

HR Compliance Library, ¶42,420, Managing diversity — training

Many managers can attest that attempts to diversify the workforce may meet with resistance from current employees. To many employees, affirmative action is just a system of preferences or quotas, and is not perceived favorably by those not in a protected group. Whether cultural diversity is encouraged for affirmative action reasons, business reasons or simply because it is the right thing to do, many employees might feel threatened by a diversified workforce. Therefore, organizations attempting to harness the potential of a diversified workforce may want to engage in some training and education programs to help employees understand the value in and need for diversity.

What type of training to offer? The training and education that an organization chooses to offer must depend in part on the make-up of its workforce.



EXAMPLE

If a company's workforce has a large segment of Hispanic or Asian workers who speak different languages and dialects, the company may want to offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to the employees. In addition, the company may also want to sponsor managers who volunteer to take language classes at local colleges or universities.



EXAMPLE

If the workforce has a large number of older workers or newly graduated employees, the employer may want to institute mentoring programs or other kinds of programs to bring together older and younger workers and allow workers to gain from each other's experiences and knowledge.

In addition to tailoring training to the workforce, there are some general training and education methods that can be employed. Many companies show training videos to all managers and employees and have group discussions afterward. The participants are encouraged to discuss their attitudes about other groups and to examine the reasons for those attitudes and how they affect decision making and other behaviors. In many cases, the discussion groups engage in role-playing exercises that put them in the place of members of other ethnic, racial or cultural groups. By doing this, employees can better understand the problems that another employee might have, and the empathy that inevitably develops is key to successful workplace diversity.