

## *“Intolerance of Intolerance” Diversity Awareness Corner*



*Beyond This Place... There Be Dragons!*

***Scott Warrick, JD, MLHR, SPHR***

[www.scottwarrick.com](http://www.scottwarrick.com)

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### **DIVERSITY, TOLERANCE & the “HOLIDAY” SEASON**

Americans seem to grapple with this concept of “Diversity” more at this time of the year than any other. We use the term “Diversity” and encourage its growth, and then do everything we can to kill it. Rather than appreciate the diversity that is among us, we try to blend everyone’s beliefs into one big melting pot. We then seem to think that in order to be tolerant of others we must abandon our own personal beliefs and practices. We seem to think that is somehow being tolerant...by betraying ourselves personally. How stupid is that?

This is like having five different kinds of cookie dough ready to bake, but instead of appreciating the chocolate chip for what it is, and the oatmeal raisin for what it is, and the sugar cookie for what it is, and the chocolate no-bake for what it is, we mix them all into one big bowl and make one big amalgam-type of cookie. **YUCK!** What a horrible mess. No one is happy. Everyone is frustrated. I would call this a great big “Garbage Cookie” and would not want to step into it, much less eat one.

**THAT** is what we have done with this time of year...and it is a loss of a great opportunity to learn about one another.

The concept of “**DIVERSITY**” is very simple:

**TO APPRECIATE THE DIFFERENCES AROUND US...  
NOT TO BLEND OR BURY THEM!**

There are many different types of people around us today. We are an international society with countless business, political and cultural ties across the entire planet. It is important that the views and rights of the minority are not squashed under the weight of the majority. Might does not make right.

Sad to say, too many today feel that it is necessary to “blend” all of these various celebrations together so everyone can feel accepted. **NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!** That is the **worst** thing that can happen. **THAT** is the **opposite** of Diversity. How can you say you are appreciating the differences others bring to the table, and then attempt to obliterate those differences by blending them all together?

**DIVERSITY** can be a **GREAT** asset to an organization. This **DIVERSITY** can give us:

- A different perspective from our own, which results in better decision making and varied ideas for addressing issues and
- An understanding that our views are not the only ones out there, which build respect for others so we are less likely to unwittingly offend clients, customers and patients.

However, **DIVERSITY** without **TOLERANCE** is a recipe for disaster. I have a client in the Midwest who decided to make their workplace more diverse...upon the advice of their consultant. However, the organization did not do anything to address its issues of **TOLERANCE**.

The result: They now have a workplace that is very diverse...and almost everyone hates each other! Within the 18 months or so, they have had three instances of workplace violence, five EEOC civil rights charges and two lawsuits have been filed.

**Great!** We are now a **DIVERSE ORGANIZATION**, so we have a whole new set of people to argue with and hate. **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Our intolerance for others, which stems from an egocentric attitude (“Yes, it is all about me!”), is epidemic. Unfortunately, our intolerance often leads to employees becoming insulted, which leads to frustration, so employees become enraged, and far too many times ... it all ends in violence. As a result, homicide is now the leading cause of death for American women in the workplace and the second-leading cause death for American men in the workplace. Three employees on average are murdered in the workplace every day in America, and there are over **one million American workers** physically assaulted during the course of their employment each year...which equates to about 18,000 people each week receiving first aid or medical treatment because someone else was intolerant of them.

Of course, we then justify our attacks on each other by stating, “Well, you have to understand. **THEY** upset me ... and I feel very strongly about this issue.”

So, hitting your co-worker with a stapler was OK because **THEY** upset you? So ... does this mean you are not able to control your emotions? Are you not able to control yourself? Does that mean if you feel strongly about something, it is OK to attack a co-worker ... either physically or verbally? If they **REALLY** upset you, is it OK to just kill them, which happens three times a day in American workplaces?

What happened to “maturity”? What do you teach your children? What would you do to your child who acted in that manner?

WWJRD?

It all boils down to ego and intolerance, which is an Emotional Intelligence issue. You see, you cannot have a tolerant workplace without first making sure you are working with adults ... not children walking around in big people suits. In fact, unless you are working with Emotionally Intelligent people, you can't have proper coaching, accountability, teambuilding, and so on. **NOTHING** happens if you don't have at least a certain minimum level of E.I.

**DIVERSITY** without **TOLERANCE** simply will not work. **TOLERANCE** without **DIVERSITY** is equally fatal to an organization, because you end up with a bunch of people who all are very similar to each other making the decisions.

However, when **DIVERSITY** is combined with **TOLERANCE** for others and **RESPECT** for their points of view, you have a **VERY** powerful combination. You then have the resources to generate ideas from many different perspectives and the ability to appeal to all of your various clients, customers and patients.

Of course, you also have to have shoulders broad enough to take it when someone disagrees with you or points out where you might just possibly be wrong.

This message of my Diversity and Tolerance Program, “Intolerance of Intolerance,” is clear:

**In order to work here, you MUST be tolerant of other's points of view.  
If not, then this is not the right place for you to work.  
We are going to be VERY intolerant of your intolerance.**

**Understand my point here:**

I **agree** with the concept of an organization referring to the traditional “Christmas Break” as “Winter Break” and referring to the traditional “Christmas Party” as a “Holiday Party” in order to include everyone of all religions. However, this is **not** for the purpose of blending anything together. It is for the purpose of letting everyone know that their beliefs are welcomed at this time to the year... *everyone's*.

