



Savor Diversity: Getting the Most Out of It

SHEETS

Diversity is a broad issue that encompasses the many aspects of differences between people. The non-discrimination policy includes sex, age, handicap, race, color, religion, marital status, Veteran's status, national or ethnic origin and sexual orientation.

When your organization drew up its constitution, it was required to include a statement in which you agreed not to discriminate in membership and benefits based on the above criteria. All group members should understand the policy and what it entails. To ensure a comfortable climate for all, you should be aware of different cultural behaviors and support multiple perspectives among members. When recruiting new members it is especially important to keep in mind what would be most beneficial to all involved. Scheduling meetings for certain times of the day or certain places may not be comfortable for everyone.

BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY

Diversity within an organization also includes being receptive to different opinions and ideas. Members of an organization can experience a multitude of benefits from diversity:

- Diversity brings a variety of ideas and viewpoints to the organization, which is especially beneficial when creative problem-solving is required.
- Diversity increases productivity by offering more viable choices to consider and makes the involvement more fun and interesting.
- Members are willing to take risks, they play to win rather than not to lose. Creativity, leadership and innovation are enhanced.
- Members are empowered, have a sense of their potential, and are aware of their value to the organization.

It can be a frustrating situation when two people with different views interact. Regardless of the difficulties, it is important to work through problems.

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING DIVERSITY WITHIN A GROUP:

- Be flexible; try to adapt to the style of the person with whom you are communicating.
- Understand that cultural differences exist. Disclose and be proud of your own differences and encourage questions from others.
- Acknowledge your own stereotypes and assumptions.
- Develop consciousness and acceptance of your own cultural background.
- Learn about other cultures, learning styles, etc.
- Provide members with what they need to succeed. Help members network so they may develop a relationship with a person who may help them work through problems.
- Treat people equitably but not uniformly.
- Encourage constructive communication about differences.

WHEN DIFFICULTIES ARE ENCOUNTERED:

When problems do occur because of differences, follow these four simple steps to manage the problem:

1. **Listen** to the problems, concerns and alternative suggestions of all the people involved. Remain calm and open to all ideas.
2. **Evaluate** the causes of the problems, the similarities between them, and the severity of the concerns. Keep anger, shock and amusement out of the discussion and keep everyone involved in the process.
3. **Negotiate** with all parties. Each person has the right to his or her own opinion. Explain your perspective and offer options. Allow others to suggest options and allow the group to choose the option that does not harm any party.
4. **Accommodate** for organizational values and assumptions. Explain the action that will be taken and why that option was chosen.

For more information on organization and personal development skills in the SOAR series, stop by or call UNL Student Involvement, 200 Nebraska Union, 472-2454; or 300 Nebraska East Union, 472-1780. Staff members will be happy to assist you and answer your questions.

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