve the relevancy, impact and results of the resources used to bring diversity and inclusion training to the entire workforce, they should be clear with their teams and the organization on what will be accomplished, the best approach to accomplish goals, what will be expected of participants following training and how the learning will be reinforced. Not communicating these decisions will limit the impact and organizational change that diversity leaders set out to achieve.

General Motors’ Barrett said if organizational change and improvement from a workforce, workplace and marketplace perspective is the goal for a comprehensive D&I process that includes training, showcasing how diversity and inclusion empowers the workforce, spawns innovation and ultimately positions employees to develop the next breakthrough or game changer is important as leaders develop a coherent, compelling and consistent message that resonates throughout the organization. «

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