However, when it comes to the **INDIVIDUAL**, the situation it is quite different. This is the **perfect** time of year to profess **YOUR** particular celebration...**NOT** to hide it or dilute **YOUR** message with such phrases as “Happy Holidays” or “Seasons Greetings.” It is the perfect time to decorate **YOUR** work station with the artifacts of **YOUR** beliefs...**NOT** for the purpose of “converting” anyone, but to let others see the best side of your beliefs.

Likewise, this is the time of year for **YOU** to learn about others. Again, **NOT** for the purpose of converting, but rather to understand how others think. It is hard to objectify ... and ultimately hate and bully someone once you have gotten to know them and view them as a human being. (If I don't know any Irish, I think they are all drunks. If I don't know any Jews, I think they are all cheap...and so on.)

If an organization supports one religion or celebration over another, then some people are naturally excluded. They are being told that they are a "fringe group" and not really part of the whole. An organization cannot say it supports diversity, then turn around and belittle or exclude others. Martin Luther King, Jr. said there is nothing more dangerous than having a part of your society who has no stake in that society.

However, when organizations use more generic titles for the season, such as "Winter Break," "Holiday Party" and so on, the organization should then also encourage the diversity they profess. The organization should encourage **REAL** diversity to take place, not this watered down version of a "Garbage Cookie." Christians should profess their celebration at this time of year, as should Jews, Muslims, and so on. On my Christmas cards, I put "Merry Christmas" because we celebrate Christmas. I expect to see other types of greetings from friends who are non-Christian, such as "Happy Hanukah" cards from my friends who are Jewish.

No one is asking anyone to forego their religion. Quite to the contrary. If you hide your celebrations and beliefs, then others will not learn about the best part of your celebration, so they will not appreciate what you believe. Instead, they will fill in what they do not know with negative "stereotypes." Organizations who truly do value diversity should encourage employees to embrace their particular "reason for the season" and learn about others in the process.

Of course, it is at this point where I hear managers say, "Oh, no! We could **NEVER** allow our employees to bring in their religious symbols or artifacts. Someone would be offended."

(Oh, yes! Rule #1 of a true leader: **NEVER UPSET ANYONE!**) (Much sarcasm goes here)

Whenever I hear this statement, my stomach turns in disgust. If your organization is so intolerant that it will not allow for different points of view during the holidays, then it never will. You will be a lawsuit or workplace violence problem waiting to happen. Tolerance is tolerance is tolerance. If I cannot be tolerant towards your reason for celebration, which is supposed to be a positive thing, then how can we discuss other vital issues that **MIGHT** affect your job?

And, quite frankly, when someone is "offended" because another person celebrates this time of the year differently, they need to be reminded of exactly how self-centered they are acting...and send them to their room! Intolerance towards another person's beliefs is egocentric and not at all respectful. Remember: We are going to be **VERY** intolerant of your intolerance towards others...and if you cannot respect others, then maybe you should go somewhere else.

This is not an issue of being “politically correct.” Classifying this issue as being “politically correct” is simply a way to dismiss the oppression of others as being “trivial.” “Tolerance” of others and respecting their beliefs is **NOT** a trivial issue.

Yes, Virginia, there are many religions that are celebrated this time of year. Actually, Christians celebrate Christ’s birthday on December 25<sup>th</sup> because in 350 A.D. Pope Julius I chose this date for the Christmas celebration in an effort to replace the pagan wintertime festivals, primarily those of Saturnus and Mithras. For hundreds of years, the “Winter Solstice” had been the final celebration of the harvest before winter arrived. Christians placed Christmas at this time of year to coordinate the holiday with the popular beliefs at that time.

Interestingly, many of our Christmas traditions come from other non-Christian cultures. For instance, the tradition of “Christmas Trees” comes from the pagans who used the evergreen tree as a symbol of fertility, so they were widely used in Winter Solstice celebrations. Christians began incorporating these customs into the celebration of Christmas.

Our tradition of the Christmas wreath comes from ancient Rome where they were used as symbols of victory and celebration.

Even the tradition of the “mistletoe” comes from pagan celebration. Mistletoe was revered by the pagan Celts as a special fertility plant. However, since it was a pagan belief, it was banned by the Christian church. In the Victorian era, Christians revived the tradition and used it as a decoration at Christmastime...and “kissing” under the mistletoe became a staple of the Christmas tradition.

As a result of these various practices, the Puritans in Boston actually banned Christmas from the Christian calendar from 1659 to 1681 because they believed it was filled with too many pagan practices, not to mention Catholic overtones.

It makes no difference from where these traditions originated. Few engage in these practices to celebrate any type of paganism any longer. Instead, they are used to celebrate Christmas, the birth of Christ. Early Christians recognized the usefulness of incorporating the best of other cultures into their own, which is the very essence of tolerance. Perhaps we should return to our roots and appreciate the best of other celebrations again today. Maybe we might learn something, like the early Christians did.

You live in America where all are supposed to be free to practice their own religions. Thomas Jefferson said that America was to be a place where everyone could practice their religions: “the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mahometan, the Hindoo and infidel or every denomination.” Our history is littered with over one million dead service men who fought to preserve these rights...the same rights so many people so blithely throw away and take for granted today.

Instead, we should extract the true meaning from the holiday you celebrate this year. We should show others that each of our respective religions are to admired and revered ... and that we respect each other's right to believe as they wish. In the end, you will discover the true meaning of the holidays...

**“Goodwill towards men.”**

That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.