

## **Binder debacle: Why diversity and inclusion are good ideas**

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Diversity is trending right now. Everyone is curious about it. Discussion, debate and crafting of policies around Employee Diversity and Inclusion is the latest corporate craze. Stating specifically what a company's stance is on employee diversity seems like a decent way to take care of employees. In reality, however, Diversity and Inclusion policies are equally beneficial for companies.

Diversity refers to variety, it means being composed of different elements. Diversity crosses many dimensions: ethnicity, yes, and also language, age, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, experience, education and, of course, gender. Imagine a Minneapolis Public Library with shelf after shelf of just binders. One for every unique element that each employee brings to the company. There's the black binder, the GLBT binder, the Gen Y binder and the binder full of women, among others.

All these binders, this wide array of skills and life experience and expertise, are useless as long as they stay neatly compartmentalized. Now, open each binder and dump its contents on a table. THAT is Inclusion. Inclusion means that employees with differences will be contained together, parts caught up in the whole.

A good way to start benefitting through diversity is to ask one simple question: If someone is fundamentally different than I am, what can I learn from her?

Larger companies have the advantage of numbers that allows them to create Employee Resource Groups. These groups band together to inform and educate colleagues so that everyone in the company profits. When a company's Hispanic Employee Resource Group recommended that, based on their cultural experience, guacamole tastes pretty good on chips (ok, most of us already knew that), the Guacamole Dorito was born.

It takes creativity, flexibility and patience to respect the ideas and suggestions of people who look or think or speak or learn differently than I do. But when a company can utilize each of their binders, celebrating the wide range of perspectives that diversity represents, then they can capitalize on it, building innovative, competitive organizations.

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