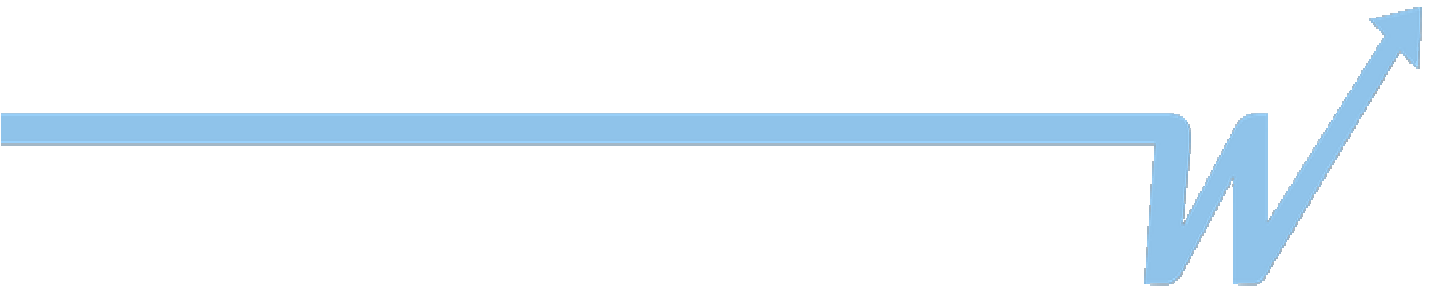




Diversity Issues





Embracing Diversity

Social issues and business trends develop for a reason. Diversity is one of those hot topics. It's important, especially when you ignore it. How does diversity affect you? The following suggestions provide a glimpse into this potentially volatile subject and offer strategies to prompt honest self assessment.

Some organizations advocate forced diversity, others try to educate, still others encourage tolerance. No matter what, the key to diversity is self-awareness. Take a few moments to assess your feelings and approach to differences.

- **Understand your background.**
 - Where you grew up determines largely your exposure to differences. Typically, the most diverse cities lie near coasts or borders. If you moved around as you grew up, it's also likely that you encountered diverse people. If not, you may not embrace diversity. People naturally gravitate toward their comfort zones, so you could avoid differences without even knowing it. Either way, understanding your background is a solid first step toward ensuring an accepting approach to diversity.

Embracing Diversity

- **Know your biases.**
 - Just ask yourself, who are your friends? Simply put – people cook for or shop with their true friends. If all your friends are just like you, why? The way you pick your friends also determines how likely you will be to interact effectively with all people in workplace situations. Evaluate your behavior, terminology and opinions honestly.
- **Listen.**
 - Once you've honestly evaluated your behavioral tendencies, begin to raise your awareness of every day interactions. When you encounter someone who's different, listen more than talk. Ask questions to prompt more listening. Don't worry about asking too many questions. People love to share about themselves.
- **Learn.**
 - Don't assume or believe the media. Learn for yourself through traveling, reading non-fiction or generating first-hand experiences.
- **Take risks.**
 - Purposefully break out of your comfort zone. Start by eating different types of food. Visit different church denominations, make friends with people who are different from you and make an effort to visit new places.

These tips are a beginning toward truly embracing diversity. Avoiding diverse locations, situations and people means limiting yourself. More serious consequences include being passed up for promotion, excluded from projects or even ostracized. Diversity isn't an imaginary concept, it's a fact of life in our shrinking world and global economy.