

The importance of Viewpoint Diversity

We hear the term “Diversity” a lot. But what does it really mean?

Diversity is the total of all the things that make each of us unique. There are an infinite number of variables that make us who we are. Dimensions of Diversity include primary, unchangeable characteristics (such as race, sex, age, ethnicity) and secondary, changeable characteristics (religion, economic status, parental status, work experience, educational level).

Working to recognize diversity and understand each other helps us build healthy, productive relationships at home, work and in our communities.

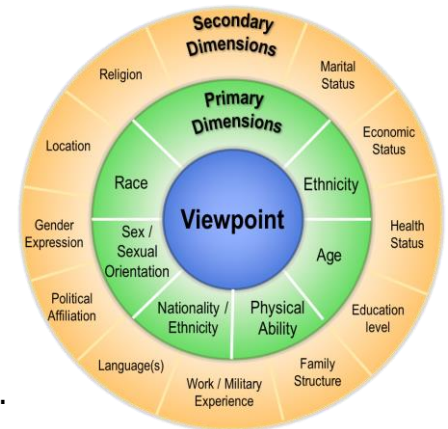
All our dimensions of diversity come together to form our worldview or **viewpoint**.

Our viewpoint influences our emotional reactions and our behaviors. We are practicing **Viewpoint Diversity** when we go beyond recognizing the overt dimensions of diversity and use empathy to understand how someone views and experiences the world. To fully understand someone and appreciate their uniqueness, we should strive to understand their viewpoint. When we do, our decisions are more accurate. We are more engaged and accountable. And we are more creative and innovative.

Building and practicing Viewpoint Diversity takes time and effort. When we demonstrate an appreciation for Viewpoint Diversity, we work to understand the views of others, particularly those with whom we disagree. We build long-lasting relationships with the understanding that no two of us see the world the same.

Here are some strategies that build Viewpoint Diversity.

1. **Avoid making assumptions.** Don't assume you know what someone thinks just because of what you see, or what you think you know. Viewpoints change over time. When in doubt, ask what he or she thinks.
2. **Assume good intentions.** Even when you disagree, start with a good faith assumption that everyone is thinking and doing what they think is right.
3. **Recognize commonality.** Identify common goals, common team and common humanity. Differences are most easily overcome when we work as one team (at work or with family) and have a shared goal.
4. **Get out of your bubble.** Expose yourself to news, opinions and people with whom you disagree. Travel outside your community or country.
5. **Avoid confirmation bias and “tribalism.”** When we only socialize with those who *think* like us, we risk isolating ourselves and only hearing views that confirm our own.



It is normal to gravitate toward others who think and behave like we do.

Confirmation bias occurs when we limit ourselves to people and information that conform to our views.

When this happens, our views (right or wrong) are repeatedly reinforced. We become entrenched in our views and very reluctant to change because we only hear one side.

The importance of Viewpoint Diversity

Strategies that build Viewpoint Diversity (continued)

6. **Be willing to change your opinion** and admit when you are wrong. This doesn't mean giving up your beliefs or values. But approaching others with humility and a desire to learn reduces tension and opens collaboration. Strive to welcome mistakes as opportunities to learn. Apologize when your mistakes impact others.
7. **Develop a Growth Mindset.** Practice embracing change as a way to learn and develop. Seek constructive feedback at home and work to build self-awareness. Find mentors and role models who demonstrate openness to change.
8. **Make collaboration and understanding the goal for relationships, rather than winning.** Work to understand others, even if you don't agree. Relationships don't require agreement. They do require understanding.
9. **Allow others to be wrong.** Don't assume your role is to change minds or get others to agree with you. It's okay for others to hold different views, even if you think they are wrong.
10. **Avoid equating views with morality.** Not all beliefs lead to behaviors; and beliefs change over time. It is true that some views are widely considered to be intolerable. But try to avoid making judgments about someone's value and humanity based on their viewpoint. Recognize that someone's actions toward you are more important than opinions they may have.
11. **Practice arguing in favor of the other side.** You don't have to admit you are wrong. But try to understand opposing views so well that you can pretend to argue in their favor.
12. **Follow people on social media with whom you disagree.** Avoid online debates and arguments. Avoid "unfriending" over disagreements.
13. **Master difficult conversations.** Practice viewpoint diversity by talking with people who have differing opinions. See the additional handout for tips on healthy disagreements.

Practicing Viewpoint Diversity involves many different interpersonal skills, such as:

- Emotional Intelligence
- Empathy
- Building trust
- Self-awareness
- Curiosity
- Listening
- Self-control over emotions and behaviors
- Intellectual humility
- A Growth Mindset

Strategies for a healthy disagreements

We all live and work in a diverse society. As a result of our vastly diverse characteristics, we all think differently. This is known as Viewpoint Diversity. When we live and work around people who think differently, we eventually experience conflicts and disagreements.

Disagreeing and difficult conversations are normal and can even be healthy. Disagreements allow us to express our beliefs and better understand each other. They drive creativity and innovation. When managed well, they leave us feeling more engaged and connected with friends, family and teammates.

So, how can we have difficult conversations without damaging our relationships?

1. **Shift your focus from winning to understanding.** View others as potential partners and collaborators who have something to teach you, rather than someone you need to beat in a debate.
2. **Show you care about the other person.** You won't influence others until they trust you have their interests in mind.
3. **Listen and understand first, deliver messages second.** You may be eager to make your point. But slow down and set the stage through listening and demonstrating understanding.
4. **Empathy first, then facts and data.** Many views are derived from emotion and experience. When presented to those who are emotional, data can be used as a means for counterargument, increasing the conflict and leaving others entrenched in their position. People will be influenced by data once they are calm, feel understood and are ready to integrate new information.
5. **Model the behavioral you want.** We all want to be understood, valued and respected. So do people with different views. Listen patiently. Tell them you are trying to understand. Admit when you might be wrong. "I don't know" is a powerful phrase that shows you are open to new information.
6. **Ask questions.** Ask with genuine curiosity. Drill down for more detail. Say, "Tell me more." Then listen. Pay close attention to verbal and nonverbal communication.
7. **Slow down.** We are prone to let our emotions control our behavior. Think carefully before you respond. Place a little space between what is said and how you chose to respond.
8. **Take responsibility for miscommunication.** If there is a misunderstanding, pause to clarify. Ask questions. Don't allow a little confusion to drive a lot of emotion.
9. **Avoid "call outs."** Call outs are when we get emotional and let someone know they have crossed a moral line. The conversation stops. Unless an opinion is a "deal breaker" for you, work to contain emotional responses. When emotions rise, take a deep breathe and just listen.
10. **Instill some doubt.** Most people don't like to have their views challenged and don't want their minds changed. Sometimes the best we can hope for is to give them some new information to consider. Before making your case, ask yourself, "was I invited to share this information?" Sometimes a little new information goes a long way.
11. **Avoid blame.** Blame ends goodwill and stops conversations. If behaviors are in question, talk directly about the behaviors. Avoid making broad statements about character or guilt.
12. **Use "I" and "and," not "but."** Start by talking about yourself, using "I" statements (e.g., I have a different opinion) instead of "you" statements that can put people on the defense (e.g., You are wrong). Using "but" negates everything that was just said. When possible, affirm what has been said by using "and" statements to add to what was just said.
13. **End on a good note.** Don't walk away. Try to deescalate the conversation. Agree to end the discussion and come back to the topic if needed. Affirm everyone's good intent. With friends, family and co-workers, sustaining your relationship should be the primary goal.