



Conversations on Diversity

Excerpted from *Voices of Diversity*, by Renee Blank/Sandra Slipp

**Why not initiate a series of monthly brown bag lunch discussions in your workplace?
Possible topics for discussion include:**

African Americans

- Many African-American workers say that others do not believe them when they describe discrimination; coworkers may feel that the African-American staff person is being too sensitive or overreacting
- Many African-American workers say that they constantly have to prove themselves to each new person they meet; their past achievements do not “travel” with them
- Many African-Americans say they are resented when they excel; some coworkers have a hard time if not in a superior position to blacks
- Many African-Americans say that if they complain about anything, they are considered troublemakers or assumed to have a “chip on their shoulders”

Asian Americans

- Many Asian-Americans say they are seen as excelling only in science, math, and technical subjects
- Some have reported that they are consistently given additional assignments because they usually accept them without complaining
- Many Asian-Americans say that they are usually all lumped together as one group; most Asian-Americans are deeply offended that their distinctive countries and cultures are not acknowledged
- Many Asian-Americans say that Americans sometimes misinterpret or take advantage of the non-confrontational or nonassertive style that is part of traditional Asian culture

Latinos

- Many Latinos say managers have consistently low expectations of their ability; supervisors assume they have minimal competence and they are intellectually inferior
- Many Latinos say that their different cultural heritages are not acknowledged when all Latinos are lumped together; such amalgamation denies the difference in national origin
- Many Latinos say that others assume that they all come from poor backgrounds and that they all live in a certain area, particularly inner-city urban ghettos

Workers with Disabilities

- Many workers with disabilities say that they are not seen as whole persons but are defined by their disability
- Many workers with disabilities say that employers don't consider them for advancement because they think disabled workers should consider themselves fortunate even to have a job
- Many workers with disabilities say they are patronized, pitied, or treated like children
- Many workers with disabilities say that others shun them in informal settings and don't include them in social activities

Younger and Older Workers

- Many younger workers say that managers expect their decisions to be respected solely because they are in positions of authority
- Many younger workers say that they are not given sufficient feedback, training, or direction; many say they receive virtually no feedback until their first performance evaluation, except for an occasional negative remark
- Many older workers say that their experience isn't appreciated by younger workers
- Many older workers say that they are not given adequate opportunities for training in the latest technologies, particularly computer technology; others assume they can't learn new things
- Many older workers say that punctuality, reliability, and stability are viewed as negative traits, or considered unimportant by some younger staff

Recent Immigrants

- Many immigrants say they're resented because of the assumption that they are taking jobs away from native-born Americans
- Many immigrants say that they are treated as if they are not smart or are in some way inferior because of the way they speak English
- Many immigrants say that employers make generalizations about their ethnic or national group on the basis of experience with a few workers
- Many immigrants say that their nonverbal behavior is misunderstood

Gays and Lesbians

- Most gays and lesbians say that most non-gays don't realize that there is no federal legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation
- Some gays and lesbians say they are penalized for their failure to conform to heterosexual gender roles
- Gays and lesbians say that others don't realize the range of diversity within their ranks
- Many gays and lesbians say they are viewed by some only in terms of their sex life

Women

- Many women say that no matter how hard they work, how much education they have, and what their title or responsibility, they still make less money than men with the equivalent education and experience
- Many women say that to complain about offensive sexual behavior in the workplace is to be blamed
- Many women say that some men have a hard time being supervised by women because they are used to having men in charge and wielding authority
- Many women say that they are viewed as too emotional and that men confuse emotional expressiveness with weakness

White Men

- Many white men say that because others assume they're racists and sexists, they're afraid to say anything for fear of being misinterpreted
- Many white men say that others assume they have power in the organization, but in actuality they often feel powerless and vulnerable
- Many white men say that others don't understand their inability to show lack of knowledge
- Many white men say that their jobs are made much harder because they have to learn a new management style to accommodate the new groups in the workplace